



The Socialist Alternative

This election is unnecessary and will solve nothing unless people use it to pass judgement on all the parties in Stormont.

The two Executive parties, in particular, have been irresponsible, arrogant and contemptuous. Returning them to power to do the same thing again makes no sense at all.

What this election does offer is a chance for people to consider a socialist alternative. An alternative to political irresponsibility, arrogance, sectarianism and the Executive's agenda of welfare cuts, lower corporation tax, zero hours contracts, attacks on workers' rights, social backwardness and the privatisation of public services.

That is the message the Workers Party will be delivering and the choice we will be presenting to the electorate.

The Assembly

For devolution to continue there needs to be a root and branch reform of the Assembly structures.

At a minimum we need to move on from mandatory coalition, abolish community designation requirements and reform the Petition of Concern ensuring that it can never be used to veto social or equality issues.

Many of the outstanding requirements of the Good Friday Agreement which have been deliberately set aside must be introduced if devolved government is to continue to function.

These include a Bill of Rights, Integrated Education, an Anti-Poverty Strategy, a viable Economic Plan and a Job Creation Strategy.

Beyond burners, flags and tribalism

During this election campaign, the Assembly parties will trade on sectarian fears and tribal instincts to maximise their votes. We have seen what that produces.

Today we have more than 100,000 children living in poverty.

The average weekly pay in Northern Ireland is lower than it was a decade ago.

We have the second highest level of workless households of all regions in the UK.

At least 15,000 people here are officially homeless.

There is a crisis in education, health and social care.

There are cutbacks to social welfare.

Funding to culture the arts and community groups has been very significantly reduced.

In every aspect of social, economic, cultural and community life working class people have been subjected to public expenditure cuts, marginalisation and exclusion.

After years of austerity imposed on the working class by capital and its able lieutenants in the Stormont Executive, working people have suffered in terms of jobs, pensions, benefits, facilities and services.

Vulnerable people with long-term sickness or disability and with great reliance on both welfare benefits and key public services, such as social care, have suffered and are suffering.

That is why we are presenting the Socialist Alternative.

Sectarianism

It has been said that Northern Ireland has no real strategy to deal with sectarianism, the scourge of our society for decade after decade.

Unfortunately, it does.

The strategy, which we are witnessing again during the course of this election, is to ramp up sectarianism, to increase communal tension, to whip up hysteria about sectarian issues, to institutionalise sectarianism in housing, education and at the heart of government, to divide workers and to distract them from their class interests.

This is the strategy to deal with sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

Austerity

Austerity has been used to make working people pay for a crisis which is not of their making.

It has been used to wage war on the public sector and to prepare large areas of it for privatisation.

It has caused immense suffering to the working class - and to women in particular.

The problem of inequality and exploitation must be tackled at its root by eradicating the current economic system and constructing a socialist society.



Anti-Poverty Strategy

It has taken a High Court ruling against the Executive, and the DUP and Sinn Fein in particular, to force them to focus on an Anti Poverty Strategy, based on objective need, almost ten years after they committed to it in the St Andrews Agreement.

Child poverty, fuel poverty and the poverty of the working poor all continue to increase. More families are forced to rely on in-work benefits, more homes are under heated and the dependency on food banks to feed children and families increases year on year.

It is impossible to divorce these harsh realities from Stormont's austerity agenda. Previous piecemeal, uncoordinated and ineffective initiatives have failed to address the underlying causes.

Only a long term, cross departmental, multi-agency strategy can begin to address and eradicate the current levels of poverty.

A positive first step would be the introduction of a realistic living wage of at least £8.50 per hour.





Failure upon Failure

The Assembly's failure to take decisive action on the economy has resulted in the erosion of our manufacturing base with the loss of thousands of skilled jobs from JTI Gallaher's, to Michelin to Bombardier.

Its failure to guarantee good employment practice and safeguard workers' rights has resulted in the retention of Zero Hours contracts.

Its failure to address pressing social issues has resulted in increased levels of poverty, an increase in fuel poverty and a growing housing crisis.

