

LABOUR LEFT

No. 5 September/October, 1984

60p



John Mitchell interviewed
Student Militancy ★ The British Left
Labour's Rank and File hit back on Subsidies

SPECIAL CONFERENCE

At a recent aggregate meeting of the Dublin membership a motion was passed calling for a Special Conference in October to discuss the progress made on certain key areas of policy such as employment, taxation and social policy. The meeting was called in response to Labour's disastrous showing in the European elections in which it lost all its four seats.

More recently an aggregate meeting has taken place in the Kildare constituency in the aftermath of the food subsidies debacle. By a majority of over 10-1 the Kildare membership demanded that a Special Conference be called if the food subsidies decision was not reversed. There will be more meetings around the country in the next few weeks making similar demands.

The Labour Party entered this administration by decision of a Special Conference in Limerick over eighteen months ago. Delegates had only a few hours to assess the merits and faults of the document hastily presented to them. A few hours in which to decide whether this 'Programme for Government' provided the best hope in the immediate future for the Labour Party and for working people whom it seeks to represent. At the conference over 500 delegates voted against this programme. The Left argued that it was a capitulation to Fine Gael. The party establishment responded with arguments that now sound hollow. This betrayal coupled with the party's continuing decline account for the groundswell now developing among the ordinary members for a Special Conference to discuss the party's future. If the Party leaders genuinely believe in Party democracy then they should concede to the heartfelt demands for a serious rethink on future strategy.

However, part of the crisis of the Labour Party is the refusal by the leaders to admit that there is a crisis. They argue that a drop of 1% is not a disaster, yet if the trends were repeated in a General Election Labour could return with less than ten seats. The inability to come to terms with the seriousness of Labour's decline stems partly from a lack of political analysis. Such analysis would reveal clearly the *political* root causes of the party's crisis. However, Dick Spring and others are content to fool themselves that ours is a problem of marketing and organisation. In some areas the left constitutes the backbone of many successful organisational endeavours yet we still must pose the questions: market what? organise to what end?

It is useless to pretend, as sometimes the leadership does, that there is not a serious ideological rift within the party. When this difference of opinion comes to notice the pro-Fine Gael media seeks to portray those arguing for a non-coalitionist independent socialist position as cranks and ideologists. Yet, in fact, the Left represents all that is positive in the Labour Party. We have argued that the party must first and foremost be rooted in the working class and seek to represent its interests. In part this entails advancing a socialist response to the present economic crisis. By offering a genuine alternative to the parties that are financed by big business democracy would be advanced considerably. We argue for a strengthening of the links with the Trade Unions, some of whom are threatening to disaffiliate and we encourage all socialists to join the Labour Party. We believe we can build a mass campaigning party from the grassroots up.

On the other hand everything that is negative about the Labour Party is to be found in the attitudes and actions of its right-wing establishment.

The negative effects of its disastrous strategy over the past decade are well known. Now much of the Leadership's energies are directed to fending off criticisms from the Trade Union movement, the rank and file activists and many of its own elected representatives. It must block, if possible, potentially undesirable candidates. In government it justifies the cutting of essential services while real wealth remains intact. But above all its stated reasons for being in government are explicitly negative. First, it seems they must restrain their friends in Fine Gael from unleashing the full force of their cruelty upon the 'weaker sections' of society. Fine Gael must be saved from themselves and a potentially vengeful electorate. Secondly, it must in the 'national interest' save the country from Fianna Fail (the effect here is relatively positive for the two major parties). The problem for Mr. Spring, of course, is how to market all this negativity.

The Labour Party as never before lacks direction and meaningful purpose. The extent of demoralisation within the party cannot be exaggerated and with worse to come the undertaking of any serious organizational tasks will take place under impossible conditions. The calling of a Special Conference would at least signal a willingness to come to terms with the party's crisis.

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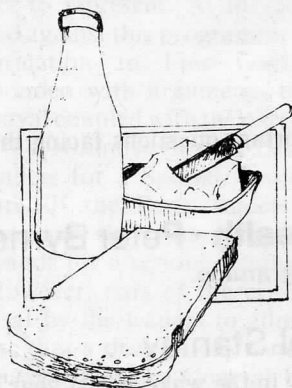
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Food Subsidies I

Curious, the reaction of some of the PLP to the subsidies cut. John Ryan suggested that the announcement was "badly handled" which leaves one to presume that there's a good way to handle an effective 20% tax on bread, butter and milk. But the most interesting comments came from the Minister for Labour, Ruari Quinn in his eclectic defence of the cuts on RTE's 'News at One'.

The Minister was stating a truism when he said that food subsidies were not a socialist programme. Neither is a land tax which the Party leadership puts so much store in. But it's a little rich for a Labour Minister to use the excuse that since programme X is not socialist we needn't worry unduly if it is abolished. On that argument the entire social welfare system could be dismantled on the pretext that, at the end of the day, its not 'really' socialist. The fact is that food subsidies are quite efficient. By manipulating the market so as to keep basic food prices down all members of low income groups, without exclusion or paperwork, benefit every day in the marketplace. And all this is done without an administrative structure comprising of means testing, regulations, inspectors, interviewers, appeals procedures, extra civil servants, etc.



But upper income groups benefit from food subsidies as well! Of course they do. It couldn't be otherwise in a capitalist context. Doctors and pharmacists get rich on the medical card scheme, contractors profit from local authority construction, the middle class benefit disproportionately from free education, CIE management do quite nicely administering a public transport system. The problem doesn't lie in universal criteria but the class structure of the society they're applied to.

The Family Income Supplement scheme (a subsidy to low wage paying employers) has been hailed as a lifeline to those affected by the subsidy cuts. Apart from the fact that this scheme will only affect 35,000 families (and exclude part-time workers), it will cost £13 million. If the scheme were expanded to include the one million people living at or near the poverty line calculate the cost for yourself. It gives a whole new definition to allocational efficiency.

The only defence for the Labour Ministers' capitulation is, not the fiscal restraint of the economy or the mess Jack Lynch landed us in, but their own inability to conceptualize, much less articulate, a socialist response to the worsening economic crisis. No wonder they can do little more than parrot the policy line of Fine Gael and Central Bank economists. Meanwhile the poor pay more to eat. Maybe Quinn will suggest abolishing inefficient Ministers who live quite well off of 'easing the burden for the less well off'.

Kelly's release

If the PLP don't take Labour Party Conference seriously, the rank and file can be excused for thinking it a futile exercise. But Conference resolutions are important, not only because they are the policies of the Labour Party but because at times they can pressurise the PLP to act in accordance with those policies.

The release of Nicky Kelly was due to a number of factors but according to Siobhan Troddyn, Secretary of the Release Nicky Kelly Committee, the Labour Party Conference resolution demanding the release played a significant role. "Of all the areas of pressure, the Conference resolution was one of the most important. Several Labour TDs had previously expressed an interest in the case but they only responded to the campaign after the resolution. Only then was there any significant push by the PLP to have Nicky Kelly released".

The Labour Party, for all its undemocratic structures, still has advantages over other political parties. Fianna Fail activists were prevented by their party leadership from placing the issue on their Ard Fheis agenda. That the Left should make full use of Conference is underscored by Ms. Troddyn: "The reason why the resolution went through was because it came from the rank and file activists, the ones who had supported the campaign

all along". Labour activists are the final arbiters of party policy and enough pressure can bring those policies to fruition.

Conference decisions are, therefore, important, but it will be a long struggle to force the policies of the Party upon the PLP. For while the amendment to release Nicky Kelly was acted upon, the main motion to which it was attached, that the PLP oppose the Criminal Justice Bill in the Dail, was ignored. But that's another day's work.

"We have been successful in insuring that: . . . the food subsidies, which are vitally important for low income families, have been maintained. . ."

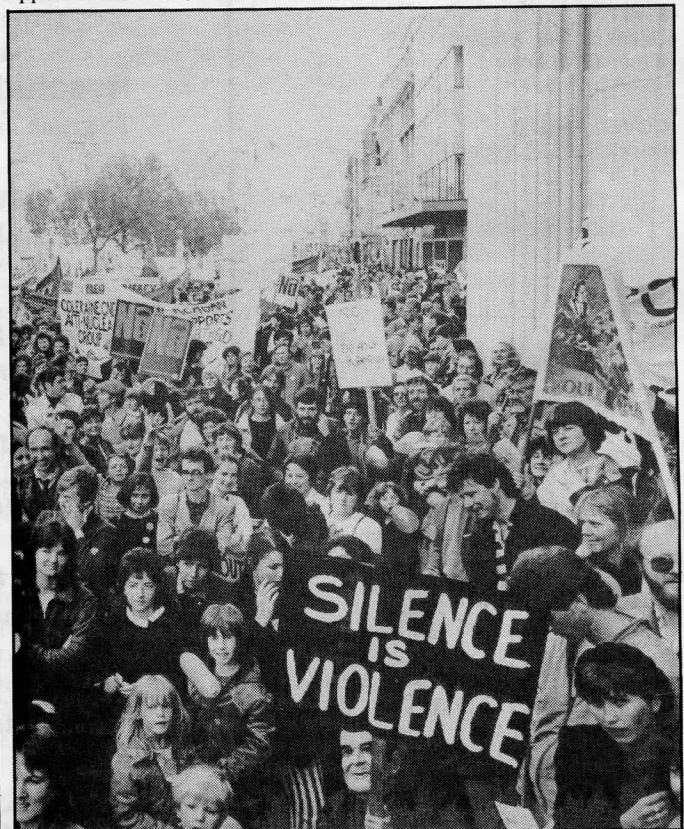
— Ruari Quinn, March 1983 (South East Constituency Newsletter).

Silence is violence

Nearly seven hundred delegates at the Labour Party Conference voted for a composite motion which called for a boycott of functions and engagements held in connection with President Reagan's Irish visit. The international committee advocated a similar approach. However, it was defeated

by the narrowest of margins. Speakers from what may be termed the party's 'centre' argued against a boycott. Senators O'Mahoney and Harte having condemned torture, mass murder, violations of international law, the attempts to overthrow a legitimate government (one that is supported by the Socialist International) and all criminal activities sponsored by the Reagan Administration, then turned around and said a boycott wouldn't look good or was contrary to 'protocol'. They of course were to later absolve their socialist conscience by personally boycotting the joint session but had helped block Labour taking effective action as a party. This position might be characterised as leading from behind. A majority of the score or more parliamentarians who boycotted Reagan's Oireachtas speech were Labour Party representatives, yet because we did not lead from the front, a course advocated by the Left and one which would have brought attention to our internationalist philosophy, we failed to offer genuine, as opposed to token, solidarity with the oppressed in the Third World.

At Conference the leadership were given a lifeline in the form of a petition to be given to Reagan



Protesters at anti-Reagan demo.

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which replaced the boycott. Dick Spring we are told fulfilled his obligations in this regard although predictably this exercise did not receive any headlines or photographs nor was it meant to. Spring neither led from the front nor behind but rather played second fiddle to the host, Garret FitzGerald.

Given that nearly 50% of Party wanted a complete boycott and an overwhelming majority showed grave concern at Reagan's policies one would have expected Spring to give public expression of this anger. Instead his contributions to this media event was laughing and joking with Nancy Reagan at the State Banquet while hundreds of party members marched together outside with thousands of others. Once again the leadership proved incapable of giving expression to the concerns, aspirations and idealism of young people. Another opportunity missed.

Food Subsidies II

We are told that Cabinet Ministers are collectively responsible. Yes, they are, to the Dail, since the Dail nominates them. But this does not entail collective subservience or secrecy as the practice in other Western European coalitions show: in France the Communist party leader, Georges Marchais, actually led protests during the steel workers dispute with the Government; in Germany there is public antipathy between the CDU and Free Democrats; in Italy collective recriminations are part and parcel of coalition arrangements. In this way minority parties can contribute to Government without losing their identities.

There is no parallel to Labour's acquiescence within Cabinet. Even coalitionists should realise that collective responsibility doesn't mean public capitulation to Fine Gael policies. In the aftermath of the food subsidies debacle no practical or theoretical reason prevented Labour Ministers from

emphasising their opposition to the measure and explaining that it wouldn't have occurred under a Labour Government. Surely its no secret that Labour supports food subsidies while their conservative partner, in common with Fianna Fail, oppose them. Given the fact of coalition the Party leadership could at least realise their potential to put before the public Labour Party policy. Unfortunately, on this occasion, as with others, they refused to do so.

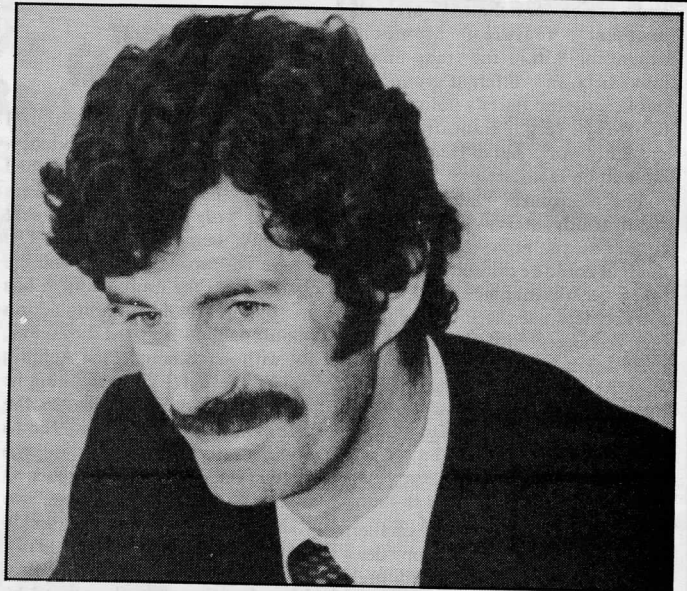
This lack of Ministerial response is rooted in the Party leadership's contradictory position towards Coalition. Dick Spring at Annual Conference stated he was quite capable of leading Labour out of Cabinet. Ruari Quinn, however, makes a habit of saying Labour is in Government for the five year term. Apart from the fact that this evinces a lack of coherent strategy, it is unprecedented for a junior partner in Government to rule out resignation as an option, thus limiting its manoeuvrability within coalition. This gives carte blanche to Fine Gael to pursue reactionary policies with impunity.

Imagine Fine Gael's predicament faced with Labour resignation over food subsidies and a subsequent election. They would have to stand alone on anti-working class policies while Labour would be able to distinguish themselves from their previous alliance. Labour ministers often complain that elections are never fought on bread and butter issues. Here was, literally, the opportunity to do that.

However, both ministerial acquiescence and Party leadership's own contradictory position within coalition may not stem so much from struggling from a minority position as from an acceptance of Fine Gael logic. If this is true, until conference decides to withdraw, the Left's only option will be to pressurise them into adopting new, more pragmatic and positive strategies whatever our doubts about their individual socialist commitment.

Food Subsidies III

Normally within the Kildare constituency there is a 3-2 coalitionist majority. But at a recent aggregate meeting of the constituency called by the Executive over the objections of Tim Conway and Joe Bermingham 300 party members made it clear that not only was the subsidies cut unacceptable but that a special delegate conference should be



Derek Spiers/Report.

called to consider withdrawal from coalition if the cuts are not reversed.

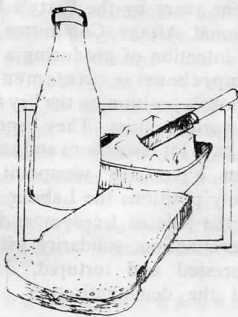
An attempt to amend Emmet Stagg's motion to delete the call for a special conference was made by Joe Bermingham. During his contribution Bermingham made some interesting admissions. As Junior Minister for Finance he was not informed of the cut until 15 minutes before the public announcement. As chairperson of the PLP he was unable to call a PLP meeting or contact Dick Spring. Bermingham characterised Stagg's motion as calling for withdrawal from coalition. His amendment failed by a massive 10-1 majority and Stagg's motion was passed unopposed. So widespread was the opposition to the subsidies cut that even Conway's own Nass branch was divided on the issue.

