

The Workers' Party

Ard Fheis

27th September 2014

**Communication Workers Union
Headquarters, Dublin**

An Clár

Preamble:

In January 2014 the CEC/Ard Comhairle agreed to convene An Ard Fheis in September 2014. In doing so it recognised that there was an urgent need for An Ard Fheis, there not having been one since 2010. Equally the CEC recognised that there would be difficulty organising An Ard Fheis, given the many financial and organisational demands facing the Party including impending elections North and South. The CEC also stated that the imperative for an Ard Fheis arose from the need for a national collective discussion and proposals relating to the problems of Party organisation. An Ard Fheis therefore must be one which looks to the Party itself and presents a way forward as the basis for the renewal and rebuilding of The Workers' Party as the leading Party of the Left in Ireland, a class conscious Party of the working class, capable of advancing the revolutionary struggle against Capitalism and for the building of Socialism in Ireland.

It is necessary to focus on the problems of the Party itself.

This is so for a number of reasons.

The most obvious is that since the events of 1992 the Party has not regained its position and role as the leading Party of the Left in Ireland, it has failed to recover from the trauma of that period and has suffered in terms of its lack of presence in many key centres of population around the country and in terms of its political influence and presence in society in general. Nor has it sufficiently attracted to its ranks new members which would assist the continual renewal and vibrancy of the Party. In short the Party has become stagnant and in decline as a serious political force in Irish Society North and South.

There are of course many external factors which have mitigated against the growth and development of the Party. The success of right wing parties as the dominant political force in society, the decline of politics and political discourse as a means of political change in society, the emergence of individualism as expressed by the rise of so-called independents as political representatives, the denial of the role of class within society, hostile media and of course the decline of Socialism and socialist values as a political force worldwide, but particularly in advanced Capitalist societies including Ireland.

However these alone cannot explain the failure of the Party to make significant political advances.

It is necessary also to look at ourselves, to apply self-criticism.

In particular it is necessary to examine the period since 1992 and the failure of the Party to maintain its position as a serious and credible political alternative, as a significant Party of the working class capable of advancing the interests of the working class.

There have been some attempts to do this.

An Ard Fheis of 2010 and the Commission Report of 2012 are 2 significant examples of this. The work of rebuilding the Party in Northern Ireland is another. But even when such proposals are advanced there is difficulty in implementing them. Indeed the current CEC recognised that the Clár of 2010 represented a serious basis for the renewal and growth of the Party. It equally recognised that insufficient time had been given over to discussion of those proposals and that they remain valid and the basis for the future Building of The Party. Only in Northern Ireland as there been any serious attempt to set about adopting and implementing those proposals. Likewise after the local elections in 2012 there was an extensive consultation across the membership as to the condition of the Party and what needed to be done. It should also be noted that as part of

preparations for the Ard Fheis a one day meeting was held in Party Head Office on 14th June where these issues were touched upon with 3 papers presented on the day and a valuable discussion with many contributions by Party members was had.

It is necessary therefore to return to these themes at this Ard Fheis.

There are a number of key areas which require attention.

The proposed thesis will deal with these and more in some greater detail but they are worth highlighting.

1. Ideological Clarity
2. Party Centre/Party organisation in Dublin.
3. Identity of the Party.
4. Defining Party Work and the Professionalisation of Party work.
5. Generational Change.
6. Resources.

IDEOLOGICAL CLARITY.

It is necessary to clarify the ideological position of the Party for a number of reasons. Recent years seen huge political, social and economic changes nationally and internationally. Naturally, these have huge implications for the Party programme and work. Due to the pressure the Party has been under since 1992, internal education declined and the scope of our analysis has not always kept pace with the changes around us. This Ard Fheis represents an important opportunity to reassert and clarify the nature and character of the Party, its ideology and programme, its place in the republican tradition, and our understanding of Marxism, as well as our strategy for building the socialist alternative throughout our island.

PARTY CENTRE/PARTY ORGANISATION IN DUBLIN.

A major factor in the condition of the Party has been the lack of a strong and effective Party centre. The recent opening of the new Party office should be a major assistance in this regard but the continuing difficulties in resourcing and financing a Party centre remain. Equally having a strong and effective political and organisational presence in the Dublin area is essential if we are to establish a national Party Identity and profile.

