



THE WORKERS PARTY

PEACE WORK DEMOCRACY
CLASS POLITICS

Oráid an Uachtaráin
Presidential Address

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I have addressed you as President at our Annual Ard Fheis for many years now. In that time we have together built a party of the working class, dedicated to winning freedom at last for our class. It was in those first years of the 1960s that we through long argument, disputation and education set out the basic principles on which we would build a democratic party based on the Republican and Socialist struggles throughout our modern history in which the oppressed working class always fought hardest, suffered most but gained least. Now we would build a party which would eschew militarism but would struggle hard by all democratic and political methods to win our objectives.

So we went straight into action with a series of political campaigns on ground rents, ownership of our waterways, housing action groups and tenants' and residents' groups. Our members entered into these political campaigns with great enthusiasm in every part of the country, and they got great public support. All the time we were learning the ways of landlords, the ways of politicians and the ways of police in street demonstrations.

In the North these campaigns became increasingly involved in civil rights issues such as discrimination in the allocation of houses or extension of the franchise in "One man One vote" committees. By 1966 the question of a full-scale Civil Rights Campaign was under discussion in the party and by 1967 the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was established to carry it out. It wasn't until 1968 that we succeeded in organising the first civil rights march under the NICRA banner, but by the following year everyone in Northern Ireland was engaged either for or against the Civil Rights Campaign. Now we had to fight off the politicians, the militarist nationalists and the ultra left groups, all of whom wanted to take over the Civil Rights Campaign for their own reasons.

We pointed out that this was not a republican nor a socialist nor a nationalist campaign. It was a democratic campaign — for basic civil rights. In fact the basic demand from the beginning was "Equality of citizenship with the rest of the UK". We saw civil rights as an end in itself to open up the road to democracy and help to break the stalemate of sectarian politics. Our objective remained the same in the North as in the South — a socialist republic achieved by democratic political action.

All this time we had to fight off the militarists within and without our party. They only wanted a military campaign but they were being defeated and silenced by the successes of our political campaigns

and the enthusiasm and commitment of our members. Soon they saw their opportunity in the increasing confrontation between the RUC and the civil rights marchers. Our members continued to man the front lines of every march in order to maintain peace and prevent attacks on the RUC. This meant they were constantly being batoned by the police but now they were also being attacked from the rear by marchers eager for confrontation. Eventually all hell broke loose in August 1969 and the militarists seemed to have won the day.

The emotionally charged atmosphere of that time is now part of history. Everyone, including leading members of the SDLP were looking for guns to defend the nationalist people of Belfast. The pressures were enormous and we seemed to be swamped. But our members stood firm, our party was not defeated. We stood by our objectives and put more emphasis than ever on civil rights, democracy and political action. Gradually we extricated ourselves from any involvement with militarism. We knew we would have a long hard struggle but little did we realise how long and how hard it would be in the early '70s. We felt the pain at the loss of some of our finest comrades in the struggle against militarism and terrorism. But we survived as a party strengthened in our socialism and clearer in our opposition to terrorism, fascism and capitalism.

Why am I telling you all this — you who know the struggle we have come through. I suppose I am doing it for myself as much as for you. I have come through many difficult struggles and many different political climates during the past three decades. And I regret none of them. Because all the time I was learning, all the time I was moving forward, all the time I was gaining an understanding of the history of our people, urban and rural, Northern and Southern, Catholic and Protestant, rich and poor — the winners and the losers. If you haven't been among the losers you don't understand oppression. And if there is one thing the members of the Workers' Party understand it is the naked oppression of the working class. They have always been the losers.

But the main reason I gave that concise account of the struggle of our party was so that you might have some idea of the enormity of the shock I felt as I watched our national television station devote almost two hours to an attempt to stand truth on its head. As I listened to the allegations that the Workers' Party were involved in the very terrorism and gangsterism which we had fought so long and so hard against I thought of the assassinated Billy McMillen and the dying Malachy McGurran, in such great pain that his face was almost

black, flogging himself around to meeting after meeting to arouse the flagging spirit of our members with the watchword of Billy McMillen — "Remember our job is just to survive as a party" — as he then went on to outline the future of the party when we got through this period. He never lived to see it. What an insult to these men and to all of our other members was perpetrated that night by this unholy alliance of crypto Provos, Labour Party hacks and New Right Reaganites.

