VOTE
Eamonn McCANN
FOR FOYLE

SEA
socialist environmental alliance

TURN THE TIDE
Manifesto

Inequality

The top quarter of earners in the North have 56 percent of income. The bottom quarter have six percent. This doesn't show the true extent of the gap. It includes only earnings. The super-rich get their real wealth from property and profits, while those on the bottom aren't earners at all.

Here is the most glaring example of inequality in our society. But the four main parties can argue about equality for hours without giving it a mention. How can we understand anti-social behaviour, drugs problems, crime, violence, etc. without taking this into account?

This highlights the reason we have entered the election. We regard class divisions, not community differences, as the defining characteristic of our society. We believe that the higher up the agenda we make class issues, the less difficult the community problems will become.

There are aspects of this beyond the Assembly's remit. But there are specific things Assembly politicians could do—for a start, stop all privatisation and PFI schemes, and stop promoting Northern Ireland as a low-wage economy.

At the lower end of the pay scale—particularly for women—public sector workers are better-paid and more secure than in the private sector. Any party serious about equality would declare that it won't sit in an Executive which proceeds any further down the privatisation road.

The invest NI website tells potential investors that the North offers 'employment costs that are up to 32 percent lower than in the US and 25 percent lower than the EU average... This makes a virtue of poverty wages. A party seriously against poverty would refuse to operate this perspective in government.

Half of all children living below the poverty line are living in families with at least one adult working. Poverty isn't caused by idleness. Poverty among people working, especially in one-worker households, is steadily growing.

The way to tell the politicians in other parties that you want these issues to the forefront is to vote.

Number One for Eamonn McCann in Foyle.

Women's issues

The SEA has the most radical agenda of all the parties on women's issues.

We will work within the Assembly for high-quality, state-funded care for children, elderly and disabled people. Without this, women cannot take their full place in public life.

Fighting poverty and low pay will benefit women most, because it's women who are most likely to be poor.

Support for a woman's right to choose comes from the same agenda. We are not out to introduce abortion. Abortion is already part of life here. Up to 60,000 women from the North have had abortions in Britain since 1967.

Whatever a woman's personal position on abortion, those who support workers' rights should support legal abortion on the NHS.

Otherwise, it's one law for the rich, another for the poor.

As things stand, women who can get the money together can travel across the water. But a woman with no resources is trapped.

The delays which result mean women from the North are three times more likely to have late abortions than women from Britain. Making abortion available on the NHS would remove the profit motive and ensure all terminations were as early as possible.

No one should be forced to go against their conscience on such an intensely personal matter. And nobody should be prevented from following their own conscience.

The right to choose also means being able to choose to give birth. For example, it's only when parents of children with disabilities enjoy all the support that can be provided—speech therapy, physiotherapy, respite care, financial support, suitable education and employment prospects—that women will be able to decide in a positive frame of mind to have a handicapped child.

But all of these things require radical economic change which conservative campaigns can't be counted on to oppose.
Unemployment

This month, the government declared that the jobless rate in Derry is six percent, which is ridiculous. Maggie Thatcher charged the way unemployment was counted 18 times. On every occasion, Labour complained. But when they got into office they didn’t reverse a single one of Thatcher’s measures. The books stayed cooked.

If you define as unemployed everybody who has looked for work but not found any in the past four weeks, the figure for Derry isn’t six percent, but 11 percent. There are other categories, too, missing from official statistics: those who want to work but have given up looking; people on a New Deal scheme who would prefer a proper job; part-time workers who want to be full-time. Include these and the figure for the Foyle constituency was 24 percent last February and, after Dodgers, ShopElectric etc., is probably pushing 30 percent now.

And yet mainstream party spokespersons talk on television about how business is booming and Derry is “buzzing.”

In a town where 6,000 people applied for 250 jobs in a department store, it’s insulting that the unemployed have to prove they’re “actively seeking work” to qualify for benefit. The merry-go-round of years of unemployment broken by training-for-nothing is insulting, too.

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When it comes to the Alliance, it’s insulting that the unemployed have to prove they’re “actively seeking work” to qualify for benefit. The merry-go-round of years of unemployment broken by training-for-nothing is insulting, too.

Disaster of Iraq invasion

The horror now unfolding in Iraq was organised in Co. Down last April, where the SDLNP, Sinn Fein, the Ulster Unionists and others provided Bush and Blair with cover.

The sole item on the agenda at the Hillsborough Castle summit was the post-war governance of Iraq. It was at Hillsborough that Bush and Blair agreed to cut the UN out and impose direct US/UK military rule.

We see the disaster of the invasion on television screens every night now. Bush and Blair have given birth to the monstrous thing they said they were going to war to prevent.

The Northern party leaders seemed oblivious to the implications and the irony as they arrived immediately after the war summit, “all to be lectured by the President and the Prime Minister on the need for a final move to a full and lasting peace.” The only journalist in the room, Peter Stothard, watched as, “The human chess pieces arrive, stand in a horse-shoe shape, and are severally and individually lectured.”

