



**WORKERS
PARTY
IRELAND**

THE WORKERS' PARTY OF IRELAND

Assembly Manifesto 2007



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The Workers' Party Manifesto – Assembly Elections 2007

Introduction

Yet again the electorate are being asked to vote in an election designed to restore a fully functioning Assembly and Executive. That we have not had such an Assembly and Executive since the last election is an indicator of the persistence, indeed the intensification of sectarian politics in Northern Ireland.

Undoubtedly many things over recent years have changed for the better.

Yet there is no denying that in other important ways nothing has changed.

Political life is as polarised as ever before.

Sectarianism remains a political cancer at the heart of Northern Ireland society.

Politics remains dominated by tribal and sectarian interests.

Sectarianism is entrenched in the structure of government itself.

For nationalists and unionist alike, this election is just like every other in the past 30 or 40 years, an internal battle to gain pole position in their respective tribal camps.

Who seriously believes that the DUP and Sinn Fein, the two parties most associated with the organisations and key individuals responsible for the turmoil of the past 30 years, the legacy of which rests like a dead weight on the politics today, are capable of realising the vision of a new society in



which the concept of citizenship replaces tribal religious affiliation.

Unless things change there is no reason to believe that the outcome of this election will result in anything better. The Workers' Party offer a democratic, anti-sectarian, left alternative. We will work with others, democrats, trade unionists, socialists and all those who want to transcend sectarian and tribal politics.

Democracy

The Workers' Party calls for the immediate restoration of a fully functioning Assembly and Executive after this election. For many years we have been a lone voice in making the demand for a local democratic devolved assembly as the best means of addressing our social and economic future. We long ago recognised that unelected and unaccountable Direct Rule Ministers were bad for our social and economic well being. Whilst we recognise the value and importance of restoring the local Assembly and Executive we have serious concerns as to how it is constituted and the rules governing its operation.

We cannot be serious about the eradication of sectarianism in our society while we enshrine it in the structure of government itself.

We will end the practice of designation as unionist or nationalist and review both the methods of securing cross community consensus in assembly votes and the D'Hondt method of forming an Executive. These practices not only perpetuate sectarian division but have been the cause of political paralysis itself.

A Bill of Rights

In this the 40th anniversary of the formation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association we restate the importance of a Bill of Rights as an essential underpinning of devolved government in Northern Ireland. A Bill of Rights will form the cornerstone of democracy as the guarantor of the civil liberties of all citizens and of the political rights of all political parties, groups and individuals prepared to work through the democratic process.

Such a bill must contain fundamental principles, which would constitute a political statement about the nature of any form of institution established in Northern Ireland.

Water Charges & Rates

The Workers' Party fully support the call by the Irish Congress of trade Unions for non-payment of Water Charges. That the water service is in need of investment to improve the infrastructure and standards is the result of years of neglect by successive Direct Rule governments. In any case people have been paying for water through their domestic rates for many years. This is an unfair and justified case of double taxation. Non-payment is now the only means of ensuring that these water taxes are scrapped.

We will open up a debate on an alternative to domestic rates as a means of funding local government. The new proposed method of basing domestic rates on the valuation of properties bears no relation to people's income or ability to pay and is particularly discriminatory against older people. We will freeze domestic rates pending the outcome of an investigation into new ways of funding local government.

Poverty

Fuel poverty has been identified as a major cause of increasing hardship in Northern Ireland. We are proposing greater powers for a new Energy Regulator to oversee the costs of gas, electricity and oil to consumers.

What more hardship can we imagine than not having a home

Spiralling property prices mean that young people and young families are finding it increasingly difficult to get on the property ladder and for those who will never be able to get a mortgage, the decline in public sector housing has created a housing crisis.

Last year 20,121 households presented themselves as homeless in Northern Ireland.

Homelessness in Northern Ireland has increased by 59% over the last 6 years. 93% of all new builds in the last year were in the private sector. It is clear that years of reducing the role of the NIHE as the lead provider of housing is now having a negative impact. In light of this we will oppose plans to shift even the much-reduced NIHE functions to the new proposed Councils. We will restore the NIHE to a position of lead provider of quality, affordable public sector housing.

Education and Public Services

We are seeking the implementation of a robust programme of anti sectarian and anti racist measures, which not only penalises those who engage in sectarian and racist behaviour, but also changes the character of our society from a segregated one to an integrated one.

Therefore we restate our long-standing commitment to Integrated Education and Integrated Housing as vital steps in changing our society. Despite a commitment to a shared future we still have a situation where integrated schools are being denied the opportunity to open, where physical barriers between communities have increased since the ceasefires and the proposed new local government boundaries will further reinforce the sectarian divide.

Sectarianism and Racism unless seriously addressed and tackled threaten to undermine and negate any political progress, which may be made in the future.

Private Finance Initiatives are increasingly becoming the means of funding public infrastructure projects, particularly for schools and hospitals in the Health and Education services. The Workers Party are opposed to this method of funding vital public services which not only undermines the values of public enterprise but as experience in Britain has shown results in poor delivery of service and poor value for money.

Summary

The Workers Party are demanding:

- A Programme for Change, the democratic, anti sectarian, left alternative.
- Support for the Restoration of a fully functioning Assembly and Executive.
- The implementation of A Bill of Rights.
- Anti Sectarian and Anti racist Programme.
- Non Payment of Water Charges.
- An Alternative to Domestic rates.
- Greater Control of Gas, electricity and oil prices.
- Public Sector Housing
- Opposition to Private Finance Initiatives

Peace, Work, Democracy and Class Politics

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