Coalitionists have swallowed two conservative budgets, the 1983 Social Welfare Act, health cutbacks, public criticism of the trade union movement by the Party leadership, Ministerial approval of the Reagan visit and the industrial white paper. But the food subsidies represents a real turning point. PLP members as widely divergent as Michael D. Higgins, Frank McLoughlin and Michael Bell have made public their strong disapproval. The spontaneous nature of the opposition makes it all the more difficult for the Party leadership to ignore it. The Administrative council will again have the opportunity on September 18th to vote for a Special Delegate Conference. The last time it was rejected by a vote of 21-8. This time will see just how representative the A.C. is of the feelings of the rank and file of the Labour Party.

Whither Head Office?

The Left has been dubious of the Party leadership's conversion to such concepts as 'marketing' and 'packaging'. Following in the wake of the Euro election defeats it seems more like an excuse not to see the results as a direct consequence of coalition. But this healthy scepticism shouldn't prevent the Left from developing its own theory and practice regarding socialist organisation. The disposal of the Party's Head Office in Gardiner Place is a case in point. The proposal, a hangover from the O'Leary days, is to either sell or lease out the Gardiner Place site (effectively scrapping the Party of its only capital asset) and either purchase or, more probably, rent a smaller accommodation nearer Leinster House. Given that asset stripping during a property recession rarely realises the full value of a property. Apart from the symbolism involved (abandoning the inner city to join Fianna Fail/Fine Gael operations in Mount Street) the central drawback in the proposal is that it would so circumscribe the Party's organisation as to put primary emphasis on the PLP to the detriment of other areas of potential socialist activity.

Socialists struggle at many different levels within capitalism; electing candidates, though crucial, is predicated on activities carried out on a permanent basis. Propaganda and publishing, community organisations, single issue campaigns, education and debate among members, cultural



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and social enrichment are all necessary features. Members organising within the trade union movement and different groupings publicising the Party's policies and ideology (e.g. Labour News presently works out of Head Office) have to be facilitated.

The Gardiner Place site has superior advantages in this regard. A four-storey building with basement, it could be utilised not only to give a permanent place of operation for activists but the incorporation of a resource centre/library and a social club could be more easily effected. Co-ordinating, within this physical space, the disparate but equally necessary activities would be a significant step towards revitalising a dynamic socialist movement.

A move towards a smaller accommodation (smaller, considering the need to reduce expenditure) would result in a skeletal operation. The arguments advanced for such a move are essentially to effect greater co-ordination within the PLP vis-a-vis its press relations, constituency facilities and financing for electoral purposes. The smaller site would be physically able to contain only this area of the Party and little else. Concentration on candidacies and elections would either relegate other socialist projects to a busy-body role or subordinate them to the interests of the PLP, as has been occurring.

Colm O'Briain has accused the Labour Party of being an ad hoc party. Quite so, ideologically and organizationally. But if anything is designed to institutionalise this 'ad hoc-ness', its proposals which physically limit the operations of the party.

Threat of expulsion

The threat of expulsions still hangs over the Militant Tendency. Militant supporters have published their newspaper for twelve years but it is only in recent times that they have come under attack. The reason is simple. The rank and file challenge to the establishment has provoked them into taking action against dissent. Militant they see as, not without reason, as the Achilles heel of the Left. Their thinking is: get Militant and you weaken the Left. There is enough evidence to demonstrate that this is the motivation. Michael D. Higgins, in an interview last year, cited two T.D.s as strong supporters of action against Militant. What Michael D. did not explain was that neither of these deputies were threatened by Militant in their own bailiwicks but, in fact, both faced a more general broad left threat.

The leadership has set up a committee of inquiry but by all accounts it is not a high-powered affair. It is not clear whether they are still intent on the expulsions and, if so, whether they have any clear strategy on how to go about it.

The Labour Party would be saved a lot of trouble and embarrassment if we would learn some lessons from the recent British experience. One, it is difficult for those who have a precarious majority to expel an important part of the minority. All the more so as the majority while agreed in principle are bound to be divided on how to tackle such a delicate matter. We've already seen signs of

this. Two, Militant are at this stage too big and too deeply rooted to be removed. Three, threats such as these actually help the group under attack. Four, attempted expulsions are a costly and damaging exercise. Last year the British Labour Party's N.E.C. spent more time talking about Militant than it did about the impending General Elections. The lesson for our own leadership is clear: they, too, should worry more about an impending general election.

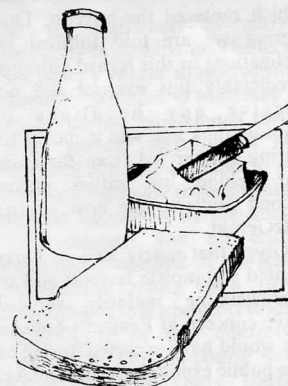
"Several aspects of the Budget were most satisfying from our point of view, notably the preservation of food subsidies (which no less an 'expert' than C. J. Haughey predicted, the day before the Budget, would be scrapped) . . ."

— Dick Spring, March 1984 (Party Leader Newsletter).

Food Subsidies IV

One point missed in the furore. Bread, butter and milk are subject to perverse demand. Unlike other consumer items, as their price increases so does their consumption. Being basic items the increased price has to be met by cutting back on other non-basic food items (e.g. meat, vegetables, fish, etc.). This in turn forces a higher reliance on the basics. Not only will the working class pay a higher price for bread, butter and milk, they will be forced to purchase them in higher quantities.

Nutritional consequences have not been alluded to. While the state of nutritional health research remains undeveloped (the last dietary survey was in 1947) tentative conclusions can be advanced. Bread, butter and milk are low in protein, iron, vitamins B and C. A high consumption pattern can lead to mild forms of malnutrition, protein and iron deficiency resulting in anemia, recurrent infections, impaired resistance to influenza and viruses and in extreme cases affect children's growth and muscle mass. Among pregnant women this vitamin deficiency can induce prolonged periods of physical post-natal depression and in some cases help precipitate neurological congenital abnormalities at birth (e.g. spina bifida). Vitamin B deficiency specifically leads to poor healing of wounds, festering of scabs, sore gums which is



compounded among the poorer old age groupings.

While general anemia can lead to weight increase through lack of exercise bread, butter and milk comprise high levels of cholesterol and carbohydrates which are contributing factors to coronary heart disease, atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), bowel cancer and stomach diseases.

These are just some of the factors that will be enhanced due to the subsidies cut. The deterioration of health among the lower income groups cannot be quantified but it seems a contradictory policy to pursue fiscal measures which will promote disease while at the same time cutting back on health expenditure. Much of the problem can be explained by viewing government programmes in a narrow budgetary context. It would be interesting to know whether the Minister of Health had any input into this decision to reduce the food subsidies.

International policy

The Labour Party has published a series of ten policy papers entitled 'Principles of International Policy'. These documents cover a wide area of policy interest. They are: neutrality, disarmament, human rights, international co-operation, the EEC, European political co-operation, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Southern Africa and Latin America.

The series has been prepared over recent years by the Party's International Affairs Committee with the intention of producing a truly comprehensive statement of Labour's position on the key issues of world politics. They represent the basis for discussions and analysis from a socialist viewpoint and firmly positions the Labour Party on the side of freedom and self-determination, solidarity with the oppressed and tortured, detente and the democratisation of the



Selling Militant.

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Dr. Michael Smith

European Community. This adds up to something more than rhetorical statements — they can become the basis of a programme of meaningful political action.

Labour must argue and work for the application of principles which are clearly stated in the first document, 'Ireland, a Neutral Nation', where the essential connection between positive neutrality and a progressive stance in world affairs is demonstrated. Neutrality is seen to be the fundamental and most positive principle of Irish national and international policy. Commitment to this position is based upon adherence to the twin concepts of neutrality and non-alignment. This commitment, however, involves the acceptance of a demanding role for a small country, especially one within a strong economic grouping. The principle though, is one which can give strength, dignity and purpose as well, as in Finland, Switzerland, Sweden and Tanzania.

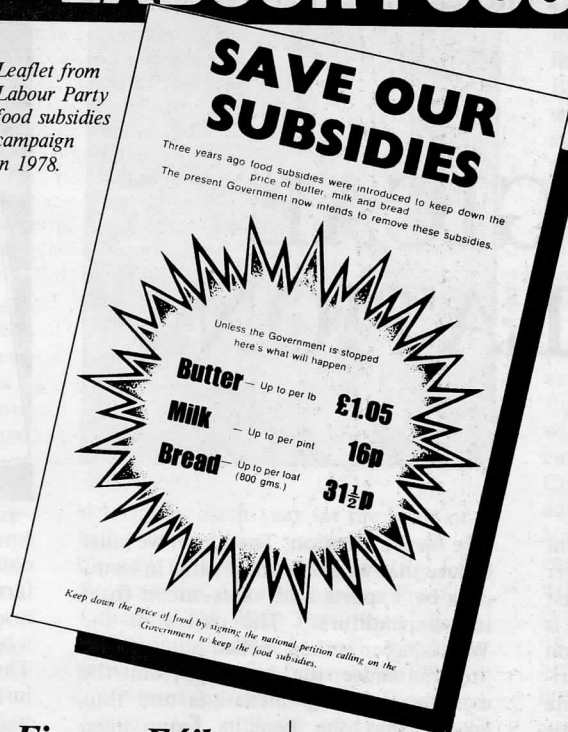
The Party faces the urgent task of developing positive neutrality in the face of the equivocal attitudes of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. All concerned should obtain copies from Head Office. The process of policy development which led to this publication must go on, must be paralleled in other areas of concern and must be carried into effective political presentation and action.

What is evident is that Labour policies, however correct and relevant, are of little significance in the absence of positive and systematic action by the Party's leadership to let people know and understand them — and to stand over them in the face of opposition, misrepresentation and the attractions of short-term expediency. We now need to give these policies reality in the political life of the nation. The credibility and survival of Labour depends on our willingness and capacity to do so.

"The Government has agreed that we must protect food subsidies as much as possible. Therefore, even though it was widely predicted (and even though Charles Haughey felt able to attack us for abandoning it before the Budget was even announced) there will be no reduction in the level of food subsidies as a result of the Budget."

— Dick Spring, January 25, 1984 (letter to Party members).

Leaflet from Labour Party food subsidies campaign in 1978.



Fianna Fáil option

In the wake of the food subsidy fiasco a few party members have proposed coalition with, or support for a Fianna Fail government as a legitimate tactic for the short term. The most vocal supporter of this view has been Michael Bell, T.D., a former member of Fianna Fail. He and others have pointed out that there is an historical precedent in that Labour kept Fianna Fail in power for six years from 1932-1938.

In the aftermath of the 1932 election the Labour Party was in crisis and facing a dilemma. The party leader, Tom Johnson had lost his seat and the vote had fallen disastrously to 7.7%. To add to the problems of the new leader, no party had an overall majority and rumours abounded of threatened mutinies in the Army and the Garda Síochána, if Fianna Fail took power. In the event Fianna Fail formed a government with Labour support and the threatened mutinies came to nothing.

Fianna Fail failed to win an overall majority in the snap election held in 1933, holding exactly half the seats after the election of Ceann Comhairle. Again Labour came to their assistance to give the Government an overall majority of sixteen. 1933 had been a calamitous election for Labour. The vote fell to 5.7% though the party had succeeded in having eight of its nineteen candidates returned to the Dail. Fianna Fail also failed to win an overall majority in the new smaller Dail of

1937 despite holding the referendum on the new Constitution on the same day as the election. Labour yet again loyally put Mr. De Valera back in power, despite having opposed his sectarian constitution. However this government fell the following year. In the subsequent election Fianna Fail romped home with over 50% of the popular vote and no Labour or Larkinite deputies were returned for Dublin.

It has been argued by some that support for Fianna Fail saved the Labour Party. Certainly the number of seats increased after 1932. But with that increase in seats something more insidious happened. The party rapidly became dominated by rural conservative T.D.s, totally ignoring the urbanised (and increasing) working class of Dublin. Nothing personified that change more than the election in March 1932 of William Norton in place of Tom Johnson. Norton, like Dick Spring, was not yet thirty-two when he took over. Norton, like Spring represented a rural constituency. The similarites are uncanny: years of appeasement to conservative and sectarian forces, failure to give any leadership to the urban working class. And in 1984, just as they did in the 1930's Socialists choose to remain outside the party.

Focus contributors include:- Tony Brown; Peter McDermott; David Moyuan; Sean O'Neill; Brendan Shiel and Michael Taft.

Dr. Michael Smith died at the end of July from cancer. He was only 38. Life had hardly begun when it was so cruelly ended.

To the general Irish public Michael was mourned as President of the Medical Union. In Kanturk it was as a beloved G.P. and inspiring community figure. But to us in the Labour Party he is to be lamented as a lost comrade and lamented, too, as a friend.

It says much of the Labour Party in its present sorry state that Michael had already left our ranks to concentrate on medical politics. He no longer saw the Labour Party as a meaningful vehicle for social change and he quit.

Once he had been a rising star. It even seemed possible he could win a seat in the unlikely constituency of Cork North West. He went very near it in 1981. But he was not of the 'normal' rural mode, or that version of it which is pushed at us as the exemplar.

Michael Smith was in favour of Labour independence and against coalition. Moreover, he said so to everybody who would listen. In the first 1982 election he stood again but not as a favourite of the then party hierarchy. By this time he was a national figure, an articulate, exciting, passionate politician who called himself a socialist and who reaped support across the north of Cork up to the Kerry border on the basis of his message.

At the famous Galway conference Michael was skillfully chosen by the Left to close its case in the coalition debate. He gave a masterful, moving speech. Coalition was being attacked from inside the citadel and with such force. He was a real architect of that triumph.

He did not stand again in the second 1982 election. He claimed the party did not want him to. Desperate efforts by the Left to get him to change his mind were of no avail. He disappeared from socialist politics only to emerge as the leader of the doctors' trade union.

What profligacy by Labour! A party which throws away such talent also throws away its future. In any other party he would have been groomed for national eminence. But in Labour he was thrown aside, too motivated, too articulate, too intense.

But Labour Left had always hoped one day Michael Smith would have come back to us, him and many others. It would have been the signal of our return to socialism. But now his place in the ranks will always remain vacant. For that there is no consolation.

BRENDAN HALLIGAN.

White Paper on Industrial Policy.

IDEOLOGICAL CAPITULATION

Sean Redmond

The fact that our present Government is the most conservative we've ever endured, only outdone by the first Cumann na nGael Government, is demonstrated by the White Paper on "Industrial Policy", published, appropriately enough, on 12th July, 1984. Despite running to 119 pages, it contains little that is new, and certainly nothing radically new.

And yet, new policies are desperately needed. Unemployment has reached staggering proportions, without any sign of improvement. An E.E.C. report has pointed out that in December, the figure stood at 208,000 which represented 16.4% of the workforce. Thirty-one per cent of the unemployed were under 25 years. The same E.E.C. report, published on 22nd August, documents the grim social realities of unemployment and the other inequities in our society.

Social Welfare payments now help to support one million of our people (one in three of the population of the Republic) and for 700,000 people, they are the main source of income. One in six children in Ireland are in families dependent on long-term social welfare payments. The report also deals with the plight of the elderly, though we hardly needed an E.E.C. report to make us aware of the position.

Faced with this situation, what have we had from the Government, now nearly two years in office? While one may face the boring task of wading through all 119 pages of the White Paper, the philosophical content of the document is revealed on the first page. After having informed us that recently our industrial performance has faltered, and that the number of new jobs created has been less than those lost, etc., there follows a real gem.

According to the White Paper, "the state of Government finances does not allow for any real expansion of expendi-

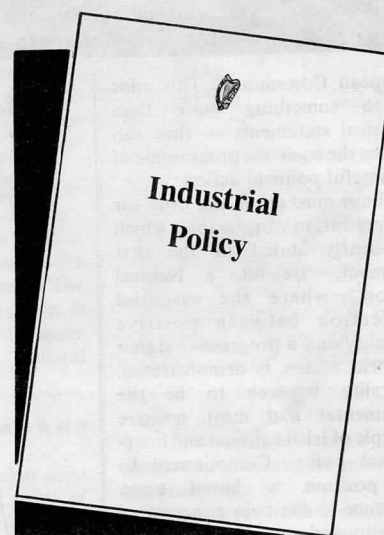
ture on job creation. Therefore, we must ensure that we get the best value in terms of jobs, exports and value-added from this expenditure." The object of the White Paper is then spelled out as being "to maximise the benefits from the existing industrial incentives and thus ensure that the benefits from them significantly exceed their costs."

