



# The Commission

REPORT OF FIRST MEETING OF LABOUR PARTY COMMISSION NOVEMBER 1985



## UNIQUE APPROACH

### Commission begins work

THE LABOUR PARTY should be proud of its approach to debating the party it is and wants to be, said Tanaiste and Leader of the Party, Dick Spring T.D. at the first meeting of the Labour Party Commission on Electoral Strategy, held in the Social Hall, Liberty Hall, last Saturday November 2nd.

"We are unique in our willingness to debate these issues in the full light of day, and we should be proud of that uniqueness", he said. "Even more, we should be prepared to offer that uniqueness to the Irish people, as testimony of our total commitment to the democratic principles that underpin our socialism".

The Tanaiste, addressing the members of the Commission assembled against the backdrop of *Connolly and Larkin* and in the presence of about 30 party members who had come along to listen to the proceedings, made a striking comparison between the Labour Party's approach to politics and democracy and that of the group assembled in the Mansion House over the same weekend — namely, Sinn Fein.

#### OUR BELIEFS

"If I may put it this way — our objective in politics is to approach the Irish people with a ballot box in one hand and a set of radical, progressive policies in the other. The only weapon we seek to employ is our commitment, and our belief in radical change to a society where the principles of freedom, equality and solidarity will be pre-eminent", he said.

"The Labour Party has often been criticised in the past for the approach to politics that, in many ways, this Commission represents. It is true that there is no other political party in Ireland — either on the left or the right — that would be prepared to undertake as public an exercise as we are proposing. There is always the risk, in being as open as we are, that in seeking to criticise ourselves constructively, we will be seen as "washing our dirty linen in public", said Dick Spring.

"But in my view, the people who may come to this sort of judgement fail to understand the essence of our approach to democracy. We have every right to be proud of the approach that impels us to explore openly, without apology for that open-

ness, the sort of Party we are and want to be", he said.

Describing the only criterion worth insisting on as the Commission proceeds with its work as "the future well-being of the Labour Party, and the people we represent", the Party Leader tied up its work with that of the Organisation and Finance Committees of the Party, who are also working on the task "of developing the Party as a professional vehicle for articulating and implementing our goals", and preparing the party for its next challenge — a General Election.

Finally, Mr. Spring placed on record the gratitude of the entire Party to the members of the Commission.

#### THANKS

"We are all in their debt — the more so as their work is nothing less than the task of equipping the Party to face the future with confidence, with belief in the rightness of our message, and with a renewed commitment to the fight ahead of us".

## AN UNEQUAL SOCIETY

IRELAND as a society is faced with huge class inequalities, Mr. Chris Whelan of the Economic and Social Research Institute told the Commission in his submission "The Changing Class Structure."

Further, by international standards, the degree of inequality of opportunity is high in Ireland and the educational system, instead of breaking down class barriers, has only served to consolidate them, he said.

Mr. Whelan attributed the emergence of class groups to the lack of friendship and family ties between different class groups. When asked to clarify this by a member of the Commission, he gave the example of different housing estates in different parts of the city in which the residents don't mix.

#### NO MOBILITY

The absence of such ties in turn leads to barriers in mobility between the classes, said Mr. Whelan.

Mr. Whelan made the point that the expansion in educational participation is not necessarily associated with reductions in