IDENTITY/PROFILE

The Party requires an identity/profile which distinguishes it from all other left and so called left forces. This means a campaign or campaigns which is associated with the Party as a Workers' Party campaign or issue.

PROFESSIONALISATION OF PARTY WORK

The way in which we do things has to change. Whether that is how we conduct campaigns, define Party membership and work, or communicate our message, it has to be effective and efficient and in keeping with the modern era and methods in which we live.

GENERATIONAL CHANGE

In order for any rebuilding or renewal of the Party to be successful it will require a whole new generation of Party personnel at all levels of the Party organisation. The Party will not be rebuilt with the existing membership alone. It requires a significant influx of new members, new layers of leadership and responsibility. That brings with it challenges and risks which we must be prepared to take.

RESOURCES

The single most debilitating and enervating issue is undoubtedly the question of finance. Without it we are powerless to act. New, imaginative and efficient ways of funding our Party work must be found.

It is clear to all that the status quo, continuing the way we are, will not work. We require new ways of doing things, acceptance of the need for change. Relying on our past record or achievements is insufficient. It alone will not succeed. Nor will reliance on past methods of work which are no longer useful.

We require a class conscious membership and a cadre of Party members who will advance the Party as a vanguard Party of the working class. There are opportunities to realise this and we have had some small but significant successes. But those opportunities will not be around for ever. We must be prepared to take risks, to proceed on the basis of a coherent class based programme of work and activity, to learn from past experience and retain the best of it. But let us recognise that we are in a new era, operating in new and changed conditions.

Organisational Proposals.

1. The Party Centre.

Central to the success of any rebuilding and renewal of the Party and in keeping with the Marxist Leninist orientation of the Party, is the existence of a strong, effective and efficient Party centre. An Ard Fheis welcomes and congratulates those involved in securing the new Party Head Office as a modern, attractive and functional Party premises. It instructs the incoming CEC/Ard Comhairle to take all steps required to secure the necessary funding to allow for required staffing needs, including the office of General Secretary, to ensure that the Head Office will act as the nucleus and engine of Party renewal, rebuilding and development of The Workers' Party as the leading party of the working class in Ireland.

2. An Ard Comhairle/CEC.

The CEC is the leading body in the Party organisation, elected by and accountable to the membership. It has a special responsibility to oversee the growth and development of the Party and the implementation of the Party Programme and Organisational proposals. The CEC must delegate areas of responsibility to individual CEC members which should include, Finance, Elections, Youth, Women, Internal Education, Campaigns/Agitations, Recruitment/New Members, International and Research and Publications.

In addition the incoming CEC is instructed to produce within 4 months a written Report to the membership outlining the steps it has taken to implement the decisions of this Ard Fheis, outstanding relevant issues from the 2010 Ard Fheis and the 2012 Commission Report, and

further that before the summer of 2015 it convene a National Meeting of Party members to report back on the same.

3. Finance and Funding the Party.

The immediate priority for the incoming CEC must be the production of a financial plan for the immediate, medium and long term financial needs of both the Party centre and the Party regionally.

4. Recruitment.

This Ard Fheis recognises the need for the Party to grow and expand in all areas of life and geographically around the country, and most significantly in the Greater Dublin area. The incoming CEC must devise a recruitment strategy which will enable and lead to a significant increase in Party membership and branches around the country. Particular attention should be paid to the lack of women and youth in the Party ranks, the potential for recruitment in the trade union movement and amongst progressive and people's organisations. Our goal must be to recruit to the Party ranks the best and most class conscious sections of society, workers and those alienated from the capitalist system. Mindful that we must retain those who do show an interest in joining the Party there must also be a structured process of inducting new members into the Party.

5. Generational Change.

Recognising that Party membership has been decreasing over the past period and mindful of the need for renewal the Ard Fheis recognises the need for generational change. There is a need for new leadership at all levels of the Party in order to maintain the Party as an active, vibrant and dynamic organisation.