Could anything be clearer? No extra money to be spent on job creation. No crash programme to deal with unemployment. Nothing, except a book-keeping exercise from a Government of book-keepers. Naturally, no one would object to an exercise designed to ensure the maximum benefits from the existing industrial incentives. However, this should be done on the basis of on-going routine assessments, rather than as the Government's only contribution to industrial expansion and job creation.

Where then does Labour stand in the light of such Governmental bankruptcy? Unfortunately, it would seem very much a part of it. And yet, one recalls what we told the public in our November 1982 Election programme on the subject of the economy and jobs:

"The main parties offer drastic deflation of the economy leading to the loss of thousands of jobs. The problem is not to get the books straight. Jobs and living standards for ordinary people are the critical issues facing us. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael offer a private sector approach to job creation which has patently failed. Labour is different."

We correctly identified the necessity to go beyond the economic restraints of the capitalist system. Under this system, the provision of a job is not seen as a right or entitlement, but as a source of profit. The utilisation of people's energy and abilities are not regarded as socially desirable, contributing to the overall welfare of the



community. Thus we observe absurd contradictions in our society. Our farmers are penalised for using the resources of the land to produce food, while millions die of starvation. Thousands of people in Ireland are living in sub-standard housing, while building workers walk the streets. An alien being from a foreign planet, dropped in our midst, would surely send the message back home that we were creatures of low intelligence with a primitive level of economic development. We need houses, yet we only build them if someone can make a profit.

The tenor of the Government's White Paper is that the same policies are to continue, with an attempt at increased efficiency. The emphasis will still be placed on the ability of the private sector to provide the jobs. The deficiencies of the private enterprise system will be examined from the viewpoint of Government financial support but nowhere is there a challenge to the system itself.

Again, one must query Labour's input into the document. Where is the contribution from the Party which told the electorate two years ago that we were offering them a real choice:

"The choice between virtually identical policies on offer from the two main political parties, and Labour's socialist proposals."

We assured the people who voted for us that ours was a radical programme, and that in relation to economic and social reform, "fundamental structural changes can and must be made now."

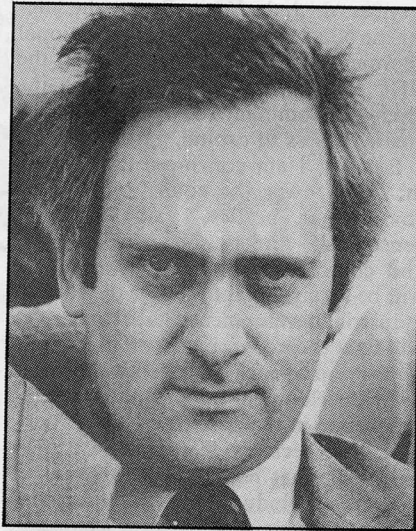
Where are these fundamental and structural changes, which we considered so necessary in November 1982? Not a trace or whisper of them appears in the "Industrial Policy" White Paper, and presumably, based on our own Party's beliefs, this policy, is doomed to failure. It is surely simple enough. If we believe,

and we told the public that we do, that the solution to our economic problems requires "fundamental structural changes," and a policy is produced which does not propose such changes, then by our own logic, that policy cannot work.

A basic tenet of Labour Party policy is the creation of a National Development Corporation, which according to our 1982 Election Programme, would have powers to invest up to £500 million in equity capital and with borrowing powers of £1,000 million.

In the Programme for Government agreed between Labour and Fine Gael, this figure had been drastically reduced to £200 million in equity capital, and a borrowing limitation of £50 million. Thus the seriousness of the proposal had been diminished.

The Government's White Paper has an entire chapter on the National Development Corporation, which states that the Government has been working on their plans for the setting up of an NDC. These are elaborated on to some extent, but crucial to the success of such a Corporation is the amount of cash made available to it. Here the White Paper is particularly vague. It states that "the annual exchequer funding of the NDC will be



John Bruton.

determined each year on the basis of a fully worked out strategic plan." So already, there is a retreat from the Joint Programme. Another broken Treaty of Limerick. The White Paper then informs us that a total sum of £10 million has been provided by the Government in 1984 for investment by the National Enterprise Agency (£3 million) and NDC (£7 million). Quite clearly, at this level of

funding, its role is intended to be low key.

In addition, the NDC will be required to replenish its capital by realising its investments, which could well mean that its role is perceived by Messrs. Dukes and Bruton as one of developing projects, with the risks that that entails, and when they are profitable, selling them off to private enterprise. Naturally, one would not expect the NDC to be another black hole into which public money disappears, but one must query if the partners in Government are in agreement on the purpose of the NDC.

The Government plan is due to be published in September. We have been assured that it will be worth waiting for. Public Sector trade unions have witnessed the incredible spectacle of their employers appealing to the Labour Court not to issue recommendations in advance of the publication of the National Plan. However, judged by the contents of the present White Paper, it will be "old wine in new bottles." The task of fighting for socialist solutions to our economic problems will still remain before the trade union and Labour movement.

Sean Redmond is General Secretary of the Irish Municipal Employees' Trade Union.

Derek Spiers/Report.

NDC: The end of an idea

Brendan Halligan

The National Development Corporation is given a whole chapter and takes up twelve pages in the White Paper on Industrial Policy published in mid July. The idea has obviously come a long way since it was first mooted in a Labour Party document in 1968. But don't let those 12 pages fool you. The White Paper is actually a defeat for Labour and a significant one at that. The NDC as traditionally presented has been grievously emasculated in this key statement on the Coalition's economic policy by being denied its main raison d'être: that of acting as the holding company for all other state companies.

It's as well to go back to the beginning so as to put everything in context. In his famous 1967 New Republic speech to Annual Conference Brendan Corish proposed a comprehensive policy review "to define Labour's position in the Socialist Seventies." Submissions on all aspects of policy were invited from branches and members and in less than a year ten discussion papers were circulated throughout the party and debated at a special Policy Conference in

Liberty Hall in June 1968.

Seven months later the AC presented twelve full policy statements to the 1969 Annual Conference, amongst them one on Industrial Development. These policies consist of 150 pages of type and, as Corish put it in the introduction, "The documents state political commitments and outline broad structures for their implementation". Naturally they are now out of print. The political commitment in the Industrial Policy statement was very clear. It was to put "an end to emigration and unemployment". The broad structure for the implementation of this planning, envisaged a new Department for Economic Development and, within it, the creation of a State Development Corporation. This is the origin of the National Development Corporation as later expressed by the ICTU and many trade unions.

The role of the State Development Corporation can be gauged from this trenchant assertion in the policy document: "In a Socialist economy there will be no doctrinaire restrictions to the

State's range of activities." All state industries were to be "wholly owned by the State Development Corporation". And it is this specific, and indeed vital role, which is now excised in the White Paper. Without that role the Corporation is just another state agency. With it the Corporation becomes the powerhouse for industrial development.

The 1969 statement outlined five different ways for the NDC to involve itself in industrial development. These ranged from setting up or expanding state owned industries and state participation in developing existing private industries to joint ventures, direct state aid and the development of the infrastructure.

In a word, the State Development Corporation had a full brief to do whatever was necessary. There were to be no ideological restrictions on its operations, either of the right or of the left.

The 1973 Programme for Government made no mention of a State or National Development Corporation but resolutions at the 1974 and 1975 Annual Conferences put it back on the public

agenda. Behind the scenes a considerable amount of research was done in the Department of Industry and Commerce into a Development Corporation which included field research in Italy and Sweden. I made several public statements myself on the NDC, notably in my paper of 1976 on "The Politics of Planning."

Needless to say, the Department of Finance fought a vigorous rearguard action against this encroachment on their jurisdiction and the Coalition Government never agreed terms on the NDC until they had called the 1977 election and incorporated it in their election manifesto. By this time the momentum for the NDC was so great that the incoming Fianna Fail Government felt obliged to make some concession to the idea and eventually set up the National Enterprise Agency with a very restricted range of responsibilities. It, in turn, was swallowed up by the election of the first Fitzgerald Coalition and readers will readily recall the death bed conversion of that Government to the idea of a NDC with the extraordinary press conference given by Michael O'Leary as Minister for Industry and Energy a few days before the first 1982 election.

The saga is completed, for the present, by the publication of the White Paper by the second Fitzgerald Coalition.

The most notable absence from the list of six functions given the NDC in the White Paper is that of holding company for all State companies along the lines of Statfortag in Sweden or OIAG in Austria. And without this vital function the NDC is virtually meaningless. It will be put into immediate conflict with the IDA and into opposition with all of the State's commercial companies. It will lose on both fronts.

In recent times I have argued that the IDA should have been transformed into the NDC for it now takes on equity stake in new enterprises where appropriate and could easily expand into joint ventures as well as providing the range of minor

services which the White Paper schedules for the NDC. It would be a more rational approach than leaving the IDA and the NDC to fight it out, with the IDA being given the dominant role by virtue of its greater access to capital.

Equally, I am convinced that, unless the NDC owns the equity of all state commercial bodies, and unless it consciously directs their development and co-ordinates their activities, there will be no significant role for the state in industrial development. State companies will fight their own corner, often in direct opposition to each other, and will fritter away development opportunities as they have done in the past.

It has been evident from the very beginning that both the Department of Finance and Industry fear the emergence of a single consolidated State sector and have succeeded so far in preventing it from emerging. They fear it because it will be an alternative power centre rivalling their own authority and prestige. The victory of the bureaucrats is a great tragedy. As the Socialist Government in Austria has proven with its creation of OIAG it is possible for a small holding company to successfully run a state sector, to make profits and to save jobs. In Austria's case the state sector accounts for one third of manufacturing output and is in heavy and advanced industries, so its not exactly a Mickey Mouse operation.

But quite clearly Mickey Mouse will be the corporate emblem of the NDC, not only that, the NDC will adopt "a commercial approach" to quote the White Paper. It will not be a grant giving agency, will not engage in rescue type operations, will aim to become self financing and to pay an annual dividend to the Exchequer to compensate for the interest on the monies borrowed to finance the NDC in its earlier years. It must also be capable of replenishing its capital by realising its investments. When you read that its Board will include

"business persons with a proven record of success" you get the complete drift. This is a far cry from Corish's socialist instrument even if there are to be token trade unionists or co-operators on the Board as well.

At present there is little commitment to state enterprise in Ireland. Many of the present Fine Gael Ministers are actively hostile to the concept and the on-going row over community radio is just one example. The civil service is almost universally opposed to state commercial activities and they have hampered and thwarted every spark of initiative and imagination attempted by the more active companies. State boards are populated either by party hacks or private enterprise buccaneers "with proven records of success" who are vehemently antagonistic to socialist ideas. Worker Directors are not a sufficient corrective. And lastly, the management of many state enterprises and agencies are personally ill-disposed to the role of the state and come to their job with no vocation other than enlarging their bank balances, enjoying perks that would make an MEP blush and enhancing their own personal prestige.

The tragedy of the state sector is that it is run by bad management, very bad, and directed by gombeens. I wouldn't mind paying state managers the highest salaries and retaining the most brilliant directors if they all got the job done. The job is not being done and won't be done thanks to this White Paper.

If all this sounds angry its because there is a time for righteous anger. The O'Leary/Fitzgerald Programme for Government promised capital taxation under the guise of company taxation on bank profits. Now we have this. The White Paper on Industrial Policy is a sad episode in Irish political life — for socialists. A critically important idea is about to be destroyed, as were so many others, by pretence and propaganda. The tragedy is that we are a willing party to it.



Michael O'Leary losing control at the infamous election press conference on the N.D.C.

Taking students seriously

Joe Duffy

The disdainful reaction of many people to students is understandable but not justifiable. The vast majority of the population aspire to an education. Ask any parent what they would like for their kids that they didn't have — invariably they reply, 'education'. Yet, because third level education is first a function of the economy rather than the needs of the people, the vast majority will never get through the doors of a third level college. Naturally, many then regard those who do get in as 'privileged', just as the one eyed man is privileged in the land of the blind. Rights become privileges when they are denied to the majority of the people. Third level education become a privilege when it is denied to the vast majority of the people.

The Economy

That third level education is primarily a function of the economy in a capitalist country is indisputable. The expansion of education in the past twenty-five years is a direct function of the economic policy as expounded by Whittaker and Lemass in their 'White Paper on Economic Expansion' published in 1958. This led to a heavy emphasis on technological education culminating in the construction of nine factory like third level institutions called Regional Techs.

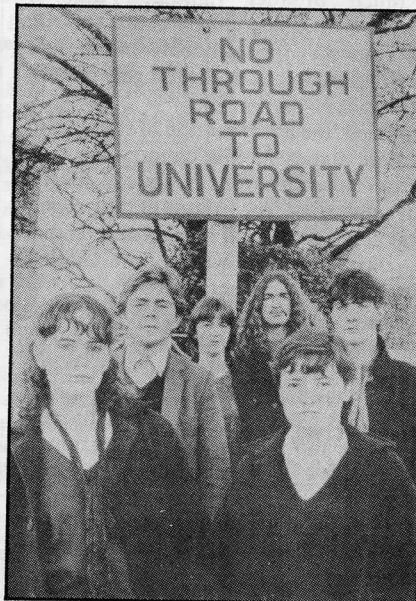
Further evidence of the nature of third level and its primary function can be gleaned from the grants scheme in operation. Introduced in 1968 ostensibly to reduce inequality, its primary purpose was to get more young people into the system using academic ability rather than finance as the determining factor. The four leaving cert honours criterion, in effect, meant that those with little independent finance must be more academically able than those who could acquire money when entering the same course. The grants scheme today which at maximum will allow a Dublin based student £8 per week makes little effort or, indeed, pretence to reduce inequality. The recent cutbacks in third level

education resulting in the doubling of tuition fees and real reduction in the value of the few grants available are quite simply a function of the economic recession. The economy in its present structure cannot, we are told, sustain any more trained personnel, therefore the system is curtailed regardless of the desires or needs of the people.

The desire for third level education cannot be underestimated. Up to 30,000 applicants are currently vying for under 10,000 third level places. The system as it now functions with huge tuition fees, rising examination fees and rapidly disappearing grants scheme is in effect designed to keep people out rather than let them in.

Vicious Circle

Because it is so costly to get in and stay in third level education many have consigned higher education to the unattainable category. Their only utterance on an area which they now perceive as irrelevant is that it should cost the taxpayer the minimum and the individual student the maximum.



A vicious circle emerges. Tuition fees are high, ergo only those with access to large amounts of money can go, ergo they are well off, ergo they should pay. Touche! Surprisingly, many of the right and left agree with this thesis, which at the end of the day only serves to entrench the position in higher education of those with access to wealth.

This confused reasoning then spawns ideas such as 'loans' schemes, which simply states that education is a consumer item, something that can be done without but if you manage to acquire it, one should pay in full for it over a lifetime.

We have in this part of the country a direct and recent example of how social inequality in education can be drastically reduced. Just as tuition fees were abolished in second level in 1968 they should now be abolished in third level. In the past twenty years we have seen a 300% increase in the number of pupils at senior cycle second level. The corresponding period has seen an increase of 125% in places available in third level. A decent grants scheme should also be introduced for the post compulsory school age to enable more young people to get a full education.

The Position of Students

Third level students are judged on their parents. Every statistic produced on Irish third level students has not dealt with students themselves. Rather it is a snapshot of the parents of these adult individuals taken when they enter third level. There has never been a study of the views, aspirations and ideals of students themselves as they leave third level.

But this underdeveloped picture of students' parents is then used by the right wing political groups and indeed many on the left to dismiss students as 'rich kids' or 'middle-class brats'. It's an easy jibe, a battered cliché, but one that offers us nothing in our attempt to understand the student movement and the changes it has fought for and won in society.



Derek Spiers/Report.

Joe Duffy talking to reporters after his release from prison in March.

Examining the position of those on the left who hold this view we see that this interpretation regards students as traditional elite group, overwhelmingly bourgeois or petit bourgeois by recruitment and outlook and therefore ultimately a trivial or reactionary force. The best that can be hoped for is that a minority of radical students might provide people for picket lines. When students engage in struggle for basic rights they are often dismissed as adventurist, playacting or simply 'making a name for themselves'.

Rapidly the correct slogan of the left, 'make the rich pay for the crisis' can under the above reasoning be bastardised to read, 'make the offspring of the rich pay for the crisis'.