I had expected attacks like this from the right wing press and their Provo fellow-travellers who like to whitewash the Provos by lashing in to the Workers' Party, but being a very naive sort of person I thought our national television station would be above that and would at least uphold certain standards of professionalism and integrity. But I had forgotten that Tanaiste Dick Spring directly intervened in RTE last summer and threatened to change Labour Party policy towards public service broadcasting unless things were done his way. It was then this programme was born.

We should not however be shocked or surprised at the increasing viciousness of the attacks against our party. In fact when I considered the background and purpose of these attacks I felt a great pride. I was proud that our party had achieved a position in our society where it was seen by our enemies as a real threat to their power and domination. Even though we seem to be tiny in comparison with the larger parties they are worried and concerned at our increasing influence, at the power and strength of our ideology, the discipline and commitment of our members. It is not only in the Dáil that we are as good as any ten of the others. Wherever we have party members we seem to have ten times as many as we have. We are accused of infiltrating RTE and the media, the trade unions, the civil service and semi-state companies, tenants' and residents' associations and all of the areas which the establishment parties themselves have infiltrated, controlled and dominated since they took state power in this land over 60 years ago.

We are only just beginning to show our political muscle and they are running scared already. They keep changing the rules to try to silence us. But it's not doing them any good. Gradually the cosy political club-wich they had so carefully built up over the past 60 years is being exposed to public view by the Workers' Party. The public don't like what they see, but most of all, the workers, who pay for all, don't like what they see. After all they now see that the Labour Party, which was supposed to be looking after their interests

over this period, was actually participating in this political charade. The Workers' Party is the first political party which is articulating the hopes, the dreams, the aspirations of working people. It exposes the ruthlessness and brutality of the owners of wealth and property — the new landlord class in Ireland who evict workers and their families from their jobs and leave tens of thousands of them in poverty and degradation, stripped of their human dignity. Our party is slowly and inevitably exposing the class nature of the society in which we live.

As we daily expose the robbery and corruption of the rich and propertied capitalist class who dominate and rule our society we also develop the contradictions within that society and especially within the other political parties. John Kelly of Fine Gael saw the threat of the Workers' Party four years ago and chose to remain on the backbenches as the watchdog and ideologue of the right to maintain the Tory purity of Fine Gael.

The Labour Party are now responding to the growing political consciousness of workers by trying to distance themselves from their old partners in Fine Gael with whom they have worked so closely since the foundation of the State. Now they are engaged in a frantic but unavailing search for their lost roots. In a similar response Fianna Fáil in the urban centres are claiming to be the party of the working class which of course is causing rumblings of dissent both from Fianna Fáil the farmers' party, and even more so from Fianna Fáil the employers' party. In fact it was these contradictions within Fianna Fáil, and the internal ferment they are causing, which spawned the new right wing party of O'Malley. I welcome this development. It sets down clearer lines of battle where friend and foe are more easily identified.

The most confused area in this regard is the Labour Party where we have very good friends among the solid traditional labour members around the country — but we have deadly enemies in the leadership of the Labour Party and of course in their Parliamentary Party. This enmity is not of our making. For years we have offered them the hand of friendship. We have tried to bring them back to their roots and to work with them on behalf of all working people to create a strong left opposition. But they spurned us repeatedly and they now attack us in the most vicious manner simply to try to save their own political skins.

We have exposed the ineptness of the Labour leadership and their craven forelock-touching attitude to Fine Gael, the political party of the bosses. We have exposed their treachery to the class they are

supposed to represent by their alliance with the Tories in the abolition of food subsidies, imposition of water charges, cutbacks in education and health services and most of all in depriving tens of thousands of workers of their jobs every year and remaining in a government which has put 250,000 of our people out of work. They have abandoned Jim Larkin and they have abandoned James Connolly and they hate us for exposing this. It is obvious to me now that it would be a waste of time talking to these people who have abandoned their class. The labour movement would be far better off without them.