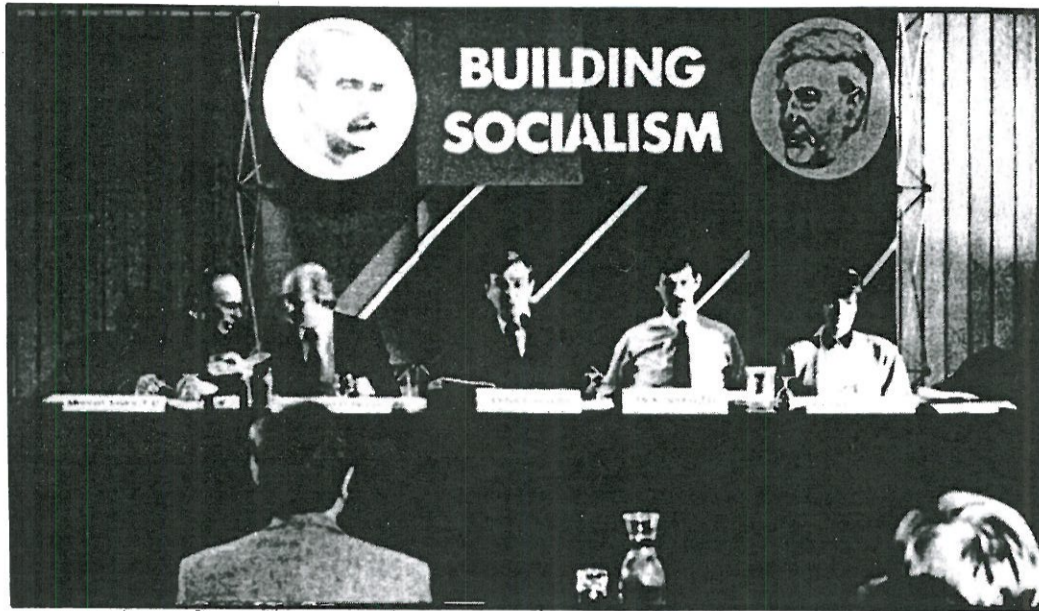
educational inequalities, because of the impact of class background on educational achievement.

Statistics show that those who fail to reach particular levels of educational achievement come predominantly from the bottom of the class hierarchy.

#### SCHOOLS UNEQUAL

Thus, of those boys who entered second-level education in 1976, those from non-manual families were six times more likely to sit for the Leaving Certificate than those whose father was semi-skilled or non-skilled. They were also 13 times more likely to enter third-level education, where children of working class families are grossly underrepresented.

In answer to a question by the Party Leader as to whether concentration on the primary sector could be a basis for eliminating class differences through education, Mr. Whelan said that the policy of schools of streaming from an early age would work against the policy and not contribute significantly to breaking down class barriers.



The Commission in session. (Photo: Derek Speirs/Report).

## Who pays the piper?

TAX REFORM is much easier if you have money to dish out", was the sombre advice tendered to the first meeting of the Party Commission by economist Colm McCarthy, who also dismissed as "fantasy" the idea that tax cuts on any significant scale could pay for themselves.

Mr. McCarthy was speaking on "The Fiscal Crisis".

Mr. McCarthy suggested that excessive tax burdens amounted to a fiscal crisis, but argued that there appeared to be no significant prospect of reducing the burden of taxation on people with average incomes until the expenditure problem had been tackled.

Tackled himself by members of the Commission in the question and answer session which followed his paper, Mr. McCarthy conceded that the system of company taxation was "odd", but warned that higher company taxes might mean fewer jobs. He also agreed that savings might be possible in areas such as direct State transfers to industry and agriculture.

#### LOOSE MONEY

"About £500 million a year is channelled through various agencies to industry and to farmers", he observed. "There is some doubt as to the effectiveness of this, and it seems that the State

agencies involved are a bit loose with the money-bags."

Mr. McCarthy said that recent Irish governments had brought surtax to the masses: in Ireland, 16% of all taxpayers paid tax at 60% or more, whereas in Britain the figure was 1.3%. And there were huge anomalies in the taxation system which meant — for example — that a family on a social welfare income of £5,000 a year would gain only £25.00 a week if the husband or wife took a job paying £7,000 a year.

He made no secret of his opinion that there were no easy solutions.

"There are regular calls for higher taxes on the rich, or on the farmers. To contribute significantly, any new target group would need to be both rich and prosperous.

#### TOO FEW RICH

"The rich are prosperous by definition. The difficulty is that there appear to be simply too few of them.

"Farmers are at least numerous, but regrettably fail the prosperity test.