Progressive Adults

The time spent at third level education is for the majority of young people a state of change and development. Many throw off the shackles of dependence. It is time for new ideas, new friends, new knowledge. A problem confronting third level education in a capitalist society is that on the one hand it attempts to create a ruling elite as near as possible to the current grouping, but on the other hand the process can unleash the critical potential of this group. Large numbers of critical, educated, alert and politically equipped individuals grouped together can become rebellious against society founded on injustice and repression.

Third level students in this country today, the vast majority of whom are struggling to get a decent education do

not perceive themselves as 'rich kids'. Rather, we see ourselves as independent adults endeavouring to get an education. This is something we believe should be available to all, i.e. it should be free. This creates a situation where the organised student movement often becomes the most progressive single grouping in society. For too long the USI had progressive paper policies but had never taken them up. This was because of the pressure on the student body to conform to the 'rich kid' role assigned to them. It is only in recent times that students have come out of their colleges to fight back and destroy the myths. That there should be a fightback I believe is an indication of a much broader fightback that is imminent in this country. A shift to the left among the student body will foreshadow a shift to the left generally in society.

Indeed, the liberalisation of students in the late sixties in this country led to a greater liberalisation in society in the early seventies. The origins of the present struggle in the North can be traced back to developments within the higher education system there.

Equally, shift to the right in the students movement can foreshadow a general rightward shift in society. While there was heavy political, economic, social and parental pressure on students to take a more conservative position in the past few years there are now strong signs that this attempt has failed. The cutbacks coupled with the diminishing job prospects and cut throat examinations added to the increased

effort to throw students back on their families. Some commentators argued that it had in effect occurred about 18 months ago with the imminent break up of the national student movement, USI.

In retrospect it was not a wild prediction in that the two major universities in the south, TCD and UCD, had left the union ostensibly over the left wing nature of the organisation. That these universities have returned in force, coupled with a doubling of the membership of the national union around progressive policies are signs that the so-called right wing swing has been stopped.

Medical Card Campaign

The militant student campaign against the removal of the medical card — which would have meant that students would be treated differently than other members of our age group when it came to applying for the card — is another step on the road to destroying the myths about third level students.

The rationale behind the proposed removal of the medical card, i.e. 'the rich kids', is one that has to be seriously challenged. That the government should sign an agreement that accepted that students should be treated like everybody else was surprising. That they should renege on it six months later during the summer break was, in many people's eyes, predictable.

Indeed, the confused reaction of many people on the left and in the trade union movement to the campaign is another example of the underdeveloped attitude of the left in general to the student movement. It was interesting to see that the most consistent and unequivocal support for the students came from the Rank Workers who were also in struggle at the time.

The organised student movement is the largest democratic organisation of young people on this island. It has up to thirty times the membership of the largest party political youth groupings. If any progressive group is to gather support it must seriously work in the student movement. But it must not simply be one of encouraging students to get involved in the 'workers struggle'. It must be one that organises students to take up the issues that effect them in their day to day lives.

For, in truth, the struggle of students for decent education, decent medical care and living conditions is one with the struggle of the workers for a better life for them and their families — they should not be seen as counterposing, but complementary.

Joe Duffy was President of the Union of Students in Ireland in 1983/84.

THE RANK AND FILE FIGHT BACK

Resolutions not enough

At the joint constituency meeting in Cork on September 5th it wasn't important that the motions of no confidence in Dick Spring were ruled out of order on a technicality although certainly they would have been passed by an overwhelming majority. It was the fact that such a meeting characterised by unprecedented bitterness and acrimony could ever take place. It is unfortunate to see at Labour Party meetings members openly abusing and shouting down one another, a creeping air of vindictiveness and the harassment of reporters. Given the large attendance at the meeting and the near unanimity of opposition to Mr. Spring can one doubt that a serious, if not irreconcilable, rift has developed between large sections of the membership and the Parliamentary Labour Party? Has the ultimate happened, has the Party leadership lost control of the party?

The immediate reason for this opposition is the reduction of the food subsidies. But this is just the latest in a series of events that have been gaining momentum in recent months. Following the Euro defeat the rank and file demanded of the Party leadership its plans for repairing the damage inflicted upon Labour during the two years of Coalition. Ruari Quinn equivocated before the Dublin Regional Council, openly admitting the Leadership's confusion and loss of direction. An aggregate meeting of the Dublin membership took an angry tone, speaking in terms of sell-outs, betrayals and loss of confidence. At that meeting a resolution was passed overwhelmingly, calling for a special delegate conference to reassess Labour's participation in government. An Administrative Council meeting in June indicated that something radical had to be done if Labour were to halt the downward slide.

However, after the initial shock coalitionist fell back on Dick Spring's reasons for the party's dismal performance. Writing in the Irish Independent just after the election Mr. Spring emphasized the party's lack of organizational and marketing skills during the campaign. He referred to the effects of the Coalition on organization only insofar that the membership

was dissatisfied at the speed with which the Coalition agreement had been implemented (ignoring that nearly 40% at the Limerick Conference rejected the agreement, implemented or not). At Kilkee Castle much was made of reorganization while reassurances were given to backbenchers that public expenditure cuts would not harm the living standards of the working class. At the subsequent A.C. meeting the tone radically changed, taking up the Party leader's original analysis that the Euro defeats were attributable to the narrow issue of organization. A motion calling for a special delegate conference was rejected by 21-8. It seemed the coalitionists would ride out the storm. That is, until the August Bank Holiday decision to reduce by half the subsidies to bread, butter and milk.

Food subsidies are one of those programmes that carry a symbol that soon develops into a principle within party policy. Labour has historically been identified with the subsidies. Following the Emergency Labour fought strongly for their retention. Though not part of the Election Pact, Labour introduced subsidies in the '73 Coalition over the objection of conservative Fine Gael ministers. The A.C. initiated a 'Save Our Subsidies' campaign in 1978 as activists leafleted many areas and gathered signatures. Recently, Dick Spring and Labour ministers used the retention of food subsidies as justification for participation in Coalition. Food subsidies reached into the subconsciousness of the Party. Whatever could and did go wrong in a coalition food subsidies would remain while Labour was there.

The Party leadership profoundly underestimated the effect of the

cuts on rank and file attitudes. Press statements from Dublin West, the Dublin Regional Council and Labour Youth appeared the next day. On RTE's 'News at One' radio programme Michael Bell proposed severing links with Fine Gael and realigning with Fianna Fail while a shaken Frank McLoughlin condemned the failure to inform TD's of the decision at Kilkee Castle, pointing out that expenditure cuts should be made in the subsidies to the rich (e.g. private education). The party chairperson Senator Michael D. Higgins said the cuts had brought the party to an untenable position within government while the vice-chairperson and Chief Whip, Mervyn Taylor, condemned the cuts and publicly denounced the Fine Gael economic line, arguing for reflation, state sector expansion and a widening of the tax base.

The unusual thing about the reaction was not only that it occurred during a politically dormant month but that it stretched across the left/right divide within the party:

Meath — constituency executive called for a special delegate conference while condemning the subsidies cut.

Tipperary South — Sean Treacy publicly condemned the cuts.

Kerry North — Tralee Urban Councillor Michael O'Regan joined in the criticism calling for withdrawal from coalition.

Dun Laoire — constituency executive called for a special delegate conference.

Kildare — aggregate meeting of 300 members by a 10-1 majority called for a special conference.

Similar condemnations occurred in South West, North West, Central and South constituencies in Dublin with the issue still to be discussed in a number of others.

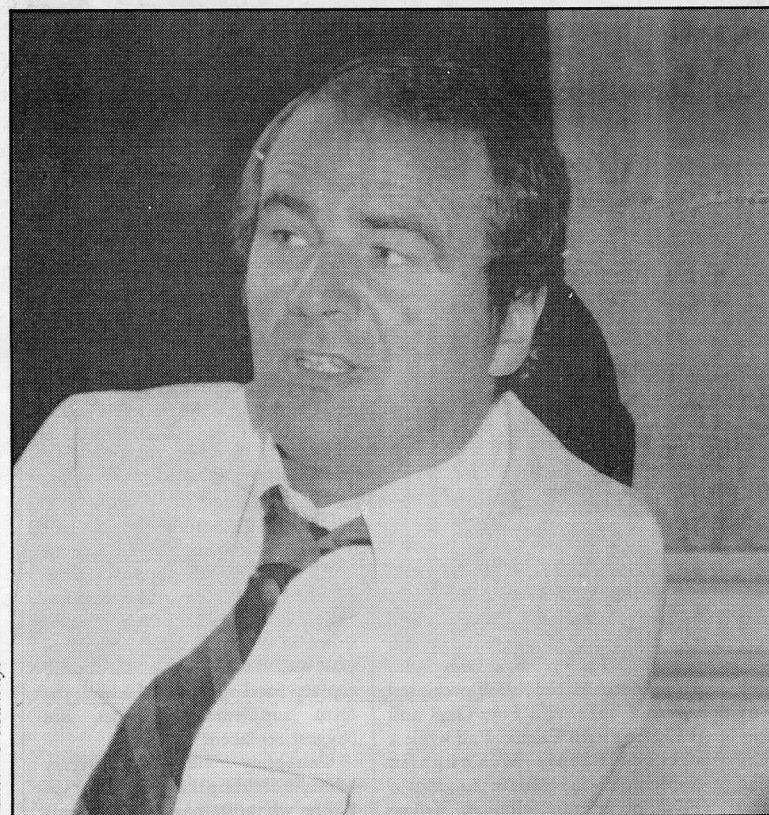
The Party leadership seems encircled not only by the rank and file and trade unionists but by members of the PLP itself. Attempts to defuse the situation by calling on the party to wait until the publication of the National Plan have been to no avail. The crucial element of the Plan, the Industrial White Paper, has already shown the predominance of Fine Gael ideology. It is unlikely that the Family Income Supplement scheme will be brought forward from November. Anyway, it appears too little, too late. The FIS, a watered down version of Labour's original proposal, was never meant to replace food subsidies. Indeed, the term supplementary does not suggest replacement.

Unhappily this controversy which is dividing the party occurs at a time when the party badly needs to be reorganised. The genuine efforts of General Secretary Colm O'Briain to attempt this in the Dublin area have inevitably been met with suspicion and apathy. However despite reservations, many left-wingers are delighted with the reorganization which they see as a clearing out of dead wood.

Another motion calling for a special conference comes up before the Administrative Council this month and if it is defeated, as is likely, it will not quell the revolt. Yet motions aren't everything. They are tactical things designed to gain the widest possible support. It would be more enlightening to listen to what comrades actually say. A detailed account, for instance, of the Dublin aggregate in July would make more interesting reading than the resolutions actually passed. One of the Regional Council officers summed up members' feelings when he said that the party's future was too important to be left in the hands of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

But even more significant is the mood of smaller meetings where ideas emerge in embryonic form. At the ordinary August meeting of the Dublin Regional Council the Kildare motion was endorsed but a number of delegates, impatient and frustrated, suggested that meetings and resolutions were not enough. Action had to be taken if Labour's socialist policies and the views of the rank and file were to be heard.





Emer O'Mahony.

The General Secretary of IDATU talked to *Labour Left* on militancy, workers and the law, internationalism and the Labour Party. The interview was conducted by Bernard Brown.

Interview with John Mitchell

LL: *The IDATU has traditionally been regarded as a conservative union but since your arrival the union seems to have experienced an upsurge in militancy, for example: the BHS and Dunnes Stores disputes. Would you agree that there has been this upsurge and suggest why it is so?*

JM: It's fairly obvious there has been a change. Last year we spent more money on strike pay than in the previous 80 odd years of the union. That puts it in perspective. The union was very much in decline, on the verge of extinction, so it was easy to come in and improve and change it. The main thing is to get a good organisation — good staff, good structures, more democracy and participation. The rest sort of followed when we made it clear to the employers, the Dunnes and Quinnsworth, that we weren't going to play footsy, weren't going to be kicked around. The most successful dispute we had was with Quinnsworth. That was like something out of the 1930's. On one morning in 50 stores they had a video giving the management's point of view. Its hard to fight that. They said they had lost 4 million and would lose 400 million if necessary to break us. A car got burned 'by mistake', there were fights — it was 50 year old hardline stuff. But that's the kind of trade I'm in. I was amazed coming from the ESB where at least there was some procedure. Here, the attitude of even the most 'enlightened' employer is that people should do what they're told. There is absolutely no concept of concept of consultation, participation or workers having any rights. But we're going to change that.

LL: *Your stated objective is to expand your membership to 30,000 members. What are the growth prospects for a union traditionally centred in a section seriously affected by the recession, introduction of technology and employers' attempts to recruit part-time employees?*

JM: It's an irony that the members employed in distribution are possibly growing. There has been a change around in some of the badly run places which are going to go under but you still have the Dunnes and Quinnsworth opening branches. Its easier to organise the big chains than the small family-run shops which have a handful of very scared people. Secondly, the level of organisation has been so low there's only one direction to go. I think we have certain advantages with a white collar union. In Cork we have a thousand non-distributive members though they've had a battering and we have an office down there where ASTMS would be our biggest rival. One great advantage we have is an infrastructure, better than the Workers Union in terms of offices. We have offices in Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Dundalk, Belfast and a presence in Tralee. Now we're moving into the North where there's probably a few thousand to be picked up.

LL: *How have you managed to motivate people with no real tradition for militancy into taking action?*

JM: I believe to some extent in the importance of leadership. I've been in three unions and I've never found motivation any great difficulty. When I was in ASTMS there was the Lombard-Ulster Bank strike, people just in the union for a few weeks and they're on very tough strikes. I think anybody, if the question is posed for them and if they're sure they're going to get some backing will fight. Even in the most conservative sections I've never had any great difficulty. The ESB clerical workers didn't have a great tradition and they were prepared to be backed and you need a sense of belonging. Take those girls up on Henry Street, we've been criticised by the far left for instructing people. Apart from the fact that people are standing up to apartheid, that people

will support the union irrespective of what they're doing is a great sign of loyalty. I think if you're trusted people will follow you.

LL: *Do you think a union should support members in illegal action?*

JM: Oh yes, I do. When it comes to protecting jobs we should back them. I've said at the last two Congresses that we have to stop the interference of injunctions and the law into industrial relations. There's hardly been a time in the last 12 months that I haven't been under one injunction or another. We should say straight away that if we're going to be injunctioned we'll break it and see what the hell they're going to do about it. In addition, there's the Unfair Employment Appeals Tribunal. You got these bloody lawyers and they'll clean you up. We had a case recently where a young man in a shoe shop was unfairly dismissed for joining a union. We won the case and were awarded £150. Really good value for getting rid of a union. The whole entry of the the legal profession into industrial unions has to be met head on and the only way to do that is to break the law.

LL: *Did the workers in Dunnes act unilaterally, since many of their colleagues have not followed them? What role did the union play in it?*

JM: We sent out a circular to all our officials to inform all members of our policy decision not to handle South African goods. This was the first place we came into conflict. In Roche's, for example, they took the wine off the shelf. In Wollsworth they refused to handle South African sweets and nothing was done. Quinnsworth in Ballymun is another place where they're refusing to handle oranges and nothing's been done to them.

LL: *So your policy of not handling South African goods has been successful in a number of other areas?*

JM: Yes, it has. But just getting back, we haven't leaned on members, we're saying it's a matter of conscience and of course we can't suspend or lean on members who do.