The pettiness and bitterness of their attitude is seen in the manner in which they are using the trade union movement in their attempts to smash the Workers' Party. They think the trade union movement belongs to the Labour Party. Trade unions belong to their members and should not be prostituted for political purposes by leading members of the Labour Party. Instead of working to preserve and strengthen the unity of the trade union movement in the face of the most sustained attack for decades on the livelihoods of working people, the preoccupation of the leaders of our main unions is with petty political vindictiveness. Things have come to a very sorry state when the leaders of one of these trade unions who are also members of the Labour Party fail to support the right of one of their officials to represent his members in negotiation when his right was being challenged by the employer, the Chamber of Commerce and local politicians. Here a fundamental trade union principle was at stake but they did not undertake a vigorous defence of it simply because the official involved was a member of the Workers' Party. This narrow politically sectarian attempt to gut an official of the union who is a committed socialist is now becoming quite commonplace. Hard work, commitment and loyalty to union and members are no longer the qualities sought after in the favoured trade union officials. If you are loyal to these self-serving leaders you don't need any of these qualities.

These people who have taken over the trade unions have the gall to accuse the Workers' Party of infiltrating the unions. What do they mean by infiltrating? All we do is join our trade unions as every working person should do. I infiltrated the trade union movement the first day I started work with the ESB in 1947. Throughout my 30 years work there I was an active trade unionist and I was still an active trade unionist as Branch Chairman of a very active branch when I retired in 1977. What is Dick Spring's record as a trade

unionist? When did he infiltrate? How and when did he become a member? What was the record of his predecessor as Leader of the Labour Party — Michael O'Leary? We expect every member of the Workers' Party who is at work to become a member of a trade union and because they are the most active and committed members of their unions they are worrying and upsetting the old establishment in the unions who just want a quiet life with no hassle. The fools, the fools, the fools. When did any working class organisation, or any member of the working class, have a quiet life with no hassle. The minute they sit quiet they are smashed into the ground. The machinery for doing just that to the trade union movement is at present being lined up for battle. We have been well warned through the British experience and all the ominous signs are here for the past 12 months. But do our trade union leaders see these signs? Or if they do are they laying down any plan of battle or even digging any trenches? No — they are engaged in petty squabbles of their own or savaging the very people who are best equipped to defend the trade unions in the battle which is coming. There is nothing wrong with our trade unions except the dead hand of Labour's lieutenants of capitalism stifling them at the top.

Our members play a constructive socialist role in building representative democracy to defend the interests of workers. We have always advocated and will continue to advocate a united approach by workers to industrial problems as we believe that individual unions or groups of unions have no monopoly of wisdom. This is no time for petty political infighting which splits and weakens trade unions and puts the credibility of their leadership in question. Now is the time for unity of workers within their individual unions and also inter union unity within the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Despite the petty attitude of the Labour Party leadership, we are still anxious to promote unity and friendship with the members of that party who understand the need for left unity to repulse the onslaught of the right on working people.

Never was it more important for working people to have a strong disciplined party of their own to fight the major political battles which lie ahead. Right across Western Europe unemployment is being used as a weapon to smash the organisations of workers which had been so painfully built up through the past half century. The purpose is to restore the power of capitalists to their 19th century glory where workers were their willing slaves who accepted low wages and bad and dangerous working conditions in gratitude for the jobs handed

out by their masters. The recession is the weapon used to divide workers, to turn them against their own trade unions which they are told are the main cause of the recession and job losses. We have been witnessing during the past two years the manner in which the whole state apparatus of the Law, the Judiciary and the Police, are being used in Britain to smash the trade unions. Since we always seem to adopt British practices about two years behind them, we can expect similar methods to be used here within the next 12 months. The Minister for Labour is already drawing up changes in legislation in regard to trade union practices which he says is all being done for the benefit of workers. But great care should be taken before any changes are made in trade union law or practice at this time. The experience in other countries is that changes are being made at the bosses' bidding and for the bosses' benefit. The less the law intrudes into traditional trade union practice the better.

There is a belief that a capitalist economy in crisis opens the road for political advance on the left. This political viewpoint is very neatly summed up in the slogan of the ultra-left "The worse the better". Like all their slogans it is of course utter nonsense as we can see as we watch the left suffer defeat after defeat in Western Europe. In time of economic crisis, like the present time, capitalism goes over to the offensive. War is declared on workers and especially on their unions. Miles of newsprint and film are used to convince the general public that the unions are to blame for all our economic ills; that our level of pay is to blame for our poor performance in the export markets.

