

Standing Against Austerity

WORKERS



PARTY

Westminster Elections 2015



Workers Party Candidates



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Upper Bann

Gemma Weir
Belfast North

Hugh Scullion
Mid Ulster

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Belfast South

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Belfast West

'Standing Against Austerity'

Westminster Election Manifesto:

This election is an opportunity to take a stand against austerity, cuts and reduced public services.

On May 7th The Workers Party will be Standing Against Austerity.

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The most damaging cuts here have been engineered by the five Executive parties. Along with the business community, they have campaigned for a reduction in Corporation Tax: something which even the Tories did not propose.

To offset the cost of lowering Corporation Tax for big business, Sinn Fein, the DUP, SDLP, Alliance Party and Ulster Unionists, are taking 20,000 jobs out of the public sector and are significantly reducing public spending on education, public transport, the community and voluntary sector and the arts. They will make up the shortfall by selling off public assets like the Belfast Harbour Estate.

That is why we have cuts and daily announcements of a further erosion of public services.

These are not Tory Cuts; they are the price the people of Northern Ireland are paying for lowering Corporation Tax.

'One Trick Pony' - the myth of lower Corporation Tax

It's not just the Workers Party which is highlighting the economic and social recklessness of the Stormont Executive's 'one-trick economic pony'.

Tom Healy, Director of the Nevin Economic Research Institute has also identified the nature and the magnitude of this myopic economic approach.

"The implications of declining living standards over a prolonged period coupled with relative regional decline spells significant trouble for any future political or economic settlement in Northern Ireland. Policy solutions along the lines of further fiscal austerity or measures to lower corporation tax more than other European regions and steal some foreign direct investment or measures to bleed the public sector in the faith that the private sector will blossom are probably doomed to compound problems" ¹.

<http://www.nerinstitute.net/blog/2015/04/11/northern-ireland-has-taken-greatest-hit-on-living/>

Thousands of people across Northern Ireland have already demonstrated their opposition to Stormont Cuts and to the Stormont Coalition's Austerity agenda.

The Stormont Coalition says it is 're-balancing' the economy. We've already seen what that means. It means -

- fewer teachers in schools
- less bus and train services
- longer hospital waiting times
- cuts to community projects
- reduced funding for the arts
- low pay, zero hours contracts and less rights

- more women in low paid, part time work
- thousands of redundancies
- fewer services delivered by fewer people
- tax reductions for big businesses, and
- selling off public assets

Plans to reduce Corporation Tax should be abandoned immediately. Instead of borrowing £700 million to fund redundancies, the Executive should use these borrowing powers to put construction workers to work, providing 20,000 new homes instead of 20,000 lost jobs.

A socialist programme of publicly funded investment, development and growth is the alternative to austerity and to the cuts imposed by the Stormont Coalition.

'A new departure is needed involving a plan to develop local industry and services drawing on the undoubted strengths of the local economy and workforce. Here, there is a role for public and private sectors with a focus on research, innovation and skills.

This is the key, in the long-run, to higher levels of productivity and living standards. Greater equality of social opportunity also appears to be linked to higher levels of productivity a point recognised, increasingly by international research'.

Tom Healy Director of the Nevin Institute

This election will be a judgement on the economic policies of the five main parties.

Health and Social Care

Health and Social Care Services must remain publicly funded and free at the point of delivery. These principles are far from safe and secure.

Creeping privatisation is now being underpinned by proposals to include the NHS in the remit of the Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the European Union and the United States.

Despite the fact that our health and social care services have been through several reorganisations over the past forty years, and millions of pounds have been squandered on new structures - each one having a detrimental effect - report after report indicates that health inequalities have not improved.

Monitoring reports make it clear that *'...the absence of a whole systems approach in Northern Ireland has resulted in Health Inequalities persisting at the same level or worse for the previous ten years'*.

NI Health & Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System
(DHPSS) - Fourth Bulletin 2012

The Public Health Strategy NI, Investing for Health NI and the various reviews carried out by Sir *Michael Marmot*, Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London, all make the crucial point that *'...social and economic issues must be addressed to improve health standards and deal with health inequalities'*.

Health inequalities have a number of root causes, but poverty, unemployment, low pay, educational under-achievement and the lack of decent public housing all feature as key factors.

All of these factors will and are being compounded by an austerity culture.

New direction

The Workers Party believes that developing a **cohesive health and social care strategy**, which tackles existing health inequalities and agrees a proper level of funding to meet the health and social care needs of our citizens should be a social and political priority

We can continue to ignore our health needs and watch hospital admissions grow out of control, patients dying on trolleys, the system go into melt down, or we can address the problem. Much of what is wrong with public health can be put right by taking a new direction.

The Workers Party believes that what is needed is an **open, transparent, and courageous debate** on the type of health and social care services that are required to deliver quality health outcomes, and deal with decades of inequalities.

That debate must challenge vested interests, inside and outside health and social services, and be prepared to think big. Health can be fixed, but it requires the political will to do so. The Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive have to reinstate Health as the number one priority within the programme for government.