LL: *You are prominently identified with international issues: the trade union struggle in Central America, South Africa, Poland - why should these issues concern Irish workers?*

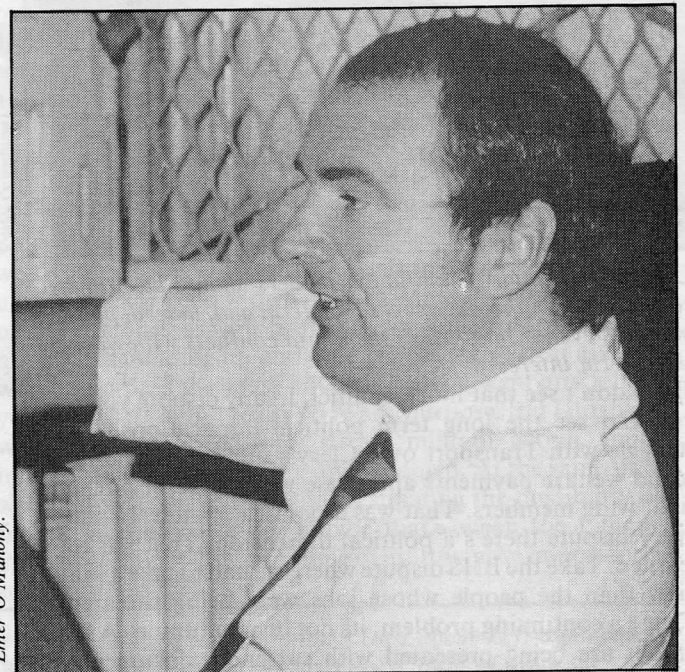
JM: I suppose in the most noble sense we're all brothers. In a more pragmatic way we can learn from the unions in these parts of the world. Unless unions go back to their roots and take moral stands, represent their members and are responsive, interesting organisations I think people will drift away, like they have from the Labour Party. I was out on a picket line in the Philippines and there have been 9 people killed since then. You have whole communities out there with their medical, propaganda and defence sections. They've got the whole family involved. People who are partly illiterate, they can see they're not just looking for pay but are trying to change their society and are extending solidarity to the rest of the world. We have a lot to learn from them. When we get involved in things like demarcation disputes, inter-union disputes, disturbance claims, things that disillusion members, you have to be able to say there's a little bit more to it than just mean things like that. Its a little bit uplifting. You can't explain everything by reason. Some of the more motivating things are emotional rather than rational.

LL: *In the Irish Left there are different views of what Solidarity is and whether it should be supported. It has been suggested by some parties and factions that Solidarity is anti-socialist and should be opposed.*

JM: Yes, the Workers' Party comes to mind. I think they've been found out on the Polish situation. An organisation with 10-14 million people has to represent something. And within such an organisation you're going to have different influences such as the Church. But its very obvious, purely based on its numbers, that this was an organisation that represented workers. The pro-Moscow predecessor and successor represented nothing. Its the typical thing, the WP are quick to support the Sandinistas and the struggle in South Africa but when it comes to their own political masters they're a little inconsistent. My view is that whenever workers are organised in the interests of workers, even though they may have dubious allies like Thatcher and Reagan, we have to support them.

LL: *You're also identified with this new committee set up on the question of Northern Ireland to promote unity and independence in Ireland. What role do you see it playing in the trade union movement?*

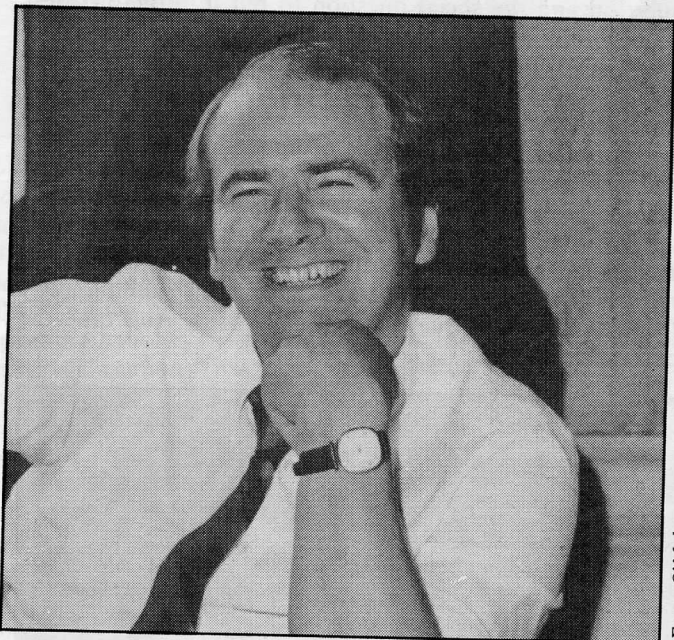
JM: The two big problems in Ireland are the national question and the social question to put it in the broadest cliches. While you have partition, you're going to have problems in both parts of Ireland. Its very important that the paper unity we have at the moment is not used as an excuse for doing nothing on the national question. I believe very strongly that the British Army should be pressurised and forced, if possible, to leave Ireland. We have this spurious unity at the moment with the Protestant workers in the North and even if it had to be found out it wouldn't do any great harm. Its very important that the Labour movement after nearly a hundred years of running away from the national question faces up to it. And take the consequences.



Emer O'Mahony.

LL: *Would you agree that the trade union movement is too fragmented and needs to be rationalised? And, if so, how would you bring about this rationalisation?*

JM: We put down a motion when I was in the ESBOA to bring about trade union rationalisation. It was passed but nothing was done about it. It will have to be rationalised. When you think of all the bankrupt unions that are around, bankrupt in financial terms and ideas . . . a number of them can't pay their wages at the moment. We've got too many unions. The best example of all are the farmers. They went from an amateurish organisation to one with influence in Brussels, economists working and good publicity. We should aim for that. I once put forward a blueprint where you would define the number of sectors from 20-40 (they're defined in CSO publications). Any union that didn't have membership from a certain sector would be barred from recruiting there. That would be the first stage of a type of creeping rationalisation. After one or two years any union with less than 5% in a certain sector would have to stay out of that sector. You would finish up with one or a small number of unions per sector. It might cause the bigger unions to federalise in some way. I gave the earlier example of Quinnsworth; how they would literally spend a seven to eight figure sum to break unions. You're up against that type of resources.



Emer O'Mahony

LL: *Do you think trade union leaders should be primarily concerned with their members long term and, indeed, political interests even if that brings them into conflicts with workers' short term interests?*

JM: I don't see that much conflict. In any dispute you have you can see the long term political implications. In the struggle with Transport over Clery's our people didn't get social welfare payments and those were some of our most right wing members. That was a political matter. In almost every dispute there's a political dimension. That has to be learned. Take the BHS dispute where we had to take a longer view than the people whose jobs were being threatened. That's a continuing problem, it's not just our union. A lot of unions are being presented with surrender documents or

cutbacks on conditions or places will be closed. I think they have to be opposed. By and large I don't see a conflict between the short and long term.

LL: *In the past you have referred to an 'overview role' for trade union leadership. Can you explain what you mean by this?*

JM: In the last few weeks I've become very conscious of the fact that no matter how militant you are, no matter how defiant, trade union action alone is only part of the struggle. Take the case of 'Mirror, Mirror'. Almost certainly it was the banks that screwed them at the end of the day. They were close to viability, they brought in this advisor recommended by the banks and he opened a special fund to take in the trading receipts. At that stage they owed the bank a million quid and in two weeks they had five or six hundred thousand. The banks made themselves preferential creditors, got another hundred thousand and as soon as they had themselves pretty well protected they pulled the plug. In a situation like that, unless there was some sort of political control over the banks, you had no hope. That's a very obvious lesson. Industrial struggle is not sufficient; there has to be a political struggle. Trade unions can't operate in a vacuum. I've been very critical of the Labour Party and all other parties who claim to represent the workers. We don't have a voice at the moment.

LL: *How should workers obtain that political voice if not through one of the existing political parties and I'm thinking here of the Labour Party.*

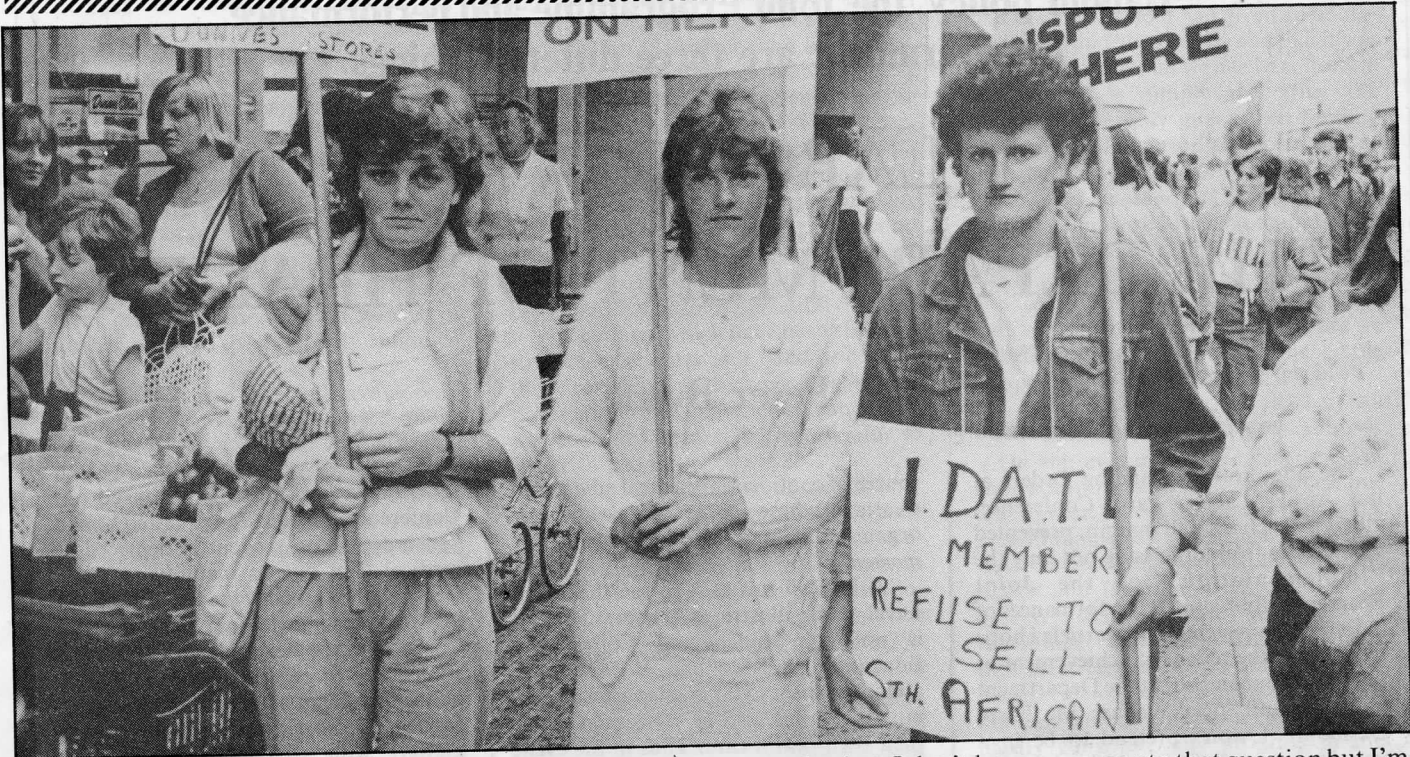
JM: I've been sort of benign towards the Labour Party a lot of my life but I really think they've gone beyond the beyonds at this stage. In the previous coalitions you could see a point. The likes of Cluskey and others with some Labour tradition had a point beyond which they wouldn't stay in power. This government doesn't have such a point. They're absolutely indistinguishable from Fine Gael, especially the ministers. The Labour Party is dead as far as workers are concerned. And its very hurtful for someone line me when you try to motivate people, tell them they should be political and then you get kicked in the balls by the Labour Party. Its very demoralising. I don't think any of these small left wing sects are going to solve the problem either. Maybe the workers are going to have to get their unions to form a political wing. We passed a motion at our conference to look into this. As the existing political side of the Labour Movement has failed we'll have to get political influence some other way. So we'll pursue that ourselves.

LL: *Shouldn't the objective be to change the Labour Party, the alternative being that workers have no political voice or involvement?*

JM: I don't think it can be transformed at this stage.

LL: *Why do you say this?*

JM: Partly the personalities. Take the leader, he has absolutely no roots in the Labour movement, no identification with the views of working people. Ruari Quinn is exactly the same. Barry Desmond is slightly left of the Phalange, he'd fit in with the old style Fine Gael. Liam Kavanagh . . . you can go through them one after another. At least if you go to the Annual Conferences of Congress you can hear the rhetoric of the working classes. These guys haven't got even that.



Derek Spiers/Report.

LL: But surely the Labour Party isn't just the parliamentary party.

JM: What is it? It isn't the ordinary workers, they're being neglected.

LL: The debates and resolutions passed at Party Conferences and the programme of the Party are distinctly different from that being pursued by the parliamentary leadership.

JM: But does it believe in those policies? I don't think it does. Are they ever going to implement them? At the last election people were saying, 'My God, there are two Fine Gaels: the real Fine Gael and a poor man's Fine Gael'. Why not work for the real thing? Why work for a party that is subservient to Fine Gael?

LL: So you'd write off the Labour Party, even the rank and file?

JM: No. I think the rank and file may have to look elsewhere. I mean, it's the rank and file I'm talking about, the badly paid people I represent which is essentially the heartland of the Labour Party. They have to be represented and they're not with food subsidies being halved and with this concentration on budget deficits.

LL: Haven't all attempts to set up an alternative Labour Party failed, ending up disillusioning quite a lot of people? What reasons would have that any new attempt won't end up as a failure as before?

JM: I don't have an answer to that. I don't think the Labour Party is the way. I think they're so... corrupt may not be an overstatement at this stage. Their only motivation is to keep Haughey out of power. The other attempts have failed; setting up a new party seems like such a futile exercise. You could learn from the other attempts. The SLP committed suicide the day it was born. Talk about having a split on item one of the agenda — here you had a split inscribed in the

constitution. I don't have an answer to that question but I'm looking for an answer. I know what the answers aren't, but setting up an alternative Labour Party isn't the answer. Maybe if the unions were sufficiently organized and politicized we could re-hatch the Labour Party. That's how the Labour Party started, when the workers didn't have a political voice and they had to get it themselves. We're back there again, back in the 1910's.

LL: What tactics can the broad Labour Movement employ to make governments more responsive to trade union members? In the absence of any real political representation how do you see unions pursuing their demands with government?

JM: The tax marches failed because there was a lack of conviction by the trade union leadership. They wouldn't be any different from the likes of Dick Spring and the party leadership. They didn't believe in what they are at. In fact, I heard a member from a fraternal organisation saying that it was very important to head off the militancy in the streets so Congress had to take over the thing. Street action without a political voice is destined to fail. So if we go down that road we're going to have to force the existing politicians to take notice of us or get our own political voice. We opposed one of the marches as you probably remember. It was just a matter of marching up and down O'Connell Street and see who could pass the most pubs before you went and joined your mates. It didn't really serve any purpose. But I do think we're going to need very strong militant action, more militant than just marching up and down. At the same time we're going to have to keep investigating the possibility of finding a political voice. Maybe that's when the Labour Party will start to listen to some of us. But more importantly some of their own.

The interview was conducted for *Labour Left* by Bernard Brown of the Federated Workers' Union of Ireland.

Labour policy, the Joint Programme and performance
in government are three different things.

LABOUR AT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Peter Byrne

The adoption of Standing Orders at last April's Labour Party Conference, albeit by such a small margin, prevented Conference from discussing not only the "implementation" of the Joint Programme but also the performances of individual ministers. In this article I hope to examine the record of achievement of the present incumbent at the Department of Health and Social Welfare, Mr. Barry Desmond. I won't pretend to be in a position to examine everything which has passed through his office, but I feel that the following aspects of policy are foremost in the public perception of our present Deputy Leader's role in Government.

Medical Cards for Young People

The withdrawal of medical cards from over 120,000 young people was a despicable act in that no other group, with the exception of the elderly and the handicapped, is as unrepresented and unorganised. Automatic entitlement was withdrawn in December '83, notably a few days before term end, and after occupations, prison sentences, marches, lecture boycotts and much negotiation, the matter is still unresolved. At no time has the Minister replied to the central argument — that students wish to be assessed using the same criteria as every other applicant; UCD Labour Party has written two well-argued letters to him privately, but we still await a full reply some six months later.

At first, this action may appear to be the removal of a privilege from the privileged: after all is not a health service to the Universities a service to the middle and upper-middle classes? Indeed at Conference the Minister distorted the argument considerably by stating that he would not give medical cards to the sons and daughters of rich farmers and businessmen. But removal of this so-called privilege is only adding to an existing injustice when you consider:

(1) A large number of secondary school students are now cut off from their

source of confidential medical advice and treatment: these people have no union or organisation, and have no vote *at the moment*.

(2) It is all too easy to see the Third Level as the illustrious Universities: this is not so. Students of Colleges of Education, R.T.C.s and V.E.C.s were already subject to far greater pressures — now they must also be concerned about their own health care. Thus in the event of illness, laying aside the obvious medical dangers and hardships, failure to produce (i.e. to afford) a medical certificate could well result in the loss of a Higher Education Grant.