6. Branches and Regions.

As a vanguard Party of the working class The Workers' Party must be active on behalf of and in defence of workers and their families. It is important that at a grassroots level, in the housing estates, the workplace the school or college, that The Workers' Party's presence is felt. Every member and every branch must be active and involved, giving leadership and direction wherever they live or work. We cannot expect and do not deserve the support of the working class unless we are seen as an integral part of their lives, defend their interests at every level and are involved at every level on their behalf.

Regions too have an important role to play in both the public and inner life of the Party. In public they must coordinate the activities of the Party in an organised fashion and provide for a cohesive and vibrant Party identity. Internally strong and effective Regions can provide a strong middle leadership, something the Party needs and a level of organisation where we are weak and have neglected for too long. The incoming CEC must pay particular attention to the work of all Regions but none more so than the Greater Dublin area because Dublin determines so much of the national identity of the Party itself. Therefore in the coming months the CEC should assume direct responsibility for the Greater Dublin organisation.

7. Look Left Magazine.

This Ard Fheis congratulates all those involved in the production of Look Left magazine. It is by far the most positive thing the Party has done in recent years and has established itself as a credible and serious publication capable of attracting the interest and involvement of a broad left constituency. In order for it to continue and grow further, including significantly contributing to the Building of The Workers' Party, it demands the active support of all Party members and branches, including its sale and distribution. The production of a Party Theoretical and Discussion Journal is also a significant and positive development.

8. 1916 Centenary Commemoration

This Ard Fheis, recognising the importance of the 1916 commemoration, and also recognising the importance of challenging the established nationalist narrative of 1916 and the subsequent seven years, directs the incoming CEC to oversee the appointment of a committee to coordinate arrangements for the Party's commemorations of the 1916 centenary, and interventions in public debate on the meaning of the Rising.

9. National Commemoration Committee.

The Ard Fheis recognises the need to remember and commemorate significant events and individuals. The Ard Fheis also recognises that there is a need for coherence in the Party's approach to commemorations and that all commemorations to be organised efficiently and appropriately. The Ard Fheis therefore instructs the incoming CEC to establish a new National Commemoration Committee to organise and oversee all commemorations organised by the Party. The national commemoration committee shall be responsible to and shall act under the supervision of the CEC. All commemorations and commemorative activities organised or engaged in by Party members must have the express approval of the national commemoration committee.

We affirm our commitment to the following as forming the basic principles of the Party:

Ideological Position

The party is committed not simply to tinkering with or merely challenging the ‘excesses’ of capitalism in all of its modern modes of operation, nor is it seeking only to reform it. Rather, it is a party which recognises a number of fundamental realities which inform its position:

1/ that contemporary society is overwhelmingly dominated by the capitalist system of economic activity, and the political and social system reflect this dominance

2/ that there are profound inequalities manifestly present within that society

3/ that these inequalities are part of and firmly rooted in the class nature of modern society

4/ that the class nature of modern society is not in itself a ‘natural’ phenomenon but, rather, is an inevitable and unavoidable product of capitalism

5/ that this class nature is structured primarily (though not exclusively) along a basic division between those who own the means of production, and those who make its products.

6/ that it is this profoundly unequal distribution of the products of production – strictly along social class lines - that represents the fundamental basis of social inequality

7/ that it is workers and their families who receive the least share of that wealth and that it is the owners of the means of production who receive the greatest

8/ that if this fundamental inequality is to be finally resolved it can only be done so successfully by workers becoming the collective owners of the very means of production, along with the very wealth that they, and they alone, produce

These, then, represent and constitute the central and immutable core of the Party’s ideology and beliefs.

Furthermore, we note that that these inequalities do not arise out of ‘individual weaknesses’, or the ‘personal character flaws’ of those who suffer poverty and deprivation but, rather, are derived from and caused by the greed of a cynical and predatory capitalism that is an integral part of what it is and represents; that they are the inevitable, unavoidable consequences of the innately unjust essence of what capitalism ultimately represents.