As our society is pushed steadily to the right by the use of the establishment's powers against the organised working class, at the same time an insidious campaign is in full flood in an attempt to convince those without work that jobs for all is a thing of the past. To deprive a human being, especially a young person, of the dignity of earning a pay packet is a very great crime indeed. This crime is now being justified by a "philosophy of leisure".

We have long known that the media is not neutral and now that the serious class battles are beginning the media is coming more and more into the open as propagandists for the establishment. Propaganda for "The Leisure Society" is now appearing on an ever increasing scale. RTE radio has recently broadcast a series of eight programmes designed to prove that work was a thing of the past and people should be educated for leisure — in other words for a life on the dole. The leisure society propaganda is designed to make poverty

acceptable, to brainwash people, especially young people, into accepting poverty under the name of Leisure.

For us there is no acceptable level of unemployment. We have ample resources in this country to build a prosperous society for all. We support fully the right of every citizen to a job. The working class does not want a society built on doles — no matter what fancy name is put on the dole. The working class wants work, with good pay and good conditions.

The substantial fall in oil prices, the depreciation of the dollar, lower international interest rates and lower inflation have changed significantly the problems facing the Irish economy and opened up major possibilities for job creation. These improvements do not result from government policies and will not lead to jobs and growth in the Irish economy without a change of policy by the Government, a change which given their track record to date, is too much to hope for.

The substantial gain in resources from these international developments will not be channelled automatically through the market into job-creation investment. Only *active* intervention and planning by the government could use the increased room for manoeuvre to bring down unemployment. The blind *laissez-faire* approach of this government and of the New Right generally will mean that increased profits will be creamed off by private companies, shareholders and financiers, while the number unemployed will actually increase. The only beneficiaries will be the same class whose privileged position remains secure through good times and bad. I predict that the economy is entering a boom period. Perhaps a substantial boom. But this time it is going to be an employers' boom, a financiers' boom, a speculators' boom. There is no government plan to bring the benefits to the unemployed, to better wages or to better education and health services. We must be ready to fight that battle and to help to organise working people and in particular young workers to fight for the share to which they are entitled.

There is a feeling in right wing circles that a major part of their job has been done in the private sector. Workers have been cowed into submission by redundancies and mass unemployment. Many are now prepared to take jobs on the bosses' terms — lower wages, no trade unions, conditions which would be unacceptable five years ago. This is precisely what the economists of the right have been advocating — as one put it "mass unemployment should be used to beat the unions and bring down labour costs".

Now they are turning their full attention to the public sector. They recommend large scale redundancies to soften up the trade union resistance. They argue that workers in the public sector should be given equality of treatment with the private sector *on the dole queue*. One way of doing this of course is to bring the public sector into the private sector — in other words privatisation. Again taking their cue from Britain this is now becoming all the rage in Fine Gael circles with strong support for it in Fianna Fáil and of course the O'Malley bunch would eat up the public sector like a sow her farrow.

But the immediate battleground is to be on public sector pay. This battleground was chosen by the government with the agreement of both the Fine Gael and Labour Party members. Their purpose is two-fold: (1) to defeat the trade unions with the help of a massive media campaign; and (2) to impose statutory control of wages in all of the public sector, both state and semi-state employees. Let me remind you of the Labour Party's declared policy under the heading "Free Collective Bargaining" at the 1982 general election.

"The trade union movement and the public service have faced unprecedented attacks from the government on pay and on negotiating procedures. Labour's policy is:

1. free collective bargaining between workers and employers linked to a democratic planning process;
2. opposition to statutory control of wages;
3. opposition to restrictions by the main parties on the negotiation rights of trade unions."

Given that specific commitment, how can any member of the Labour Party agree to support the government's attempt to deprive the teachers' unions of the right to negotiate for their members through free collective bargaining? How can those on the Labour benches, who are trade unionists agree to this attempt to impose statutory wage controls on one particular group of workers? How can Executive Members of the two largest trade unions sit on the Administrative Council of the Labour Party which agrees to such an anti-trade union measure?