(3) The composition of our third level institutions is outside the control of the DSW, and is due to a number of factors such as a loaded educational system, exorbitant fees and an inadequate grants system.

(4) Students are now being discriminated against: before agreeing to end the dispute last February, Joe Duffy, then President of USI, sought to ensure that a student living on an income of £25 per week would qualify for a medical card. Barry Desmond said yes. 7 out of 8 Health Boards say no. It is now the case that once an applicant writes "student" on his or her form, the granting of a card is solely dependent on whether his or her parents hold one.

On this issue I hold that Desmond's actions are wholly inconsistent with membership of the Labour Party. The Party fought the last general election with an unambiguous health policy; we proposed "a comprehensive national health service" and "the phased extension of the GMS". The Joint Programme was committed to "the best possible health service", emphasising "care of the child (sic) and of the aged". It stated that "in carrying through this programme of reform we shall ensure that the existing level and quality of health care will be maintained".

In addition to abandoning these (in this area as in others). Desmond has

ignored two motions passed at Conference. Motion 75 requested him to "ensure that no student is deprived of medical care due to inability to pay". Certainly he can obey the letter of this by inviting students to join the queues at Casualty in the hospitals, but to force a student to bring a routine consultation to a hospital is clearly a false economy. Motion 95 also called for a rethink on the matter, with particular attention to students cut off from parental support, of large families, or those who must leave home to attend their courses of study. No such review has taken place. If Minister Desmond can ignore these directives then this status as a Labour Party Candidate in the next election is meaningless.

Cut-backs in the Health Services

Though it is perhaps not as easy to pinpoint, the steady decline in many areas of health care and actual services cut-backs are worthy of close examination. Delegates to Conference will have received notice of a £31 million increase in Non-Capital expenditure to bring 1984's projected total to £1,064 million. Such amounts distract attention from the facts that this represents a decline in real terms and the "increase" presupposes that the existing level of expenditure is adequate. Further, the Health Services cannot be compared to an office or factory situation where staff or machinery are bought and sold as finances permit; during a recession the demand for these services does not fall — if anything it rises.

Bearing in mind that the Joint Programmes pledged itself to "existing level and quality of health care", these are some results of expenditure cuts:

*Last June a charge of £10 was introduced in the general hospitals of the North-West for attendance at any Accident and Emergency Dept. The Joint Programme states: "the £5 outpatient charge recently introduced will be abolished".

*Lack of funds have delayed the orthopaedic unit, already promised by this Minister, for St. Vincent's Hospital, Athlone.

*Many appointments of consultants have been blocked — most graphic is in the case of scoliosis outlined below.

As recently as last May, the Irish division of the Royal College of Psychiatrists warned the Minister that cut-backs would reduce patient care considerably. They expressed a willingness to implement genuine economies but warned of further damage to an already rundown system.

*Cork Regional Hospital have closed a 35 bed surgical ward for a period of one month, while Our Lady's Hospital, Crumlin (not to be outdone) have closed two wards for two months. Galway Regional has also closed down a ward, while the Mater, Dublin, has been forced to close two.

In addition to violating the Joint Programme, these actions also run contrary to Motions 79, 80 and 81, all carried at Conference. Furthermore, given the restricted budgets of the hospitals, it is reasonable to suppose that the last few months of this year will become a real "Winter of Discontent" for the health services.

Scoliosis

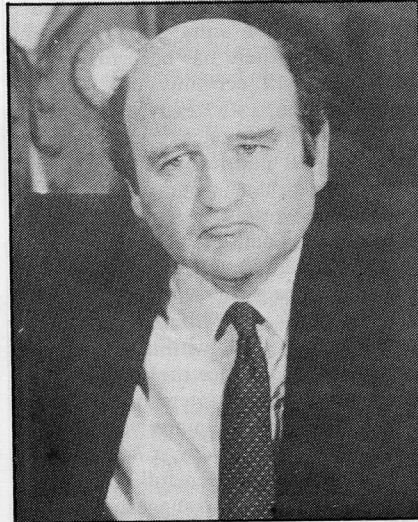
Another broken promise of the Joint Programme is the commitment, already quoted, to the child. Scoliosis is a disease involving a lateral, or sideways, deformity of the spine; it is progressive in that the convexity develops and becomes more and more marked towards the weaker side. The growth of the scoliotic curve is directly dependent on the velocity of spinal growth, and as such, progress of the condition is well marked in children. In cases of adolescent idiopathic scoliosis, failure to halt the deformity may result in permanent deformity of the "hunch-back" kind, and other related disorders such as breathlessness or angina. Our Lady's Hospital, Crumlin, has perfected the surgical correction procedure necessary for this type of scoliosis, and at time of writing one consultant is attempting to reduce an 18 month waiting-list of affected children. The hospital intended to appoint a second specialist who had undergone the required training abroad. Minister Desmond blocked this appointment and in so doing has, at the very least inflicted unnecessary anxiety on a large number of children and their parents.

The Other Drugs Problem

Also contained in the information sent by Mr. Desmond to all Conference delegates was an outline of the Federation of Irish Chemicals Industry

Agreement. It underlined, quite rightly, the intention of seeking cuts in drug company profits rather than in services, and gave an estimated saving of £12 million. No details were given about the actual agreement, but it was subsequently admitted that it included a 7½-15% mark-up on all drugs as sold to the British NHS, and these prices *already* include a high profit margin. A second provision of the agreement was the agreed opposition to "parallel" imports; these are the cheap importation of drugs to one country which have been supplied to another country at a fixed price. It is this provision which, according to one drugs importer interviewed on RTE, prevents him from giving good value to the Irish people.

Such laxity on the part of the Minister was uncovered in a Sunday Tribune headline of 22nd July: "Millions Squandered on State Drugs Bill". Although the article did not contain any statistics or estimates, a "Today Tonight" on the following Thursday confirmed the 7½-15% mark-up, and postulated that an



Barry Desmond.

average saving of 25% could be made on the country's most widely-used drugs, but for this agreement. It is impossible not to be emotive in the presentation of this deal: every pound in extra profit for these companies is a pound lost to a continually run down health service.

Colin McStay

The publication of an advertisement about the funding of Colin McStay's medical expenses, on the 31st of July, represents a gross abuse of Public Office. It is outrageous that a Government Minister can use Exchequer funds in such a personal face-saving exercise. In any event, the Minister's disclaimer had already been widely publicised — not least in a front-page article in the Irish Times of the 4th July.

The implication in such statements is that the Department had given an undertaking to fund all expenses and that it was not "so denuded that we need a collection box". This is simply not true: the McStays were only guaranteed funding *after* they had incurred any costs, and at that the Minister was only "prepared to make good any *shortfall*"¹. It is disgraceful that a family should have to undergo a highly publicised campaign to save the life of one of its children and then be publically dressed down for so doing. If the fund-raising was unnecessary, are we to believe that the McStays launched the campaign just for the hell of it?

Family Planning Services

On the ever pressing social issue of contraception etc., the Joint Programme told us that: "there will be a review of the present family planning legislation with a view to providing full family planning advice and facilities in all cases where needed". Whatever your perception of the Minister's personal commitment in this area, leaked stories about Cabinet disagreement or the opening of an "illegal" clinic in his own constituency, hardly constitute any progress in this area.

Given that in Opposition the Parliamentary Labour Party adopted a detailed resistance to Haughey's Family Planning Bill, it is unacceptable that after over twenty months in office not one word, in the form of a Bill or even a policy statement, has been published.

Conclusion

The Joint Programme was rejected by significant sections of the Party as a submission to Fine Gael strategy, but I hope I have shown that even this has been sold short. Yet again we must question whether the Labour Leadership pay any attention to policies and directives of Party Conferences.

One could point to examples from the past when administrations disappointed expectation, lasting achievements were effected in the area of health care. One can look to the Cuban experience or the work of great individual socialist like Nye Bevan and Noel Browne. Yet in terms of alienation caused and controversy provoked, the Department of Health has matched the reactionary standards set by the government generally. No silver linings are to be found here. We must seriously question whether the efforts of Barry Desmond distinguish him from a Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael minister.

If ultimately however the Cabinet as a whole is to be blamed for reactionary policies in the various departments, then it is immaterial which portfolios Labour Ministers actually hold.

¹Italics mine P.B.

Realignment on the Left

There are three trends of opinion in the British Labour Party; the right, the hard left and the broad left. *Nigel Stanley* explains the differences on the left.

One year ago pundits were seriously discussing the end of the British Labour Party as anything other than a party of protest. And for once, this reflected something more than the patterns of ownership of the British media. Having just emerged from a general election where Labour only just maintained its position as the second party in its worst ever electoral performance many party activists wondered secretly, and in some cases not so secretly, whether the pundits might be right.

To form a majority Labour government, our pocket calculators told us, would require a swing of over 11% at the next general election — greater than any party has achieved since the war. When compared with graphs confirming that Labour's vote had declined in every election since 1951, bar a slight rise in 1966, concern turned to depression. And when Mrs. Thatcher's remarkable success in holding on to almost all her 1979 votes despite the massive rise in unemployment, the growth of poverty and her failure to cut taxes as she had promised was taken into account depression very easily turned into despair.

But one year later politics, at least superficially, has been transformed. Labour is actually leading the Tories in the polls. A new leadership is presiding over a party which has managed to maintain a degree of unity and common purpose unthinkable during the civil war after the 1979 election. Local government elections in May saw a healthy swing to Labour giving us control of Edinburgh for the first time ever and in the South, where Labour had done particularly badly, Southampton was regained after many years.

The European elections in June were also good news. Not only did Labour finish a mere 4 points behind the Tories, capturing many seats in the process, but also, and perhaps more significantly beat the Alliance for second place in vast tracts of the country where Labour had been written off very recently.

The Labour Party has maintained a real momentum over the last year. It finds itself in a situation now far more favourable than most party members would have predicted a year ago. Indeed perhaps the biggest danger facing the party is complacency. If activists start to think power is inevitable all the bad habits of inner party strife could break out all over again. But it must be said, that at the moment there is still a real evident desire for unity and a greater tolerance than there has been for many years. This will certainly continue if Labour maintains its steady progress.

This state of affairs makes discussion of the internal politics of the party far more difficult than in periods of trench warfare such as we saw between the last two elections. Factions and currents are less important and less easy to define, but it would be wrong not to think that there are still very real differences about strategy and politics within the Party. Indeed the period since the election has seen some of the most interesting debates on the British left for many years. *New Socialist*, *Marxism Today*, *Chartist* and other journals have been full of articles analysing the defeat and suggesting ways forward. The debate has been sharp at times, but rarely bitter. Unlike after 1979, people have taken each other seriously without doubting motives.

Underneath the surface of this unity, and spurred on by a high level of intellectual debate, fundamental realignments are taking place in the Party. They have yet to be tested in any way other than in the leadership and deputy leadership contest at last year's conference and it is difficult to judge how deep these new alignments run. They are still certainly in the process of formation, and it is difficult to place every individual within the new categories, and not just because they are blurred and merge at the edges.

Having made these qualifications, and continuing to add others, it is now possible to describe three broad currents within the Labour Party: The right, and

hard left and the rest of the left. This latter group is the largest and the most influential at present, but it is the most difficult to name as it is the least cohesive and could well be subdivided further in various ways. Some call it the soft left, some call it the broad left, others the inside left. None of these is particularly satisfactory and resisting the temptation as an adherent to call it the sensible left or strategic left I shall call it the broad left, adopting the same terminology as Jon Bloomfield in a perceptive *Marxism Today* article (April '84).

The right are beginning to regain their confidence within the Party and regroup. The defection of the "hard right" to the SDP and the general intellectual malaise to be found on Labour's right after the death of Crosland has led them to be quiet in recent years. However they are beginning to re-assert themselves in various ways. First, Roy Hattersley obtained a majority of the constituency votes for Deputy Leader and secondly the SDP's lurches to the right have given them the political space to operate within which at one time looked squeezed. To be fair there has been also been significant political movement on their part. Certainly they have lost the naive Atlanticism and Europeanism that have helped define their politics in the past. Ronald Reagan's election and the events within Central America have helped them break from total loyalty to US foreign policy. They now accept that a Labour Britain will get rid of the bomb and indeed it was Roy Hattersley who recently moved Labour's National Executive adoption of the unilateralist approach to Polaris, in return for the Party stressing membership of NATO and accepting that conventional defence expenditure could not be cut by a government moving from nuclear to non-nuclear defence.

The Common Market, as it leaps from crisis to crisis, from milk quota row to budget row, has hardly been a source of idealism recently either and with many on the left far less interested in

withdrawal, unity around withdrawal as an option was maintained throughout the Euro elections from some on the hard left.

But the right have exerted themselves on some issues. In particular they tried to bounce the leadership into making compulsory changes in the ways in which constituency parties choose their candidates in order to make it less likely that they will dump sitting MPs. But in this they have not succeeded and instead a compromise package, discussed below, will be put to conference. But as the past year has not been one of policy debate with the exception of the defence document there has been little division within the Party or in Parliament in which the right have been the prime instigators other than reselection.

This has not been the case however in the trade unions. Here the hard right that might have considered joining the SDP if they were not working in a union context have had nowhere to go. People like Frank Chapple of the Electricians Union are still advocating crude anti-left politics. More significant than Chapple though has been the rise and fall of the 'New Realism'. This is a philosophy associated particularly with unions not affiliated to the Labour Party and has found its leading exponent in Alistair Graham of the junior civil servant's union, the CPSA. The basic argument of the 'New Realism' is that the Unions should distance themselves from party politics, take cognisance of the declining number of union members who vote Labour and come to terms with the government of the day, whatever its colour.

Some of the measures and ideas associated with 'New Realism' are not entirely negative, especially when counterposed against some sections of the Left who have failed to come to terms with changes

in employment patterns and changing work processes. However, in as much as it represents a retreat from political trade unionism it is clearly weakening. The point, as someone once nearly said, is not only to understand the new realities, but to change them.

However, 'New Realism' has failed as a strategy. To some extent this has been due to the Labour Party's recovery. When Labour looked finished it was perhaps sensible to deal with anyone and everyone but this has now changed. The Tories also needed to play ball and be seen to recognize the changes. Instead the change coincided with the introduction of yet another round of anti-trade union legislation. Its use against the print union, the NGA, threw the unions into disarray. Although the right narrowly won the final vote in the TUC it was not sufficient to decisively defeat the left. And when a few weeks later the government introduced its GCHQ union ban, hitting Graham's members among others, it became clear that there could be no accommodation with this government. Len Murray's early retirement closely followed and at congress he is likely to be replaced by Norman Willis, his current deputy, close ally of Neil Kinnock and the left's candidate.

Changes on the left in the Party have been subtle, but a real division between the hard left and broad left has developed, though admittedly with a blurring at the edges and differences within each bloc. The essential difference between the two blocs however was the analysis of the election result.

The hard left failed to see the real depth of defeat the party suffered and the success of the Conservative Party in shifting attitudes in society to the right. Tony Benn who in many ways is most representative of this trend in the Party

saw Labour's vote as "a remarkable development by any standards" as it had won "such a large vote" when "for the first time since 1945" it had been arguing "an open socialist policy". Eric Heffer has argued that the election defeat was merely a failure to campaign hard enough. More work, less sell outs by the right wing and real socialist policies will do the trick.

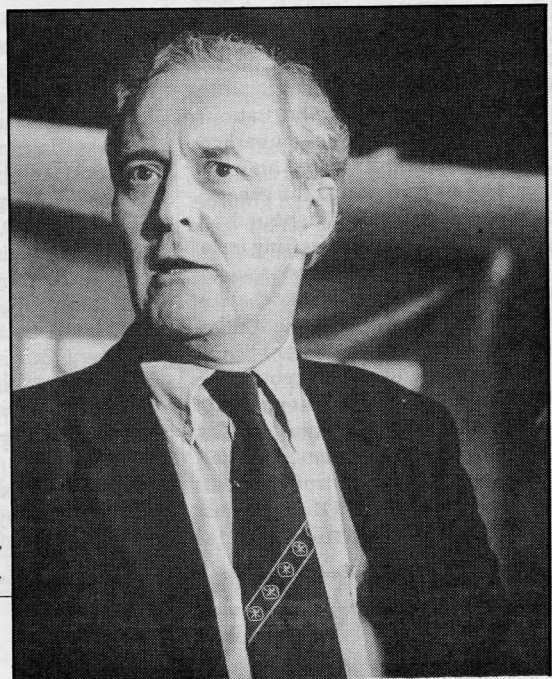
In particular the hard left deny the existence of "Thatcherism" as a particular shift in ideology for the Conservative Party. They refuse to concede that "common sense" political ideas have moved sharply to the right in the wake of the break up of the post-war consensus. Those that argue this, perhaps its clearest advocate has been Sutart Hall in *Marxism Today*, are accused by Benn of pessimism. The job of leaders is to inspire and build confidence.