Bush and Blair then went outside to greet the 500-plus journalists who had converged on Hillsborough. Had even one of the Northern party leaders taken an anti-war line and refused to greet Bush in protest against his war-plans, it would have been front-page world news. This may be the only occasion any of them will ever have to make a measurable impact on a major global development. But none of them stepped up to the mark.

On the back of a lorry outside Hillsborough Castle the night before, Eamonn McCann made the final speech at a rally called by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, pleading with Trimble, the President and the Prime Minister on the need for a final move to a full and lasting peace.” The only journalist in the room, Peter Stothard, watched as, “The human chess pieces arrive, stand in a horse-shoe shape, and are severally and individually lectured.”

Protecting the environment

Protecting the environment is fundamental to SEA. It is basic to both socialists and environmentalists that we should leave our children a better world than we inherited from our parents. We have to stop the drive for profit killing the planet.

There is a lot more the Assembly could do. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry’s target is for 12 percent of electricity from renewable sources by 2012. Like the Green Party, we aim for 20 percent by 2010.

SEA activists were central to the successful campaign against an incinerator in the North West. Eamonn McCann will continue that work in the Assembly and will oppose incinerators proposed in other regions’ waste plans.

Growth in waste by businesses using unnecessary packaging must be stopped. Less than five percent of waste is recycled in the North—one of the worst records in Europe. We need a determined, publicly-funded strategy to reduce, reuse and recycle. One which accepts that all solutions have to be “market driven” and “economically viable” are a hindrance to progress.

Why must recycling be “economically viable”? Landfill already costs us—environmentally, economically and socially. Incinerators are called “vegetable plows” and are particularly in relation to children’s health. Why can’t the money spent on landfill be devoted to publicly-funded recycling?

The blue bins were welcomed because most people want to help stop incineration and global warming. But many areas of the city still don’t have them. And we have no kerbside collection of other recyclable material. There is much more to be done. Eamonn McCann in the Assembly will help get it done.
Constitutional arrangements

Socialists are opposed to the constitution in the South, which enshrines Catholic doctrine and the rights of private property. We are against the British constitution, with its hereditary monarchy. And we are against the constitutional arrangement represented by the Agreement, because of the way it entrenches sectarianism.

Throughout these islands, however, we get on with the business of organising to defend working class interests, opposing sectarianism, racism, etc., and fighting for a fairer society. We look forward to the day when constitutional arrangements will reflect a new reality.

It's regularly said by other parties that there's no alternative to the way things work under the Agreement. That's not true. The main function of a MLA should be to encourage the marginalised and done down to mobilise and fight back.

The fraud of privatisation

The sudden closure of ShopElectric exposed the fraud of privatisation. The shops were part of the old Electricity Board. They were bought out from the private sector by a management group in the 1990s. This group then sold them on to a three-partner consortium—which in turn flogged them off last June to Northern Retail. Now they're gone, leaving customers and workers in the lurch.

How much money was siphoned out of ShopElectric in these deals into the pockets of private individuals? Why hasn't this information been made public? Why haven't the main parties made issue of this?

At the time of the management buy-out, we were told that the dynamic private sector would guarantee a bright future. The fuddy-duddy state sector had no future, the propagandists insisted. But like the railways etc., privatisation has proven a disaster for everyone—apart from the fat cats who have run off with the cream.

This shows how to turn the tide on privatisation, which under the four-party Executive has also affected our schools and hospitals and transport and water services.

Disability and equality

When it comes to people with disabilities, there is no equality.

The reform of the 11-plus suggested in the Burns Report—commissioned by the outgoing Executive—completely ignored children with disabilities.

It's a remarkable fact that not one of the Executive parties commented on this shameful omission.

Despite equality legislation, discrimination against people with disabilities remains legal. Exam boards aren't obliged to make "reasonable adjustment"—large-letter papers, for example—to give disabled people an equal chance.

The result emerged in last year's NI Labour Survey: People with disabilities are twice as likely as others to have no qualifications. 44 percent compared to 20 percent.

Only 12 percent of disabled people have a higher qualification, compared to 23 percent generally.

This is a disgrace.

And it's a greater disgrace that it's not regarded as a disgrace.

People with disabilities suffer inequality, too, in health provision, access to employment, transport and appropriate housing.

These things affect relatively small numbers. But the people they do affect are those who need help most.

But issues like this don't fit into the conventional framework of politics here—one of the reasons for voting for a different set of priorities.

No water charges

It seems every single party is opposed to water charges. But water reform was discussed in Assembly committee prior to suspension. No party unequivocally ruled out water charges then—not one. Some Executive parties say now they will support non-payment. The test is this: Will they say they won't remain in an Executive which brings in water charges?

None of them has given this pledge. The SEA can be counted on 100 percent to oppose water charges and help build community-based campaigns of non-payment. And we'll blow the whistle at the first opportunity on any proposal of this sort in future. We won't sing dumb and then rediscover our radicalism when an election looms.