"The notion that some well-off group, which could solve our fiscal problems through higher contributions, seems to me to be an evasion of reality."

#### UNFAIRNESS

Mr. McCarthy's observations about the wealthy were taken up by Commission member Damian Hannan, who argued forcefully that attacking this problem seriously would do something to offset the feeling of unfairness which many taxpayers had because they believed that the rich were not paying their fair share.

## End of the youth boom

THE oft-quoted statistic that half our population is under the age of 25 may be a thing of the past by the end of this century, Dr. John Blackwell of University College, Dublin, told the first session of the Party Commission, in his submission "Demographic Change".

"The proportion of the population aged under 25 was 48% in 1981, and is projected to fall notably, to 38%, by the end of the century", he said.

Among other dramatic possible changes in the Irish population Dr. Blackwell outlined the following:

Marriage is going out of fashion, relatively speaking. In common with trends in other European countries, not only are fewer people marrying, but marriage is taking place at a later age. This trend, Dr. Blackwell noted, is "unprecedented in peacetime".

### EMIGRATION BACK

Net emigration is resuming, and the average rate for the past three years has been about 11,000 per year.

The Irish fertility rate (the statistical average of the number of children born to each woman) has been declining dramatically. If the decline continues at the present rate, the country could be reaching the "replacement level" in only four years time. This means the level below which the total population of the country would, over time, begin to decline.

### WOMEN WORKING

There has been a striking increase in the number of married women in the workforce, although their participation in paid work is still far below the European average. If the Irish rates were on a par with the European average, there would be 130,000 more Irish married women workers today than is actually the case.

Men still die earlier than women, in contrast to the trends in other countries, in which the gap has been narrowing. In Ireland's case, this means that the future could see four times as many women as men in the 80+ age bracket.

Dr. Blackwell warned against undue optimism in the social policy areas arising from the fact that the numbers of very young and very old people — heavy consumers of expensive social services like educational and health — might be declining in relative terms.

### FUTURE SPENDING

Continuing high unemployment, he pointed out, would continue to bump up social welfare bills. There will probably be more old age pensioners. And a large group of over 80's than exists at the moment will mean heavier social security and health costs.

# Is Labour to be the maker or victim of history?

"WHAT is the future of the Labour Party in a society where four out of five voters still vote for conservative parties?" was the question posed for the Commission by Party Chairman Senator Michael D. Higgins in his opening remarks.

The work of the Commission will be extremely important in the hierarchical, clerical and patriarchal society accepted by the majority of people, he said.

"I want to thank the literally hundreds of people who have made submissions to the Commission."

### LABOUR TRADITION

Labour had a radical tradition in Irish politics, promoting egalitarianism against populism.

The way the Commission was operating was in stark contrast to another party conference being held at the same time, the Fianna Fail youth conference in Cork "where the leading members of the party will direct the youth members what to think".

Michael D. Higgins continued: "Labour is opening up questions about the future of the left in a disputative way — and rightly so in contrast with the authoritarianism of Fianna Fail".



Mr. John Blackwell U.C.D. presenting his submission to the Commission. — (Photo: Derek Speirs/Report).

The work of the Commission was instituting a political educational process.

### INTERVENTION

"The two main parties look at the political system as the interplay of forces. The difference for us is that we say we can intervene to change the system — intervene on unemployment, the distribution of wealth, the quality of life."

"We believe in reason — that is the distinguishing characteristic of

the Labour Party" the chairperson declared.

### LABOUR'S ROLE

Labour had to address serious questions about its role as a party with the support of 10% of the electorate.

"Is this party condemned to the two alternatives of accepting Fianna Fail rule or punishing Fianna Fail?" he asked.

"The end product must be — do we make our history or become the victims of history?"

## A Volatile Electorate

IRISH voters do not fit into any usual pattern of voting behaviour, Dr. Tom Garvin, lecturer in Politics in UCD told the first meeting of the Commission in Liberty Hall last Saturday. Dr. Garvin was addressing the topic "Class and Politics in Ireland".