The Workers' Party fully supports the teacher unions in their battle to protect their living standards and their negotiation procedures. Instead of being intent on beating the teachers and their unions into submission the government should be working with them to raise the educational standards and lower the pupil teacher ratio to at least the level which operates in Northern Ireland. To do this they would need

to recruit an extra 3,000 teachers rather than close down teacher training colleges. The Green Paper on Education issued a few months ago showed no progressive thinking whatsoever. Its content was a purely negative one of wanting to destroy the only non-denominational and democratic part of our educational system which was built up under the 1930 Vocational Education Act. We believe in the slogan "Educate that you may be free". I think the government understands the truth of this also because their philosophy is based on its corollary which is "Keep them in ignorance and you keep them in slavery".

Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil gach cuma ar an scéil go bhfuil ceist na Gaeilge caithte ar leath thaoibh ag an Rialtas seo freisin. Níl polasaí dá laighid acu ina leith agus níl aon iarracht déanta acu chun an plean cinnte simpli a bhí leagtha síos ag Bord na Gaeilge le roinnt blian anuas a chomhlíonadh. Chuireadar Comhcoisde na Gaeilge ar bun 'san Oireachtas blian ó shoin agus d-eitigheadar leigin d'aon ball ó Pairtí na nOibrí páirt a glacadh ann. Do réir mar a cloisim tá sé deachair doibh anois quorum d'fháil dos na cruinnighthe.

Tá an teanga in ísle brigh fé láthair. B'fheidir go bhfuil sé básaithe cheana féin. Má tá is feidir a rádh gur thactadh é. Tá sé dhá thactadh le blianta fada leis an greim docht daingean atá a choimead air ag na polaiteoirí agus ag an meán-aicme.

Ní hé toil an phobail é go n-éagfadh teanga na gaeilge. Cinnte ní h-é toil an docht oibre é ins na bailte agus na cathracha mar atá siad ag teasbáint leis an troid atá á chur suas acu chun scoileanna lán gaeilge a chur ar fáil dá bpáistí. Caithfidh an Pairtí seo againne cabhrú leo mar 'sé ár n-oidhreacht atá i gceist. Tá daoine ann a deireann gur rud naisiúntach é caomhnú na gaeilge agus nach cóir do sóisealaigh bheith páirteach ina leithéad. Ní fíor sin cor ar bith. Is ins na tiortha sóisialaigh in Oirthear na hEorpa atá teangan na mionlaigh á chaomhnú. In Iarthar na hEorpa tá siad á mharú. Ba choir duinn machnamh ar an gceist seo agus polasaithe níos briomhaire agus níos gníomhaige a chur i bhfeidhm i leith na gaeilge.

San oráid i-mblíana táim ag labhairt faoin bpáirtí, na polasaithe atá againn agus na namhaid atá mór-thimpeall orainn. Aon rud adubhairt mé baineann sé leis an Tuaisceart comh maith leis an Deisceart, mar tá an namhad ceanna againn, ag obair as lámh a chéile agus ag baint usáid as na h-uirlisí céanna. Ach tá troid i bhfad níos deacra ag ár bpáirtí sa Tuaisceirt ná mar atá thíos annseo mar tá an seicteachas le

throid acu annsin comh maith le chuile rud eile. Seo mar atá an scéal fé láthair.

Everything I have said about the policies of the party, its purpose and its enemies applies equally to the Northern and the Southern states. Our party and the working class people have the same battles to fight, the same oppression to oppose. But on top of everything else, in Northern Ireland they have to struggle against the all-pervading blanket of sectarianism which makes their fight so much more difficult. I must therefore deal briefly with the crisis developing there and how it affects our party.

For two decades now we have held to a consistent policy of total opposition to terrorism and campaigned for peace and democracy. We have accepted the principle of an internal democratic solution in Northern Ireland and have campaigned for consensus on three propositions:

1. The need for devolved government.
2. That such devolved government must be based on firm principles of democracy.
3. That such democratic principles must be guaranteed in a Bill of Rights.

When the Northern Ireland Assembly was established we had serious reservations about its effectiveness but we accepted it because we felt it could be the basis for achieving consensus in the above three points. The SDLP trying to outdo the Provos, boycotted the Assembly which ended its usefulness for achieving consensus. When the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed we expressed even graver reservations as to its effectiveness because of the fact that it was an obvious kick in the teeth to the Unionists. Again however we voted for it as the only alternative to paramilitary violence and because it specifically advocated devolved government and consideration of a Bill of Rights. We did however emphasise the urgent need for discussion and compromise with the Unionist politicians to avoid their total alienation and the danger of escalation of sectarian violence. This was not done because John Hume did not want it done. He enjoyed watching the Unionists being hammered.

