

# **Election Manifesto**

**November 2003**

**The**

**Workers Party**



## ***It wont work... without the Workers Party***

**The Agreement isnt working.**

It's not working because **nationalist and unionist parties are incapable of making it work.**

They can't think and they can't act in any other way than the way they've always done.

**The whole point of the Agreement was that it was a new way forward. About the future.**

But nationalism and unionism are only about living in the past.

For five years the people who want the Agreement to work have had to wait and watch.

What the Agreement needs is a breath of fresh air.

**A radically different input.**

**The Workers Party can provide that.**

The Workers Party, and people like us, can help make the Agreement work.

**Not nationalist or unionist,**

**not catholic or protestant**

**Socialist, democratic, secular and anti-sectarian**

*- how's that for a breath of fresh air?*

**14% of people in Northern Ireland refuse to define themselves as catholic or protestant- nationalist or unionist**

Five years ago the citizens of Northern Ireland voted for The Agreement. It was a time of great hope that a new beginning was indeed possible. Many people rightly believed that The Agreement represented a leaving behind of the past and that a new type of politics based on co-operation and working together for the benefit of all had arrived.

No one believed it was going to be easy. No one expected that things would change overnight. No one believed the Agreement was perfect in all its aspects.

But there was an expectation that things would get better. In many ways they have. Para-military violence and killings are greatly reduced, but they, the para-militaries, still exist. A Devolved Assembly demonstrated how much better it is when local politicians take decisions about how we live our lives.

***However the public mood of optimism and euphoria has been replaced by cynicism, despair and apathy. People are fed up.*** They are fed up because unionism and nationalism have failed to deliver on the promise of The Agreement that a new way forward was possible.

The unionist and nationalist parties haven't changed. They are still committed to the tribal politics of the past. They use the old sectarian language of "*them*" and "*us*". They prefer confrontation to co-operation. Sectarian bickering and wrangling, failure to reach agreement has been the hallmark of the past five years.

Whilst the nationalist and unionist politicians have been squandering the opportunity for a new beginning society has become ever more divided.

Sectarian attitudes, prejudice and practice have intensified.

***To-day Northern Ireland society is more deeply divided than ever.***

The Agreement is in serious trouble. The Workers' Party believe that the Agreement, despite all its flaws, still represents the best way forward for the people of Northern Ireland. After these elections another effort will be made to get the Agreement going again.

However, left in the failed hands of the unionists and nationalists we are in for more of the same.

The Workers' Party want an anti-sectarian society, free from sectarian hatred and violent division. The Agreement can make this possible!

***But it will only work if people like The Workers' Party are in there.***

A Workers' Party presence in the talks that will follow these elections will make the difference. ***Ours will be the voice for socialists, democrats, everyone fed up with the failed politics of the past.*** We will work with others who think broadly along these lines to provide an alternative political alliance to nationalism and unionism.

***A growing number of citizens refuse to be categorised in the traditional stereotypes of unionist or nationalist, protestant or catholic.***

They want a modern politics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, free from the sectarian shackles of the past. Their concerns are not flags and emblems. They are concerned with their children, their education, their future, the elderly and how we treat them, ***a society based on citizenship and human values not according to religious affiliation or cultural identity.***

We appeal to those people. Make your voice heard in the negotiations about your future. Don't leave it to the unionists and nationalists. **Vote No. 1 Workers' Party.**

In this election we offer voters a five-point programme.

## **1. Reclaim The Agreement as The Peoples' Agreement.**

Ownership of The Agreement has been taken from the people who voted for it

Instead of our future being discussed and planned for in an open, democratic and transparent manner, the Agreement has been reduced to a plaything of one or two parties who conduct business behind closed doors and in secret. This has resulted in shoddy deals and fixes which have been the major cause of instability of the institutions and of the significant loss of public confidence in the workings of the Agreement.

The Workers' Party will insist that:

- (i) All talks are conducted between all parties elected to the Assembly.
- (ii) That those talks are open and transparent.
- (iii) That the requirement for a majority within unionism and a majority within nationalism be replaced by a weighted majority of all members of the Assembly.
- (iv) That members of the Assembly be free to designate themselves as they so wish.
- (v) A major shake-up of the Civic Forum to mobilise civic society in support of the principles and values of The Agreement.