Neither do Irish voters align themselves on the left-right spectrum which can be identified in most European countries. Instead Irish voters for the most part obey the dictates of a Catholic nationalism developed in the last century and persisting up to modern times.

### CHURCH AND STATE

The development of Irish politics took very different lines from the usual. Instead of the usual anti-State and confessional wing lining up against the pro-State and secular, the opposite is true in Ireland. Irish nationalists were very pro-State and eventually, the new state leaned on Catholic confessionalism to gain legitimacy.

Thus Fianna Fail, by lining up together a pro-State and Catholic approach, grabbed the consensus and majority support, by being able to attack the right for being anti-State and the left for being anti-Catholic.

### VOTING PATTERNS

In looking at voting patterns in the last 20 years, Dr. Garvin identified the steady vote of Fianna Fail, the movement of the middle classes to Fine Gael, the rise in the Workers Party vote and the variability of the Labour vote. Since 1960, Labour's most serious losses have been in the urban working classes,

Garvin, can be divided into those loyal voters who stick with one party and those who change their minds almost with every election. To the suggestion that Irish voters are becoming more volatile and less "loyalist" with increasing urbanisation and education, Dr. Garvin only accepted it as valid in the long term.

Party Support and Age, 1983, Averaged from Eleven Monthly IMS Polls

	FF %	FG %	LP %	WP %
Under 35	34.8	31.5	8.1	5.1
35-49	39.4	32.0	6.9	2.5
Over 49	41.6	34.8	4.8	1.3
All	38.2	32.8	6.7	3.2

and while a large percentage of Labour's vote is a loyal one, it is largely middle-class.

Fianna Fail voters, said Dr. Garvin, are more inclined to believe in miracles and the afterlife and the Devil, said Dr. Garvin to the entertainment of his listeners. They are also inclined to be older, but this does not mean that their support is fading. In fact, it seems that as people get older they are more likely to favour Fianna Fail.

Irish voters, said Dr.

### REACTION COMING?

In the short term, he suggested that there may be a reaction to the increasing sophistication of political life.

"A confessionalist and nationalist backlash against more complex views of the nationalist question, against the secularisation of the symbols of the policy, against the apparent selfishness of the urban personality could easily come. No marks for guessing who might orchestrate such a backlash", said Dr. Garvin.

## Briefly...

### Background

The outline arrangements for the meeting which took place on November 2nd in Liberty Hall were made at a preparatory meeting of the members of the Commission in September. At that meeting Damian Hannan was appointed chairman of the Working Group to make arrangements, in consultation with the Deputy General Secretary Marion Boushell, for the first meeting. The Working Group, which also included Peter Cassells, Brendan Halligan and Sam Nolan, decided, on the speakers for the meetings and the issues they should address. The speakers were John Blackwell of UCD, Chris Whelan, ESRI, Dr. Tom Garvin, UCD and Colm McCarthy, of Davy Kelleher McCarthy, Economic Consultants, who addressed various aspects of the topics "Class and Politics in Ireland."

### Next Meeting

Meeting two of the Commission will take place on Saturday, November 23rd in Liberty Hall. The Chairman of the Working Group to arrange speakers on the topic "The Prospects for Left Politics in Ireland" is Tony Brown, and other members are Alan Matthews, Kevin O'Driscoll and Pat Montague, the Party's Youth Education Officer. It is expected that one of the speakers will be Ms. Jean Tansey, Chairwoman of the Divorce Action Group, who will look at the links between single issue groups and the development of left politics, as well as touching on the role of women.

### Labour Women

As is well known by now, Ms. Niamh Bhreathnach, Chairwoman of the Labour Women's National Council, member of the Administrative Council and member of the Commission, takes every opportunity to introduce the issue of the participation and representation of women at all levels of the party. Niamh and Anne Byrne of Wexford, also a member of the Administrative Council, are the only female representatives on the Commission, and while Saturday's meeting was addressed by men only, this will not be the norm throughout.