The hard left is represented in Parliament by some, but by no means all members of the Campaign Group of MPs, by the *Tribune* newspaper and is generally supported by the various Trotskyist groups in the Labour Party such as *Militant*, *Socialist Action*, *Socialist Organiser* and the quasi-Trotskyists of *London Labour Briefing*. But much of its support comes from an emotional left that belies fearless advocacy of the pure socialist creed is the way to win support. It has certainly inherited the mantle of oppositionalism that has so beset the British Labour left.

The Broad Left represents the coming together of two trends that existed in the Party before the general election. These were the mainly parliamentary left who had refused to back Tony Benn in the Deputy Leadership election but had on the whole supported most of the democratic changes after 1979 and those who had backed Benn in 1981, supported



Roy
Hattersley.



Tony
Benn.

Andrew Wyard (Report)

Laurie Sparham (Report)



Organs of the fundamentalist left.

the democratic changes and left policy developments but who emerged from the 1983 election campaign with a more sober analysis of what went wrong than the hard left. Typical of this first group would be Neil Kinnock and of the second would be the Labour Co-ordinating Committee.

The first test of this new alliance was the leadership election. As is now well known the hard left candidate, Eric Heffer, did miserably and Neil Kinnock triumphed. This was not only true in the electoral college overall but also in the constituencies. But although this alliance came together successfully for that particular electoral test it is probably more united in its analysis than its prescription. There is therefore something of a question mark hanging over its cohesiveness as a bloc, especially as the new leadership's honeymoon comes to an end.

But it is within this group that the interesting developments in the Party are going on. The hard left are on the defensiveness and the right, though stronger, are still not making a sustained input into party debate. For example the Labour Co-ordinating Committee has embarked on a "long term aims project." This grew out of part of its analysis of the general election that stressed that Labour had never really sorted out what its long term vision of a democratic socialist society would be like. The hard left immediately characterized this as interfering with the ark of the socialist covenant and rewriting the constitution, thereby confirming for many observers their inability ever to develop strategy and their ability to turn anything to immediate tactical advantage. But a real problem exists in the socialist project when there seems no consensus about where it is meant to

lead. Inviting the electorate onto a mystery tour when the only "actually existing socialist" model could lead to the Gulag being the next stop, is hardly going to work.

Another difference in attitude between the three trends in the party is illustrated very well in approaches to the ballots on whether unions should maintain a political fund that the latest round of Tory anti trade union legislation forces unions to carry out by March 1986. The right's approach is very cautious. They wish to fight the ballots in a very specific way in each union making the particular arguments why that union needs a political voice. This involves playing down the Labour Party link and fighting an essentially defensive campaign to defend the status quo.

On the other hand sections of the hard left are advocating that the unions should boycott the ballots. This approach is derived from the principle that unions should not accept state interference, which has generally been applied to the more industrial parts of Tory legislation. However it is hard to see how this constitutes practical politics. First, if the unions do not have the ballots their political funds cease to exist and the Labour Party goes bankrupt. Secondly it will play into the hands of those wishing to portray the unions as anti democratic. It will look less like a principled stand and more like running away from the ballot box because you might lose.

The LCC is advocating a different approach. It has argued that the ballots should actually be used as an opportunity to win the argument for political trade unionism and Labour Party links. The one-sided nature of Tory attacks on Labour Party funding should be emphasised in the campaign as another

piece of evidence of Tory authoritarianism.

Clear lines will be more difficult to draw at the big conference debate this year which will be on reselection. The hard left's opposition to changes of any kind in the selection and reselection processes is primarily based on a fear that it will be beneficial to the right, though of course the argument is based on preserving the federal nature of the party at local level and bad timing.

The right would have wanted compulsory one member one vote ballots but have settled for the optional proposal as the best they are likely to get. The trade unions believe that they are more likely to get sponsored MPs if initial selections are confined to management committees with union delegates but as the options are only available to seats with sitting MPs, they are prepared to go along with them.

The broad left finds itself in severe difficulties. Generally supportive of Neil Kinnock who has adopted something of a back me or sack me attitude on the proposals and in the face of a media onslaught they have found it difficult to articulate their criticisms of the proposals. These objections are by no means coherent and indeed some do support the proposal. Most do not object to extending the franchise to all paid up party members. Some have argued that the timing is wrong and that the debate has opened up wounds in the Party best left to heal. But the commonest objection is that the particular proposals on offer are confused and difficult to implement, allow postal ballots rather than collective decision making and cannot be based on principle if they only apply to sitting MPs. Unfortunately these objections are too sophisticated to really get aired at conference and so conference will be polarised on this issue between the right and the hard left who will be taking the lead in outright support or opposition. Whilst Neil Kinnock is deeply committed to the proposals it is unfortunate that the group which he relies on for his support within the party will be marginalised in the most important debate at conference.

However, apart from this issue, conference this year will be relatively quiet. Most people there will be pleased with the impetus the party has gathered in the last year and will not want to rock the boat. Power struggles of the kind resolved by votes at conference are unlikely to feature. Instead it is at the fringe meetings and bars where the ideas are debated that will see where the party is heading over the next few years. Much is up for grabs.

Nigel Stanley works for Robin Cook M.P. He was formerly organizing secretary of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee.

LABOUR AND IRELAND

BOB PURDIE argues that important lessons can be drawn from a study of the Labour Government's handling of Northern Ireland in the late 1940's.

Roy Johnstone in *Labour Left 3* wrote about his hopes of achieving a European socialist initiative on the North through a 'push from Britain', in which Ken Livingstone and the British Labour Party would play a crucial role. I share Roy's aspirations for a united and independent Ireland, but it seems to me that an approach through Europe, or any other strategy which seeks to skip over the obstacle of the refusal of the majority in the North to accept such a settlement, will achieve little. The elements of a solution simply do not exist within Northern Ireland at present. Until such times as they do, no approach through outside agencies is going to be successful.

That doesn't mean that such an approach may not be helpful at some future date and, in anticipation of that, it is useful to consider how such outside agencies might be used. But can the British Labour Party simply be used as a conduit through which Irish socialists and supporters of peaceful reunification might exert influence? Such a strategy has in fact been tried before, and had quite different results from those anticipated. A case study of British Labour and the Irish question in the late Forties might throw some light on the problems which are likely to recur. I propose to look briefly at three issues; the 1945 Labour Government and Ireland, the British LP and the NILP, and the LP's reaction to the anti-partitionist candidates in the 1949 British general election.

Unionist veto

In Northern Ireland the new Labour Government of 1945, was greeted with concern on the part of Unionists and with delight by Nationalists. The link between the Unionists and the British Conservatives and Labour's traditional sympathy for Irish nationalist aspirations would, it was assumed, lead to a confrontation between the Westminster and Stormont Governments. But instead relations were good, and in 1949 the Labour Government, in response to the declaration of a Republic by Dublin, guaranteed Northern Ireland's status

within the UK for as long as the Stormont Parliament wished to maintain it.

Nationalists reacted with outrage, especially since Westminster had declined to act on abuses of democracy by the Unionists. But they were oblivious to the two considerations which were paramount for the Labour administration. First of all, the Government was caught up in a web of legal norms and diplomatic conventions which determined the status of the Stormont Government *vis a vis* the British Government. Pressure from anti-partitionists and their sympathisers within the Parliamentary Labour Party, met with a firm refusal by the Cabinet to intervene on matters which had been devolved to Stormont. The Unionists were given the same treatment as that extended to Dominion governments, although their degree of autonomy was technically much less. So long as Stormont stayed within its legally-defined powers, the ultra-legalistic Labour Government would not disturb it. Secondly Labour's ideology placed great emphasis on economic matters and social conditions. If the Unionists had held out against the Welfare State there might well have been a clash, but their adoption of a 'step-by-step' approach in this field ensured good relations with Labour.

These two factors helped to ensure that Northern Ireland ranked quite low in the Government's list of priorities. This, together with the structure of the government machine, prevented any serious attention being paid to the internal regime in the Six Counties. Anti-partitionists, traditionally, have assumed that British governments are engrossed with the problem of how to keep a grip on the North. In fact partition has always been a device for disentangling the Irish question from British politics. Northern Ireland was consigned to the level of policy making which rarely surfaces in Cabinet discussions. Government at Westminster takes the form of an elaborate hierarchy of committees which process policies and decisions for the Cabinet, ('pre-cook' them, is how Richard Crossman described it). Apart

from a very small number of crucial issues, Government policy will largely be decided by civil servants. It requires a very great amount of effort to overcome the inertia of the Whitehall machine. The 1945 Labour Government was confronted with so many other major problems that the likelihood of any radical departure on Irish policy was slim indeed. Anti-partitionists made the fundamental mistake of failing to distinguish between the Labour *Party* and the Labour *Government*, and assumed that there would be a straight line between Party policy and Government action.

NEC

The NEC of the Labour Party did take a more anti-Unionist line than the Government. It made concerned noises about restrictions on the franchise and the less favourable trade union legislation in the North. But it was too bogged down by organisational problems to exert any effective pressure or undertake fresh thinking. This was evident in the relations with the NILP. In 1948, proposals were put forward within the NILP for it to become a regional organisation of the British party. It was widely assumed by nationalists that this was a result of pressure from British Labour, an impression strengthened in 1949 by the appointment of a full-time organiser by Transport House to assist the NILP.

In fact the NEC had adopted a very cautious attitude to the proposal, and did nothing to encourage it. When it became clear that a majority in the NILP did not want a merger there was evident relief in Transport House. The appointment of a party agent arose out of discussions on the merger. The NEC hoped that, with a revamped organisation, the NILP might cash in on the popularity of the Labour Government and win a couple of the Westminster seats in the North. This would help to offset the advantage to the Tories of the Unionist votes in the Commons. On only one point did the NEC make its political views clear. It

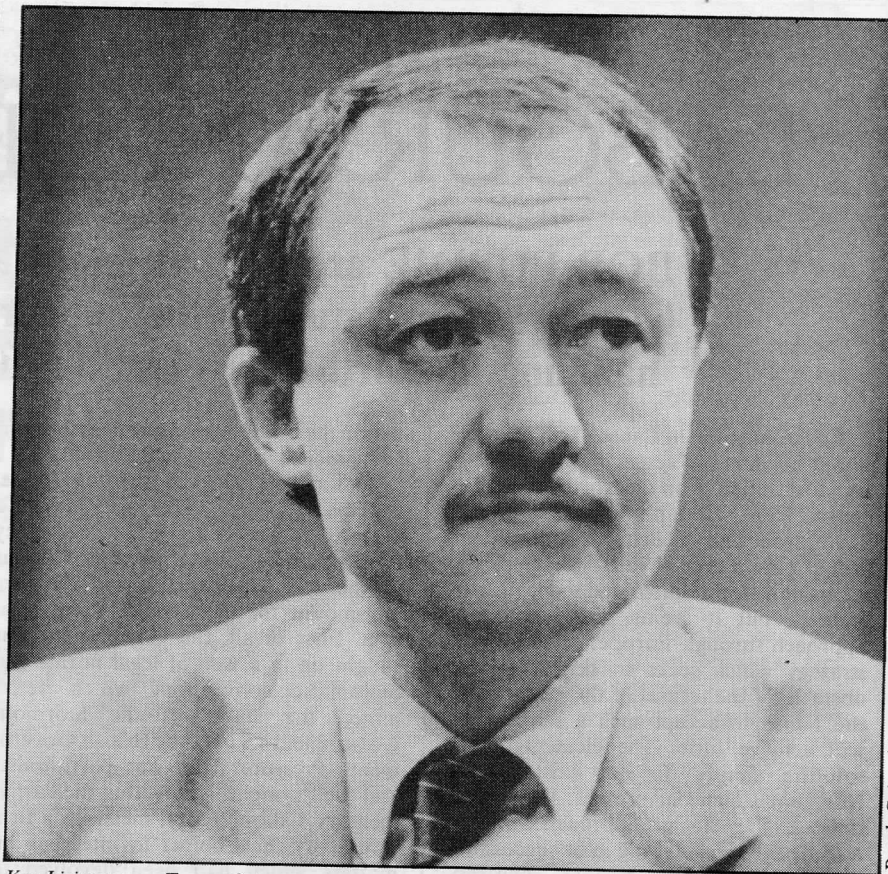
advised the NILP *against* adopting a definite line of support for partition. This advice was ignored but no conditions were put on the aid given, and the agent appointed to Belfast was instructed not to become involved in the internal political disputes of the party. The tendency of the British LP to avoid involvement in Irish politics was as strong at the level of the NEC as in the Government.

One reaction of anti-partitionists to Labour's 'betrayal' in 1949 was to seek to 'punish' the party by mobilising the Irish vote against it. The strategy was a disastrous failure on two counts. First, Labour was quite unaware of any threat to its vote from this quarter and secondly the anti-partitionists were, in fact, incapable of disposing of the Irish vote in this way. None of the four anti-partition candidates in the 1949 general election came within a mile of denting the majority of their Labour opponent, and in the two seats in which the Communist Party also stood it polled more votes than they did, (in a particularly chilly period of the Cold War). But in any case, so far as the Labour Party was concerned, Irish workers in Britain were simply workers, who would vote Labour for reasons of class solidarity and personal interest. An assumption which was amply vindicated.

The NEC was aware of the possibility of losing votes as a result of the activities of Catholic pressure groups, but bracketed this threat with that of the British Legion. The only special group of workers whose voting behaviour was discussed was not the Irish but 'black-coated' workers living in seaside resorts! During the campaign Alice Cullen in Glasgow, Gorbals, did make conciliatory statements, to Irish nationalists but romped home with almost 11,000 votes compared with just over 1,900 for the anti-partitionist, so had nothing to worry about. Bessy Braddock in the Scotland division of Liverpool, however, refused to have any truck with Irish lobbyists, whom she considered were seeking to split the working class. The Irish pin pricks simply failed to penetrate Labour's thick hide.

Blinkered

A lot has changed both in the Labour Party and in Ireland since the late Forties. Ireland now has a much higher priority for British political parties in general, including Labour, and there is no longer a devolved legislature at Stormont. It would be foolish, therefore, to suggest that the above provides a blueprint for Labour's response to Irish pressures in the future. But I would suggest that it does provide three important considerations which have to be taken into account.



Ken Livingstone - Troops Out supporter.

First, it is necessary to distinguish between the Labour Party and a Labour Government. There will be a constant tendency for the latter's policy on Ireland to be pulled towards the Whitehall view and away from the Labour Conference's view. Despite the increased importance of Ireland, it is still only one problem amongst many to be tackled by a future Labour Government. It is at present impossible to predict how it will rank amongst such problems, and therefore the degree to which there will be a radical departure from Whitehall policy.

Secondly, Labour's perception of the Irish problem is strongly influenced by the party's ideology which, traditionally, tends to give a very low priority to the concerns closest to the hearts of nationalists and to interpret national and ethnic conflicts in social and economic terms. Faced with problems which challenge the party's view of the world, Labour tends to become engrossed with routine and organisation. One important difference between the Forties and today, however, is the influence of the Troops Out lobby within the British Labour Party. They have challenged the party's tendency to see Ireland through British-tinted spectacles, but the alternative they offer is just as unrealistic and their view of Irish realities is equally blinkered.

Much as I admire Ken Livingstone's fight against the Thatcher Government

over the GLC, I find it difficult to recognise, in his perception of Northern Ireland, the place in which I live. The problem with the Left in the British Labour Party today is that patient investigation and serious thought are at a discount and politics is seen as little more than frenetic action. On neither the left nor the right of the party do I see any motivation to undertake the kind of detailed study and analysis which might contribute to a solution of the problem of Northern Ireland.