Good Friday Agreement

Its failure to implement key aspects of the Good Friday Agreement includes the failure to promote and develop integrated education.

It has also failed to deliver on infrastructure and public projects.

Planning & Development

Plans for a national stadium came to nothing and the upgrade of Casement Park has turned into a debacle.

Long promised reforms to Northern Ireland's licencing laws failed to materialise.

Major development plans for Belfast City Centre were so badly mishandled that they did not stand up to a legal challenge.

Social Policy

The Assembly's refusal to keep pace with the rest of the UK and Ireland has seen a repeated refusal to legislate for marriage equality despite the overwhelming support of the people of Northern Ireland.



The Economy

Currently one person in five of working-age in Northern Ireland is living in poverty. A similar figure applies to people of pensionable age and the number of local children living in poverty is nearer to one in four.

Against this background the Assembly's 'rebalancing' of the Northern Ireland economy is shorthand for savage cuts to public services and the privatisation of health, education and public utilities.

We have witnessed the outworking of that particular strategy over the lifetime of the last two Assembly terms and the impact it has had on public services, community projects, workers rights and the sale of public assets.

No Engagement

While the Assembly promotes its lower Corporation Tax / FDI model on one hand, it cuts the budgets for further and higher education and training on the other. While it seeks to attract hi-tech and manufacturing investment it fails to invest in the development of a skilled workforce to deliver it and declines to upgrade and develop the local infrastructure to support it.

The current economic strategy is increasingly played out off stage. Economic rabbits are pulled out of hats at press conferences with seemingly little or no engagement with the relevant work sectors, the existing workforce or their representatives.

The Workers Party calls for the urgent creation of an Economic Forum to address these issues and centrally plan a development strategy.

EDUCATION

impacting every aspect of our lives



Our education system impacts on every aspect of our lives.

It determines the quality of our workforce, the abilities of our population, our levels of comprehension and understanding, our ability to communicate and greatly influences how we relate to each other individually and collectively.

The Workers Party stands for a publicly funded education system, free at the point of access, free of tuition fees and free of future debt.

We are completely opposed to academic selection at age 11. The next Assembly must confirm this.

We are committed to a democratic, egalitarian, secular, integrated education system including integrated teacher training.

Promoting shared education instead of integrated education is like building invisible 'peace' walls between yet another generation of our school children.

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

We see further and higher education as an investment in young people, the economy and society: not as a commodity or as a means to reclaim the public money used to bail out banks and financial institutions.

Rural Development

The Workers Party supports the initiatives being run to tackle health and safety issues and believes these programmes should be extended and enhanced.

We are calling for a moratorium on the granting of exploration licences and a full public inquiry into the background to recent licences at Woodburn and the Sperrins areas.

We seek an urgent review of rural planning policies to address the basic needs and rights of those living in the countryside .

We support the nationalisation of the electricity infrastructure so that the electricity grid can support environmentally sustainable renewable electricity.

We believe that no part of the country should be inaccessible due to the lack of public transport links to the surrounding area.

Housing

Levels of homelessness have remained at historically high levels in Northern Ireland since 2005/6.

The next Assembly should reinstate the NI Housing Executive as the lead housing agency.

Health

The principle of services publicly funded and free at the point of use is far from safe and secure.

The recent Bengoa Report while welcome must not be allowed to morph into 'Transforming Your Care'.

We must move to ,and invest in, a prevention based approach.

Primary care services can only be secured if GPs become NHS employees rather than private contractors.



The right to choose: 'Trust Women'

We recognise that women have the right to control their own bodies, including their fertility, and to pursue all reproductive choices.

We support a full programme of secular sex education for schools, free access to contraception, proper health and social care for pregnant women, the provision of appropriate, free and quality child care facilities and adequate support for single and low income parents.

We believe in a woman's right to choose and support the provision of free and safe abortion in her own country which will include practical facilities to support women seeking an abortion and quality post-abortion care.

The next Assembly should recognise a woman's right to choose and secure the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 to Northern Ireland.

No one should vote for a candidate or a party that does not trust women.

WORKERS PARTY



socialist, secular, anti-sectarian