"It is important I feel for the public to see in a real way that the attitude of the Party to women is the best one in terms of policy and representation, through the Labour Women's Council", says Niamh. "I look forward to seeing women giving submissions to the Commission, and to a discussion on the role of women in politics in Ireland and in the Labour Party in particular".



# The Commission

REPORT OF SECOND AND THIRD MEETINGS OF THE LABOUR PARTY  
COMMISSION NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 1985



## HOW IS LABOUR DIFFERENT?

### THE CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

THE ABILITY to answer the question "How is the Labour Party different?" will be crucial to the future success of the Party, Alan Matthews told the Commission at its second meeting on "The Prospects for Left Politics in Ireland" on November 23rd last.

And, he said, the Commission itself must spend some time trying to answer this question for itself.

In his submission entitled "A Changing Agenda for the Left" Dr. Matthews suggested the main challenges for the Labour Party in the years ahead, and set out to highlight some problems with Labour's traditional responses to them.

#### ECONOMIC FRONT

On the economic front, the problems of growth and employment will be central. Alongside the traditional interest in distribution and in championing the cause of those disadvantaged and left behind in the process of economic change, Labour must place emphasis on the actions needed for growth. The implications of the proposals for closer EEC integration will have to be studied, alongside the threat posed to the maintenance of an open economy by the "misplaced monetarist policies by the EEC's conservative governments".

Socially, the challenges for Labour will be to break down the inequalities present in the rigid class structure of our society, to provide for appropriate structures to secure full equality for women, to build communities to overcome the increasing alienation of urban society, to provide for new work relationships to restore work to its creative role, and to ensure a physical environment which is safe and clean.

#### PEACE

Politically, the challenges will be to increase the possibilities for involvement by ordinary people in decision-making in the face of enormous pressures to professionalise the business of politics. Regarding Northern Ireland, the challenge will be to fulfil the potential of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and to make it work, and on the international level "we must seek more effective ways of contributing to peace and disarmament and to the independence and prosperity of the Third World".

This is not too wide-ranging an agenda for the Labour Party, argued Dr. Matthews; it is not enough for the party to confine itself to the so-called bread-and-butter issues.

"Socialism is not just about providing the jobs and the services more efficiently than the other fellow, it is fundamentally about trying to fulfil a different vision of society. The power of such a vision to motivate and to lead should not be underestimated", he said.

Looking for an adequate basis on which to base its policies in the 1990's must be answered by the Commission, Alan Matthews said, and suggested three elements:—

- the breaking down of class and gender structures;
- making society more democratic, through increasing and widening peoples participation in decision-making;
- the need to be more convincing



Pictured at the Commission: l. to r. Kevin O'Driscoll, Ray Kavanagh and Bill Attley. Pic: Derek Speirs/Report.

about its policies for production and the creation of the thousands of jobs needed.

Dr. Matthews suggested that there are elements of this policy in the party's own programme and in the ICTU document "Confronting

the Jobs Crisis".

Finally, said Dr. Matthews, the party must "Go about its activities with a sense of commitment and excitement, willing to experiment in both ideas and methods, in a word, to be a truly radical party".

## Women: Work to be done

"THE LABOUR PARTY has always been foremost in having exemplary philosophies and policies regarding women, but it has not been as effective as other political parties in converting these into reality", said Ms. Jean Tansey in her submission to the Labour Party's Commission on Electoral Strategy.

The submission, entitled "Women: Some Issues to be Considered" was heard at the second meeting of the Commission, held in Liberty Hall on Saturday, November 23rd last, which looked at the theme "Prospects for Left Politics in Ireland".

#### MUST DELIVER

"The Labour Party should stand for issues and principles clearly, unambiguously, and in a way which will be seen "to deliver", she said, and suggested the abolition of age limits in the public service which affect women particularly, the availability of "parental leave", which is relevant to the transformation of working time and organisation, and pushing EEC legislation which relates closely to women and the achievement of equality as issues to be pursued by the Labour Party.