Health inequalities have a number of root causes



An open, transparent, and courageous debate



We need to deliver quality health outcomes



Mental Health

Northern Ireland has higher mental health needs than other parts of the United Kingdom.

In any 12-month period in Northern Ireland, one in four people displayed symptoms of mental illness.

University of Ulster's Bamford Centre

Factors contributing to these rates include persistent levels of deprivation in some communities and the legacy of Northern Ireland's troubled history.

The Workers Party is calling for a minimum 30% increase in funding for Mental Health, Learning Disability and Children and Family Services in Northern Ireland and the development of a service models which are considerably less dependent on hospital based delivery.

Northern Ireland suicide rates more than doubled between 2005 and 2013. The suicide rates in the most deprived areas are more than three times higher than in the least deprived areas: 24.9 per 100,000, compared to 7.6 per 100,000. Cuts to public services, welfare reform, redundancies and a lack of opportunities will compound these problems.

Home treatment and crisis response teams need to be prioritised and resourced to maintain people in the community and support service users in their recovery.

Similar services also need to be developed for pregnant women and mothers, children and young people, people with a learning disability and older people.

Rural Development Farm Safety

The Workers Party supports the initiatives being run by the Health & Safety Executive in Northern Ireland (HSENI) and the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland (DARDNI) to tackle health and safety issues, and would like to see these programmes extended and enhanced.

Farming Subsidies & Payments

Changes to the Common Agriculture Policy are having an adverse effect on many farmers and farm incomes. The introduction of the Basic Payment Scheme will present problems for many farmers and their families.

The Workers Party urges a simple, consistent and coherent approach to applying for subsidy in Northern Ireland and clearer guidance and support offered to farmers to facilitate applying for and receiving payments to which they are entitled to receive.

We also call on DARD to cooperate fully with the Ulster Farmers Union to resolve all outstanding issues regarding the new payment and to make the transition process smoother so that farmers will receive what they are entitled to in an efficient and timely manner.

Renewable Energies

The Workers Party supports the development of wind generators, solar panels and other forms of renewable energy. Co-operatives and ventures involving many stakeholders ought to be established to maximise the renewable energy potential here.

We support the nationalisation of the electricity infrastructure so that the electricity grid can support renewable electricity and provide a good deal for all electricity consumers.

The Workers Party stands firm against the idea of fracking. Fracking is highly dangerous and we must endeavour to unite to stop the progress of fracking anywhere in Northern Ireland.

Planning

Planning in the countryside in Northern Ireland is a longstanding problem

We call for an urgent review of rural planning policies. We must address the basic needs and the fundamental rights of those living in the countryside to make sure that they all have access to a good standard of living, at least comparable with those living in the town.

Public Transport

Public transport in Northern Ireland is particularly important for the social well-being of all residents in the region and for the economy. No part of the country should be inaccessible simply due to the lack of public transport links to the surrounding area.

All residents must have easy access to the public transport system. Regular public transport links to all of the hospitals with all regular towns in their catchment areas must also be established.

TTIP

The Workers Party is actively campaigning against the introduction of the Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP) deal between the USA and the EU. This deal is bad for farming, bad for food standards and animal welfare and bad for farmers.

A&E and Primary Care Services

There will continue to be crises in our Accident & Emergency Departments for as long as these services are under provided and underfunded and for as long as the lack of appropriate hospital beds makes it impossible for A&E staff to admit patients to anywhere other than a trolley in a corridor.

GP services play a important role in the provision of first contact primary care. The Workers Party argues that their work would be much more effective and their role much better integrated were they to become NHS employees rather than independent contractors.

The arguments that we cannot afford to fund our health service are quite simply untrue.

If we can afford to go to war in Afghanistan and Iraq then we can afford to resource and support a publicly funded, world class health service. What is lacking is the ideological commitment to that kind of service.



- Crises will continue in A&E

Workers' Rights

The Workers Party rejects a system in which low-pay and precarious employment is predominant; where workers are often expected to work "for free"; where hard won work-place rights are dismantled; where public assets are privatised for private profit; where the bargaining power of labour is diminished; where the gender pay gap continues and where restrictions are placed on trade union freedom.

Integrated Education

Shared education is not integrated education.

Section 64 of the 1989 Education Order requires the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to "*encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education*".



- Independent Commission needed to deliver Integrated Education strategy

This position was further secured by the Good Friday Agreement.

The 'Shared Education' education agenda being pursued by the Executive is nothing more than a political fig leaf to justify the continued segregation of our children into religious and political tribes and offers no alternative to those parents who want more for their children.

This is much too important an issue to be left to the Executive alone.

The Workers Party is calling for the establishment of an Independent Commission tasked with the responsibility of mapping out an Integrated Education Strategy.

The alternative will be an unchallenged assault on one of the most progressive initiatives in a generation.

Sectarianism, racism and homophobia

Sectarianism

The political institutions in Northern Ireland reflect and perpetuate sectarianism and segregation and the number of 'Peace Walls' has actually increased since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Northern Ireland has no serious plans to tackle sectarianism.

A number of 'peace walls' can be demolished immediately. There are a number located in non-residential areas, there are a number that are simply not needed. An immediate start to bringing down the walls can and must begin now.