I must seriously question John Hume's commitment to peace. He is of course against being involved in violence himself but he is quite prepared to allow a situation develop where others are involved in violent activity while he sits by to grab the political power. He is quite happy to see the Protestant people in turmoil and their political

leaders in confusion while the paramilitaries take over and raise the killings and injuries to ten times their present level, because at the end he feels that he will have more power in his hands, he will be the politician of international stature, he will be raised to the status of statesman. This is the scenario outlined for him by the higher echelons of Catholic Nationalism.

All our worst fears and reservations in regard to the Anglo-Irish Agreement are now coming to pass. There is a very dangerous crisis upon us now in Northern Ireland. Every other issue affecting working people there is now forgotten. Are the Taoiseach and Peter Barry prepared to sit back and allow John Hume's scenario unfold with all the death and misery it could bring? It is time they acted. It is time they forced John Hume to act — to open discussions on devolution of government and on a political road to peace rather than confrontation. Why not suspend the Inter Governmental Conference for a few months? Or if they prefer the term, let them go into recess as the Dáil does. This would immediately open the door to dialogue. If the Taoiseach doesn't take such action, and take it rapidly, then we can only assume he does not want to halt the inevitable slide to anarchy and slaughter.

The policy of the Workers' Party is peace — peace among nations and peace at home. I will end by quoting to you what I said on this subject 10 years ago at our Ard Fheis in 1976 and I quote:

"Our repeated call has been for peace. It is the most revolutionary demand at this time. We want peace that will lift, in the North, the daily burden of British, Loyalist and Provisional terror that has been loaded on top of the daily burden of wage robbery. Peace that will give the Catholic worker a pause and a chance to identify the parasites that feed on him. Peace that will allow the Protestant worker a pause to identify the real causes of his present misery. Peace, not in the woolly hope that Protestant and Catholic will come together by supernatural dispensation. Peace, not in the sick fantasies of the ultra-left, where the Protestant is to be beaten by Nationalists on a Monday and told to behave like a Socialist by the same people on a Tuesday. The peace they need and the peace they want and the peace our Party is now committed to giving them is the peace to think and plan how to lift the burden of bigotry, sectarianism and terror, both of the Catholic and Protestant middle class, once and for all from their backs. We want a peace that removes the British jackboot, the Hibernian gunman and the Orange bomber, so that all our people can join in the struggle for the re-

conquest of Ireland from the Bankers, the Profiteers and the exploiters — the political struggle of the working class and the doomed small farmer class, for the ownership and control of the wealth of this country. That is the National Question which faces us."

As well as peace our constant slogan has been class politics. No one in the working class will shed a tear at the demise of this government. But the political reality is that when they are thrown out of office, they are likely to be replaced by another right wing administration, made up of either a single party or a combination of right wing parties. It is more important than ever that there should be a strong, vigorous and coherent voice of the working class in the next Dáil. The Workers' Party is the only party that can be depended upon to fill that role and can give workers and their families the voice they need.

James Fintan Lalor once said "Somewhere, somehow and by somebody a beginning must be made". We have made the beginning. We have built a party that can free working people from the misery and exploitation of the capitalist system. Our purpose is to advance the interests and the cause of workers.

Our party has proved it is strong — strong enough to withstand all attacks and all inducements. We have proved our consistency, our reliability and our integrity and this has brought increasing support for the Workers' Party during the past number of years. Most recently our party in Northern Ireland showed a huge increase in support in the Westminster bye-elections.

Between now and our next Ard Fheis we will likely face decisive political battles in both states. In Northern Ireland the only alternative to mass slaughter is devolved government which would mean a vital Assembly election. Here in the south we are witnessing a gradual collapse of government. We could have an election at any time. But when it comes it could be decisive for the future of left wing politics. We must be ready. We must be organised. Comrades, delegates, friends I say the sooner it comes the better. This time I am confident you will bring a great victory for the left.

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