Looking at the reasons for the low participation of women in politics and power generally, Ms. Tansey said that women have had little share in devising the power structures which dominate their lives, and that men have been brought up to take part in them. Women for instance do not take easily to long and boring meetings. Nor are they by their nature motivated by power and position as men are.

In political parties, women face bigger problems in going through the

process of being selected and elected. For instance, Ms. Tansey identified the lack of financial independence, baby-sitting problems, and the inability to take naturally to what seems to be required to be selected and elected i.e. assuring others of one's wonderful talents and performing with skill the required "political manoeuvrings".

Much work remains to be done, said Ms. Tansey, despite the advances of the past decades. To begin with political parties must not just recommend Equal Opportunities Programmes for institutions other than their own — it must start with them. Also, male colleagues must listen to women, as well as devise structures for institutional encouragement. In the final analysis, said Ms. Tansey, women must depend on themselves, and not male-dominated political structures, to achieve equality.

#### MIDDLE-CLASS

Bill Attley made the point to Ms. Tansey that in the trade union movement it is the women who make the

decisions regarding their own work practices, and they have made the choice not to change the traditional ones. He also made the point that to date the women's movement has been very much a middle-class movement, and that the Labour Party must reach out to working class women with working class problems also. Alan Matthews commented that while many single issue groups, such as the women's movement, are campaigning on issues which are Labour Party policy, the Party has not succeeded in drawing these groups into the party. Is the reason, he asked, because these groups do not see the possibility in the Labour Party of turning these issues into reality, or is it that they are put off by the party structures?

Niamh Bhreathnach, who is also Chairwoman of the Labour Women's National Council, commented that the Party is so structured as to hear the comments of the Council, and gave the example of the Status of Children's Bill, on which the Council has made a submission.

Women Candidates and Seats won by Women in Dail Elections, 1957-1982

	Total No. of Candidates	Women Candidates	No. of Seats	Women Elected	Women Deputies As A % of Total
1957	289	10	147	5	3.4
1961	301	8	144	3	2.1
1965	272	8	144	5	3.5
1969	373	11	144	3	2.1
1973	334	16	144	4	2.8
1977	375	25	148	6	4.1
1981	404	41	166	11	6.6
1982 (Feb.)	366	35	166	8	4.8
1982 (Nov.)	364	31	166	14	8.4

Source: Department of the Environment, General Election Results from "Women in Ireland" by Jean Tansey 1984.

### The Spanish story

FROM THE outset, the Commission stressed the importance of discussing the international dimension of Socialism and the experience of European socialists in particular. The Commission was therefore, very glad to welcome the Minister for Labour of the Spanish Socialist government, Mr. Joaquin Almunia Amann to speak on the Spanish experience, at its second meeting on November 23rd.

The socialists came to power in Spain in 1982 on a policy of change for Spain. Its platform was for tackling the economic crisis through state intervention, to tackle unemployment and rising prices; to introduce equality in the areas of health and social services and education and to ensure fundamental rights.

#### WILL RETURN

After three years in government, and with an election due in '86, the polls predict a return to power for the Socialists.

According to Mr. Amann, the reasons for the popularity of the Socialists in Spain are not ideological or strictly political. Rather the reasons are that the Socialist party is seen as the modern party in Spanish society. It is seen as the party which does not belong to the past, as the parties of the right do. It is the party which stands for European involvement, for a better quality of life, for fundamental freedoms, and for honest administration, without any influence or intervention by private interests.

Mr. Amann identified as a major factor in the rise to power of the party, its success in the local government elections of 1979. The participation of its members in local government displayed very clearly not only its ability to administrate and to handle power, but its commitment to reform. It also showed the honesty of the party as administrators, and gave the party a political weight which it did not previously have.

Mr. Amann was invited to the Commission through the Minister for Labour, Mr. Ruairi Quinn T.D.