However, my third point is that, despite the above reservations, British Labour has been influenced in its Irish policies by the labour and socialist movement in Ireland. The division and incoherence of the Irish left on the North has contributed to British Labour's confusion. Nevertheless I have found a much greater willingness to discuss the problem seriously on the Irish than on the British left. This strengthens my conviction that socialists in Ireland would do better to concentrate on discussing and clarifying our own ideas than on seeking a quick and easy solution outside the island. If **Labour Left** can provide a forum for such a debate, it will be making a valuable contribution.

Bob Purdie is Secretary of the Belfast branch of the Irish Labour History Society.

Review

Two major speeches by leading anti-coalitionists which were widely distributed in printed form are critically examined.

THE PROJECT OF SOCIALISM By Michael D. Higgins

That Michael D. Higgins ends his address with a 'great expression of optimism' from Brecht is entirely appropriate. It has always been one of his special talents to lift the Labour Party above considerations of immediate practicality and towards the socialist aims for which the party was founded. Here he emphasises three of these aims. First, the establishment of a new economy to serve the aims of equality and freedom, that would recognise the nature of work as human activity. Secondly, the building of a participatory society in conscious replacement of authoritarianism, a society in which men and women have a right to participate equally. Thirdly, the achievement of a culture that allows for the fullest development of personality for all. Since we belong to a party in which 'socialism' is widely assumed to be no more than an interest in things social — such as the administration of social welfare, the alleged social role of the banks, the proliferation of social workers — a party in which 'Labour' means a ministerial post — we need to be reminded of the real beliefs, values, and aims of socialism.

But 'The Project of Socialism' is not primarily an outline of socialist principles. Its core is an attempt to apply these principles to four immediate issues — unemployment, poverty, discrimination against women, and social reform. Michael D. is right to insist that any socialist party has a duty now to be putting forward its answers to its country's problems, in enough detail to give people a clear idea of what a socialist government would offer. But in attempting to do so, a wider issue is also raised. For if the difference between left and right in the Labour Party extends any further than the overt question of coalition, it ought to be reflected in such programme-building. The left ought to have a different conception of what the party should be aiming for, and of the

conditions for attaining these aims. And one would expect Michael D. to be the natural spokesperson for this position. In this respect, 'The Project of Socialism' is perhaps not so clear as it ought to be.

Michael D.'s most general formulation of his stance is sound enough, but dangerously vague: 'that inequality, oppression, and human misery are human creations, arising from the abuse of power and of resources, and that they can be eliminated only by the winning and proper use of power to redistribute resources for the benefit of all. Dangerously vague, because the nature and extent of that power and of the proposed redistribution are crucial. Current Labour Party ministers, for instance, consider that they have the power to achieve some important redistributions. Michael D. surely has something else in mind, but is it really all that different from the piecemeal, social democratic strategy characteristic of the party's right?

What Michael D. seems to be in search of are the policies which a majority socialist government would pursue. Such a government would not face the opposition of a Fine Gael senior 'partner', but it would have to cope with right-wing forces both within Irish society and internationally. Unless we are to fall prey to the belief that these constraints by themselves impose a reformist approach which would amount to little more than the coalition strategy on a larger scale, we need both a clear statement of more radical policies, and a clear idea of how they could be implemented. Unfortunately, Michael D.'s policy recommendations are on the whole pretty vague, and the obstacles to their achievement largely unexamined. For instance, in the area of unemployment, he calls for 'performance', for an 'expanded' educational system with 'easier' access, for a "properly structured" food industry, and for a 'response' to key research reports. Interestingly, his recommendation for us to

emulate the progress made by 'socialist countries' is ambiguous. Does he mean the planned economies of Eastern Europe, China, etc? That would imply revolutionary change in this country. Or is he referring to those western countries with socialist governments? Their attempts to manage and reform capitalist economies raise burning questions about the road to socialism, which demand sustained, critical analysis.

On poverty, Michael D. is right to remind us the scale of the crisis. But again the socialist response is left vaguely stated, as 'having a social policy'. Since, as he emphasises, both unemployment and poverty result from capitalist structures, even immediate, transitional policies would seem to have to take on the task of beginning to dismantle these structures, and not simply to rearrange state subsidies. In the area of feminism, Michael D.'s only concrete policy suggestion, 'a solemn declaration of equality principle that might later indeed be constitutionally affirmed', is, one hopes, only a fragment of a full feminist programme. But what the further elements of this programme ought to be, and how it can be pursued in what, as we saw again last year, can only be honestly described as a Catholic country, have yet to be answered. If the situation seems better in connection with the assortment of issues Michael D. lists under 'social reform' — 'divorce, family planning, children and the law, minority rights, provision for travellers' — this is only because these demands are so modest: within the reach, even, of the present coalition. When we remember that this area must also include education, the legal and penal system, environmental and housing rights, and of course genuine religious toleration, we can begin to see just how much Michael D. has here left off the agenda, as well as the size of the barriers it will be necessary to cross.

If the Labour Party left is to be constituted by more than an approach to electioneering, then it has to explain both the error of a social-democratic political strategy and the feasibility of pursuing a more radical direction. As a speech at a party conference, 'The Project of Socialism' can hardly be expected to accomplish very much. But what it has done is to emphasise the importance of a practical, theoretical, and political task which we have only barely begun.

JOHN BAKER

REVIEW

continued

'THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SOCIALISM'

by Brendan Halligan

The argument is as simple as it is concise: retreating from an independent position Labour's support has been halved in little over a decade, the world recession compounded by an upward population growth will ensure that the present Coalition will preside over radical cutbacks and further unemployment which in turn will aggravate Labour's downward spiral; the contradiction between rhetoric and performance will make policy making irrelevant and, so, redundant. Summary: Labour is no longer a radical alternative — its an indispensable component of the status quo.

Brendan Halligan's analysis, 'The Achievement of Socialism' is based on a speech to a Dublin Regional Council symposium in June 1983 and represents the first clear delineation of an anti-coalitionist model for the Labour Party. However, given that there would be little argument among socialists that coalitionism has been the primary reason for Labour's decline, Brendan devotes most of his time charting a way out of the morass, back on the road to achieving socialism.

He places importance on the manner of withdrawal from Coalition, rejecting the possibility of a parliamentary withdrawal and warning of the dangers of a Government defeat in the Dail whereby Labour would be forced to defend the Coalition record. The withdrawal must come through either an Annual Conference or a Special Conference summoned by the Administrative Council. This objective could not be clearer and it lays the foundation for his remaining strategy. Clear it is, but as it is intertwined with other problems, the Left should understand it within context so as not to underestimate the difficulties involved.

The Labour Party manifests its undemocratic structures at a formal and an informal level. In the first place, the Administrative Council is unrepresent-

ative of the Party at large. Eight out of 36 seats (over 20%) are apportioned to the PLP while less than half are directly elected by the Conference. On top of this, the Conference, itself, does not practice one person — one vote. Rural branches may have the same number of delegates as an urban branch but only half the membership. The effect of this artificial weighting towards rural constituencies is evident considering they tend to be more coalitionist.

However, its at the informal leve that pretentions to party democracy are found out. The Kerry busloads and inflated membership in coalitionist constituencies are not mere myth. Membership in the party is determined at the branch level and with rural branches needing only 5 members to be constituted, with membership fees set ridiculously low, the scope for abuse is great and the ability to monitor limited. One indicator of this is that A.C. candidates from Kerry North and South, Meath and Tipperary North received nearly 30% of the total Conference vote while these same constituencies managed to submit only 2 resolutions between them. To secure withdrawal and make the party safe for non-coalitionism, the Left will have to pursue democratic and organisational reforms as well.

Brendan next attempts to construct a post coalition strategy, arguing for radical policies ground in Ireland's own unique historical development as well as a determined non-coalitionism to force the conservative parties into a single electoral force. Ironically, its this emphasis on policy formulation that has contributed to Labour's debilitation. The Party's conservative ethos has several historical reasons but a recurrent problem that all democratic socialist parties face is that of policy making, which by its very nature is a hierarchial endeavour. It can be an alienating process within the party. The contradiction of rhetoric and performance is not an Irish socialist phenomenon

(e.g. the Wilson-Callaghan betrayal of British socialism). While it is refreshing to note Halligan's unapologetic defence of the public sector with the emergence of a broad alliance with progressive tendencies, any such policies will have to grow organically from the oppression of working men and women. The Labour Party must provide that space where socialists, trade unionists, and progressives generally can meet, organise their own responses and confront capitalism at whatever level they are challenged at the various levels — not only in Parliament, but on the shopfloor, the communities, the family, the schools, etc. (which makes the Party's links with the trade union movement all the more necessary). It is not policy making per se, but the politicization of the Party, the Labour Movement and, through active engagement, society as a whole that presents the greatest opportunity for the achievement of socialism.

Admittedly, Brendan is not attempting such a synthesis. He is posing Labour as an independent force (whereby a temporary alliance of convenience with Fianna Fail is no more odious than with Fine Gael). The theoretical and practical work of reconstructing Labour's historical purpose is a collective exercise in which Brendan has established the bottom line. And that work will include harsh questions for the Left: is reconciliation possible with elements who graft the word socialist on to opportunism? Is the PLP as presently constituted capable of projecting a socialist vision? Is the organisation — from Head Office to the branches — able to confront the growing alienation from traditional parliamentary politics? Between Coalition and socialism may well lie a wasteland as any progressive advance. 'The Achievement of Socialism' has offered not so much a direction as a reference. The work only begins from there.

MICHAEL TAFT.

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LABOUR LEFT

Labour Left was launched in 1983 by members of the Labour Party who wished to restore and maintain Labour's role as an independent socialist party working within the Party's democratic structures. Until then no other group was seeking to mobilise the broad rank and file around this position.

In the May Day Manifesto we pointed to the growing crisis of the party, a crisis marked by serious decline in popular support, the growing demoralisation (and in some cases defection) of party members and moves within the Trade Unions to disaffiliate. Coalition with Fine Gael, a conservative party, was identified as the fundamental cause of this process.

This situation meant that Labour's long-term existence was in doubt. The Labour Party was no longer perceived as in any sense radical; it had ceased to be a focus for socialist criticism of the existing social and economic order. This was all the more tragic given the worsening crisis of capitalism in Ireland. Nothing has changed since which would force Labour Left to change its analysis.

Labour Left believes that the party should withdraw from Coalition. This arrangement with Fine Gael does nothing for the Labour Party nor does it serve the interests of those classes or groups which should be our natural constituency. Our objective is to win at future conferences a majority in favour of electoral and parliamentary independence.

Labour Left also advocates the following:

- the building of a campaigning party committed to socialist policies
- the strengthening of the party's traditional links with the Trade Union movement
- the building of a democratic and broadly-based socialist youth section
- democratic reform of the party's structures
- opposition to expulsion of party members.

Labour Left supporters comply with the Party's Constitution and are committed to working for the socialist aims of the Party Programme passed at the 1980 Annual Conference.

Despite the party's decline over the last decade there is no convincing evidence that a mass socialist party can be built outside the Labour Movement. We appeal to all socialists to join with us in the fight for an independent Labour Party.

SUBSCRIBE!

Labour Left is produced by members of the Labour Party who have become a democratic collective. Membership of the cooperative is open to all members of the Labour Party who support an independent and socialist Party. Becoming a shareholder in the cooperative entitles you to attend and vote at all meetings of the cooperative which decide the policy and development of Labour Left publications and to elect the Management Committee at the Annual General Meetings.

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WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON?

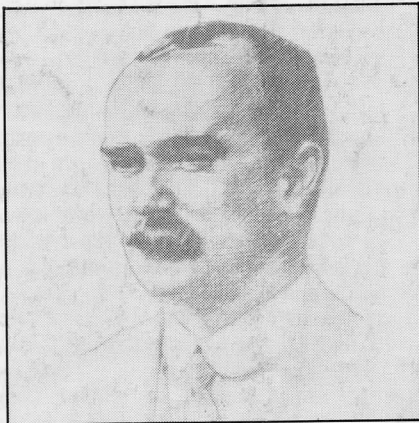
Michael O'Riordan

When invited to write for the guest column I remembered that you had already hosted that unique national revolutionary Peadar O'Donnell. I remembered also a reply by him to a question put when he was guest speaker of ours at James Connolly House. Asked what his opinion was about the Workers' Party he said that for him "there were only two parties in the country, viz., the Labour Party and the Communist Party". Both parties, though having travelled different kinds of roads have the common characteristic, that despite varied vicissitudes, have proven themselves not to be flashes in the pan. Both have survived the hard test of time.

A guest does not comment on the internal affairs of the host family. Rather should a social-political occasion be used to seek out points of common agreement. This is particularly necessary when both parties share common historical roots and if not a specific ideology there does exist a shared political birthright in the form of the teachings of James Connolly. It is pertinent to quote then the very first paragraph of the manifesto which Connolly drafted for a political party that preceded both our parties. This is what he wrote for the 1896 foundation meetings of the Irish Socialist Republican Party:

"The struggle for Irish freedom has two aspects; it is national and it is social. Its national ideal can never be realised until Ireland stands forth before the world a nation free and independent. It is social and economic, because no matter what form of government may be, as long as one class owns as private property the land and instruments of labour from which all mankind derive their substance, that class will always have power to plunder and enslave the remainder of their fellow creatures. The party which would lead the Irish people from bondage to freedom must then recognise both aspects of the long-continued struggle of the Irish nation."

Is not the political wisdom incorporated in that statement relevant to the contemporary situation in our country? To an Ireland wracked and torn by division, political violence, mass unemployment, jailings, hunger strikes, increasing poverty — and with no conceivable end in sight? Yet, there must be an end otherwise no substantial advance



JAMES CONNOLLY.

can be made to real socialist achievement. In the Communist Party we often quote the words of the first General Secretary of our party, Sean Murray (1898-1961): "You can if you wish ignore the national question but you will find out that the national question won't ignore you" (Murray was the man on whose grave Peadar O'Donnell laid as "a wreath" his latest fine piece of political prose — "Not Yet Emmet").

Is it not a task — nay, a responsibility — common not only to both parties but to all sections in the Labour Movement to ensure that the lessons of the national struggle are fully comprehended? One sided emphasis on one or the other of the aspects — the national or the social — has militated against both. The Labour Movement's standing aside and ignoring of the national question only prolongs the continuance of same as it leaves the leadership in the solution of same in the hands of the middle and petty-middle class nationalist.

As Irish history has shown the leadership of such forces has either ended in a type of compromise that solved nothing or a defeat in which the working people were sacrificed. If the Labour Movement does not lead the national struggle others will. William O'Brien and Cathal O'Shannon didn't but the Cosgraves and the DeValeras did — and we live with the results; in some cases people die because of them. If the present Labour Movement doesn't then the Charlie Haugheys and the Garret Fitzgeralds will and already we are seeing the results of that.

In concrete terms how can Labour lead? Central to that question and its

answer should be a clear insistence that the Irish people have a fundamental democratic right to unity and independence. That right was most blatantly suppressed by the undemocratic imposition of partition, an imposition that establishes British imperialism's central guilt and responsibility for the political crisis in Ireland. But Britain will not leave Ireland merely by moral pressure no more than by a bombing-military campaign. British imperialism will have to be forced out by a political mobilisation of the working class in the leadership of the national struggle.

The forcing a British declaration of intent to withdraw is of major importance because it would remove from the Unionist bourgeoisie the major weapon by which they maintain the division of the working class in the North, i.e. the guarantee of Union with Britain. Such an attack on Unionism's ideological base would do much to develop the political unity of the working class of all Ireland. A declaration by a British parliament of its intention to withdraw could, however, be dangerous if it is not accompanied by immediate steps to end repression in all forms, to withdraw all British troops to barracks pending their complete withdrawal, the disbandment of the UDR, the replacement of the RUC by a civilian police force accountable to a reformed Police Authority, etc.

As long as Britain relies on a military policy instead of being forced to face up to the demands for a political solution the Provisionals and the INLA will be sustained by the feeling of insecurity engendered in the Catholic section of the community by repression and deprivation. The way to overcome the Provisionals and INLA ideas and practice, however, is not to parrot British Tory government policy, to pander to Unionist sectarianism or to bolster repression. The way to overcome them is for the Labour Movement to fight resolutely for the Irish people's right to unity and independence and for it to accept that responsibility bequeathed by Irish history which was so well enunciated by Connolly . . . "the working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the struggle for freedom in Ireland."

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