## **2. An all-out assault on Sectarianism and Racism.**

We are now a segregated society. The trend towards more and more division in our schools, houses and work places, must be reversed. Accommodating division runs contrary to the spirit of the Agreement. Division re-inforces sectarian prejudice and practise.

Unless we tackle it seriously, it will continue to poison community relations and is a threat to the Agreement itself.

***The Workers' Party believes in an integrated society.***

We will:

- (i) Ensure the removal of sectarian graffiti and symbols.
- (ii) Give greater support to integrated education.
- (iii) Give priority to the maintenance of mixed housing areas.
- (iv) Have as a policy objective the goal of an integrated society.
- (v) Promote the concept of common citizenship.

### **3. The elimination of poverty**

Recent studies have reminded us of the extent of poverty in

Northern Ireland. The report published by Democratic Dialogue, the work of Save the Children and the Anti-Poverty Network along with the most recent report by Barnardo's have made shocking reading. It is a wake up call because it has been tempting to fall into the trap of interpreting favourable economic statistics and data as indicators of the well being of society as a whole.

Poverty in Northern Ireland is worse than in either the Republic or Great Britain, which are two of the most unequal societies in Europe.

***This illustrates that there is not only a religious divide in Northern Ireland but also a social class divide.***

Amongst the worst affected by poverty are lone parents, pensioners, children and the disabled. Those on state benefits and the long term unemployed are particularly vulnerable.

In the Assembly the Workers' Party will

- (i) seek all Party support for an Anti- Poverty strategy to be adopted as a matter of urgency
- (ii) review the working of the Social Fund for those on State Benefits
- (iii) regulate the operation of Licensed moneylenders who prey on the most vulnerable

(iv) oppose the introduction of Water Charges which are not only unjustified but will hit those in poverty hardest

(v) in the pending review of public administration, divert savings from cutting our overloaded bureaucracy into funding an Anti-Poverty strategy.

#### **4. A Fair Deal for the Elderly**

The elderly are an ever-growing proportion of our population. As a group in society their rights as citizens have been ignored for too long.

They deserve not just to be rewarded after a life time of work and contribution to society but to be treated as full and equal members of society, with the same rights and opportunities for participation in society as anyone else.

Not all will be able to participate fully. Many are vulnerable.

Vulnerable because of ill-health, isolation and inadequate income; and vulnerable to physical attack.

As a priority The Workers' Party will campaign for:

(i) A Community Safety Programme for the Elderly

with specific reference to older people in rural areas

(ii) seek to restore the link between pensions and average earnings abolished in 1979

(iii) free personal care for older people

(iv) free travel for all at 60 years of age

(v) a strategy to enable older people to fully participate

in all aspects of life - education, arts, culture, leisure,

etc .

## **5. A Public Sector Ethos in the Economy**

The Workers' Party believes that the public sector has a central role to play in the economy and the provision of public services.

***Private companies exist to create profits not to serve the public good. Neither do we believe that they are fairer nor more efficient.***

One only has to look at the experience of the privatisation of public utilities and transport throughout Europe, particularly Britain, to see how they resulted in get rich quick profits for individuals, grossly inflated wage packets for company directors and a run down of public services.

***The Workers' Party will oppose the trend adopted by all the parties in the last Executive to a greater role for the private sector in the delivery of public services.***

The Workers' Party will:

- (i) oppose the introduction of fees for university means tested student grants
- (ii) oppose the use of Public/Private Partnerships and Private Finance Initiatives in the Health and Education services
- (iii) oppose the introduction of water charges in any shape or form
- (iv) support a government strategy for the revitalisation of our manufacturing industries
- (v) propose the adoption of full employment as a fundamental principle for any future government

The Workers' Party programme represents a radically different approach - socialist, democratic, secular and anti-sectarian.

We urge citizens to cast their number one vote for that programme and to continue down the ballot paper for candidates who think broadly along these lines.

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