# TWENTY YEARS OF LABOUR

"THE LABOUR PARTY is an issue-related party in a society which is not issue-related", said former General Secretary Brendan Halligan and Commission member in his analysis of the last 20 years of the Labour Party to the third meeting of the Commission on the theme "The Labour Party in relation to Irish Society and Culture" on December 14th last.

In his submission entitled "History of a Failure", Brendan Halligan looked at the way the Labour Party has related to the issues of the day in the past 20 years of Irish society.

In the late '60's, change was the theme of the party, and change was evident in society at that time. The comprehensive set of policies presented to the 1969 Annual Conference represented, said Mr. Halligan, a totality of vision of society which the Labour Party had developed.

## SOCIALIST SEVENTIES

"The seventies will be socialist, the first line of Brendan Corish's address to the 1968 Conference (The New Republic) and a statement which has been thrown back at the party, was not a political prediction, it was a statement of a conviction that socialism was inevitable, more expressive of a mood that anything else", he said.

The issues in this pre-1970 period were set out in the same New Republic speech by Brendan Corish as emigration (which in Mr. Halligan's view has today been replaced by unemployment), social inequalities, the role of the State and the need for governmental reform — an issue which in his opinion has not received enough emphasis by the party.

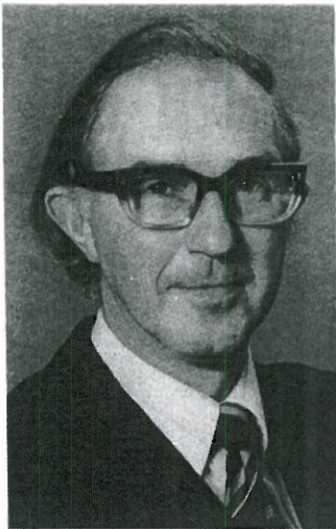
## WOMEN EMERGE

The issues which dominated in the 1970-73 period were the debate on Coalition, which followed on what the media perceived to be a negative result in the 1969 election for the Labour Party; Northern Ireland, with the flare-up of the violence, the arms crisis and the civil rights issue. The third issue was the women's issue, and the Labour Party was the only party to take up an issue which was emerging internationally at the time — but not without intense debate at Conference level. This period can be identified as the one in which the

## Submissions

The submissions heard publicly and summarised in "The Commission" are not the only ones which will be considered by the members of the Commission when they come to write their final report. Submissions in writing are being received from many sources, both within and outside the party. Among these for instance will be a submission from the Labour Women's National Council and it is expected that this submission will cover a wide range of issues, including the role of the LWNC within the party and the effectiveness of the structure over the years. The closing date for receipt of the submissions is February 28th.

All the proceedings of the Commission to date which have taken place in public have been recorded on videotape. It is planned to edit the tapes to produce a video of the highlights of the Commission sessions.



Mr. Brendan Halligan.

Labour Party came to be seen as a major agent of attack against the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The 1973-77 period is

## Analysis of the issues

characterised by involvement in government, by the containment of violence, by the policy of social justice and the war on poverty, by labour legislation and for the first time, budget deficitting. This period also saw the maturing of the women's issue in the party, with the passing at the 1975 Dun Laoghaire Conference of a motion in favour of divorce.

## SOCIALIST DIMENSION

The 1977-81 period is defined by the publication of the document "The Socialist Dimension" which "displayed a fearfulness by the

party. By calling itself a dimension, it was accepting a scaled-down version of socialism", said Mr. Halligan.

While the period since then is too new to categorise, the achievements of the NDC and the Anglo-Irish Agreement are obvious ones.

Finally, in answer to the question by Peter Cassells regarding the level of commitment to the policies adopted in 1969, Mr. Halligan replied that they were more than just "wallpaper". "There was a genuine commitment to social change, and the Labour Party changed the whole focus of the period".

# PROBLEMS ON THE GROUND FOR LABOUR

THE LABOUR PARTY's participation in Coalition was a major factor in the collapse of the party's vote in working-class areas in the local elections last June, former Dublin city councillor Mary Freehill told the third meeting of the Commission, held in Liberty Hall, on Saturday December 14th, on the theme "The Labour Party in relation to Irish Society and Culture".