The Workers Party reasons that sectarianism and the sectarian nature of the Assembly structures are the main reasons why we continue to have localised conflicts over parades, protests and flags.



• 'Peace' walls can and must come down

But the real discussion has to be about the type of society we live in and the kind of values it upholds.

On-going conflicts around parades and flags are caused by the politics of the past, the fanning of sectarian flames to maintain political power and the failure to create the type of society envisaged by the Good Friday Agreement.

These issues are far too important to be discussed behind closed doors by Sinn Fein and the DUP. The rest of Northern Ireland society must be part of the debate. The Workers Party is calling for the re-instatement of the Civic Forum.

That way, the views of a much wider section of the community can be heard and the self-serving schemes of the major parties can be challenged.

We still have sectarian stand offs over parades and flags because the Assembly itself is based on sectarianism and difference.

The first steps have to be ending the need for MLAs to declare themselves as either unionist or nationalist. There must be an end too to the D'Hondt method of forming the Executive and no more 'cross community' or parallel voting deals.

Changing the way the Assembly works, how it appoints the Executive and how it reaches decisions is now a urgent political priority.

If we really want to work towards an integrated peaceful society we have to take steps to make that happen.

Integrated society

We need to signal our real commitment to an integrated society with a strong and transparent programme for integrated housing, integrated education - including integrated teacher training - and a programme to start dismantling our 'peace walls' now - not in ten years time.

The alternative is to keep voting along sectarian lines and suffer the consequences.

Racism

80% of hate crimes are thought to go unreported but last year police in Northern Ireland dealt with more than 980 racist incidents: almost three every day.

One-third of all racist incidents in 2013 /14 were acts of violence against the person.

This cannot continue and the mind-set which leads the First Minister of the Assembly to say he would trust Muslims to go to the shops has to be challenged and overturned.

This is a matter for everyone in Northern Ireland to become involved in.

We need to have a robust public discussion about the type of society we want and the values it holds. But in the end the principles are very clear and very simple: Racism is wrong. It will always be wrong.

Homophobia and Transphobia

The hurt and damage inflicted by racist and sectarian attacks are no less real when the targets are member of the LGBT community.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people are full citizens of Northern Ireland, contributors to this community and have every right to expect the same level of protection, support and legal safeguards as everyone else.

The Workers Party fully supports the extension of same sex marriage legislation to Northern Ireland, is implacable opposed to the ban on the giving of blood by gay men. It is clear that there are no medical or safety grounds on which to base the biased decision.

Women

Austerity measures have a disproportionate effect on women.

They are more likely to be affected by the cuts and by the accompanying culture of zero hours contracts, less rights and more low paid, part time employment.

The cost and unavailability of affordable childcare often compounds these difficulties.



- **Women must have the right to control their own bodies**

The Workers Party is Pro-Choice and recognises that women have the right to control their own bodies, including their fertility, and to pursue all reproductive choices.

This is fundamental to any reasonable concept of gender equality. We strongly condemn those who engage in anti-choice harassment and abuse.

The limited number of women candidates in this election, the absence of women on public bodies and the low number of women in senior positions both in the public and private sector. and the is testament to the lack of progress.

Housing

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) must be maintained as the lead housing body in Northern Ireland for both the provision of new homes and as landlord of public sector tenants.

The Workers Party will campaign to maintain the NIHE, enable it to raise finance on an equal footing with others allowing it to build badly needed new homes and help create thousands of new jobs in the construction industry.

Over the years there has been a steady and gradual privatisation of the NIHE.



- The Housing Executive can help create badly need jobs

The NIHE cleared Belfast of its slum homes and replaced them with first class housing stock. Passing responsibility for house building to private interests means poorer quality homes, increased rents and shoddy and expensive repairs.

Votes at 16

At 16 years of age, young people are legally allowed to leave school and enter work or training, consent to sexual relationships, get married or enter a civil partnership and join the armed forces.

Surely, this gives them the right to a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

But there is another reason why 16 and 17 years olds should be given the vote. They are needed to help breathe some life into the democratic process here.



Since 1998 the average turn out in elections in Northern Ireland has fallen from around 70% to just over 55%. That is a massive decline in participatory democracy.

The reasons for people not voting are not too difficult to see in many cases.

The performance of the Assembly, its inability to deliver even what has already been agreed never mind new initiatives, its institutionalised sectarianism and its all class alliances quite simply turn people off.

There is an alternative

There is an opportunity in this election to reject sectarian politics in favour of class politics and working class interests.

Contrary to the myths, there is an alternative to capitalist crises and exploitation.

Corporate interests and big business sanctify the market and portray it as infallible, inevitable and irreversible.

Under this system everything is judged by the yardstick of profit. Everything is commodified and exploited. Human and natural resources, including the environment, are plundered, devastated and laid waste. Capitalism is inherently unequal, exploitative, wasteful and fundamentally undemocratic.

A better future is possible: one in which working people have real power over their own destinies and where their interests are paramount and supreme. The Workers Party is committed to that alternative, to the construction of a socialist society.



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