Ms. Freehill who formerly represented part of Dublin South-East on Dublin City Council, was speaking to the Commission on the experiences of the Labour Party

representative on the ground. She told the Commission that the problems of unemployment, crime and drug abuse are the ones affecting poorer areas worst, and the Labour Party has become identified with the establishment which voters in these areas blame for these problems.

## CLINICS NOT ENOUGH

On the other hand, the vote held up in middle class areas which are satisfied with the party's performance on such issues as divorce and contraception.

"There must be continuous contact with the electorate", Ms. Freehill told the Commission. "The Party makes the mistake of believing that because clinics are held, that we are communicating with the electorate. In fact, only 3-4% of the electorate uses the clinic system".

"We must look at the whole area of communication of the initiatives of the party to the electorate, initiatives such as the National Development Corporation, Home Improvement Grants, and the Family Income Supplement, instead of letting other parties take the credit for them", she said.

Ms. Freehill suggested that the party should initiate training programmes in communication for party activists.

"Labour ministers in government must work to highlight the difference between them and Fine Gael ministers", she said. "There is a feeling on the ground that the Labour Party are solidly behind Fine Gael in government and support them in everything they do".

## PARTY PERCEPTION

Damian Hannan put the question to Mary Freehill whether the problem for the party is that it is seen as a party which is unable to achieve anything, while Fianna Fail and Fine Gael are seen as the parties of power? She replied that in fact her Council seat was taken by the Workers Party, an even smaller party. On the same point, John Horgan suggested that voters perceive of two types of party — one which will roar and shout on behalf



Pictured at the Commission: l. to r. James Wrynn, Niamh Bhreathnach and Anne Byrne.

## RURAL RULES O.K.

THERE IS A whole disenfranchised electorate among the young and urban dwellers, and the Labour Party should fill this political vacuum by adopting a radical stance as it did in 1969, Mr. Declan Kiberd told the third meeting of the Commission in Liberty Hall on Saturday December 14th.

Mr. Kiberd, who lectures in English in University College, Dublin, was speaking on the theme "The Labour Party in Relation to Irish Society and Culture".

There is a growing threat to democracy in society at the moment, said Mr. Kiberd, displaying itself in the urban-rural divide for instance. The myth that Dublin dominates the country as a whole is not true; in fact what has happened is that rural values have been imposed on the city through rural people taking positions of power in Dublin, resulting in a ravaged inner city, sprawling suburban estates and Ministers with no real appreciation of the problems of the city devising policies to deal with them. City dwellers feel alienated from the city which is no longer theirs.

Ireland, according to Mr. Kiberd, is "a periphery-dominated centre".

In politics, the activists in the political parties learn their politics in rural Ireland and then impose them on the city. Irish politics have not developed into a left-right divide, and clientilism in a more mature form, continues. Mr. Kiberd cited the examples of George Bermingham and Richard Bruton of Fine Gael who, behind the window-dressing of supposed liberalism and a policy of changing the system, continue the clientilist system, in a more sophisticated fashion. The Workers Party and Sinn Fein hold out no hope of radical change — they are simply beating clientilists at their own game.

There is still a percentage of the electorate who want a radical party, and they are effectively disenfranchised at the moment. Their radicalism is to be found in the arts, in the plays of Tom Murphy for instance.

This, suggested Mr. Kiberd, is the place for the Labour Party to start rebuilding its base.

Damian Hannan, member of the Commission, suggested to Mr. Kiberd that Irish society was dominated more than simply through rural values — the power of property and the petty-bourgeois culture is much wider than the farm, and much more threatening.

of the voter, the other which will get things done, and that the Labour party is neither.

In answer to a question by Niall Greene, Ms. Freehill agreed that the Labour Party is no longer identified with the poor, and is becoming more and more identified with the middle classes.

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