We note too that possessed of that ideological view, the Party is thus determined to mount the most serious sustained challenge to capitalism that it has ever yet encountered in the history of both states on the island of Ireland. In short, that it stands unashamedly and proudly for the overthrow of all forms of capitalism and for the establishment of its arch nemesis - a democratic, secular, socialist unitary state on the island of Ireland, a Republic. A republic in which the rights of workers and their families are both paramount and supreme; where the principles of true equality are enshrined defining what it is that the Party represents; what it is that distinguishes it from virtually all other parties active on the Irish political scene, and what makes it the one party that the Irish working class can trust to lead them to ultimate victory.

The Critical Role of Theory

We also affirm the Party’s commitment to a radical, revolutionary theory of politics, and recognise that such theory is found in the Marxist-Leninist critique of capitalism and theory of socialism. In that respect we understand and accept completely the critical role that theory must play both in terms of rigorously analysing the existing capitalist system, along with informing

and guiding the actions and responses of the Party as it both defends workers from attacks, as well as works to achieve their mobilisation in order to achieve the successful removal of the fundamental injustice that is capitalism and the building of the socialist alternative.

The Materialist & Dialectical Dimensions

Furthermore, we also accept that central to the theory of Marxism-Leninism is a materialist and dialectical view of how societies are formed, how they are controlled, and, most fundamentally of all, of how they actually change and can be changed; that at its core this represents the most complete and realistic analysis of the critical dynamics of social, economic and political life available. Without such a theory to guide the everyday aspects of political activity we note that the Party would be reduced merely to reacting and responding to events and situations, and be utterly bereft of any clear and concise understanding of why it is that it takes certain positions on particular issues and circumstances.

We further recognise that at the core of the materialist critique of society is a fundamental, underlying truth; it is the manner in which the social and economic world has been structured and controlled by elites and not the role of abstract ideas - that is, ideas wholly detached from material reality - that determine how wealth is used or who will actually own and control it. Ideas may indeed change the world, sometimes radically so, but it is the material world that ultimately prompts the ideas. We understand that the dominant ideas of a society reflect the material basis on which it is built.

Equally, we recognise that the dialectical view of the world is also of enormous importance. At its core the dialectic represents a recognition that the world as we know it is not something composed merely of static or 'stationary' things or objects, but form part of a complex totality that is in a condition of constant flux and flow where nothing remains the same for all time; where the material and the social worlds alike are in perpetual modes of transition; where change itself is both product and agent in a process which throws up inevitable, though sometimes surprising, consequences. Knowing this should arm the Party and its members with a supreme confidence that, in such a world of flux, the radical changes we seek are both eminently viable as well as achievable; such confidence should drive our work.

A Party of the Workers, for the Workers

We further affirm that being a party of and for the working class is the essential nature of the Party; in a society, a world, comprised of social classes and where those classes are themselves the direct and inevitable outcome of how the material world both drives and is driven by the powerful and the elites, a working class that remains passive and accepting of its subordinate position is one doomed to be dominated and exploited mercilessly.

Simultaneously, however, we note also and recognise that the history of the working class shows clearly that such passivity is not the norm, and that down the centuries and decades workers and other dominated classes have struggled valiantly, relentlessly, to throw off the shackles of slavery, indenture and bondage. Significantly, it has only been by resorting to whatever means were necessary to assert their freedom that workers, throughout the history of capitalism, have frequently and successfully been able to overthrow tyranny and despotism in the myriad forms in which it manifested itself. We also note that there have also of course been periods when either defeat has been their lot or their success has been quite limited. Nevertheless, as history again shows, such defeats can be noted more as temporary, not total experiences. Time and again, and frequently against all expectations and odds, workers have re-grouped, re-energised and have successfully rallied to win further battles with capital.

Central to such success, however, is good organisation; without the highest levels of organisation and discipline even those most highly motivated and determined to succeed can achieve little more than vainglorious defeat. This represents one of the critical lessons of history, and one which Lenin learned from bitter experience. When your class enemy has extensive resources, excellent lines of communications and is capable of mobilising and deploying the highest levels of skills and experience on their side then, for workers to be successful, they too must similarly muster all available skills and resources and deploy them intelligently, diligently and consistently. And, to ensure the maximum such application, they need to be constantly and appropriately organised. We note that only a revolutionary party can help provide the focus, the discipline, and the absolutely necessary organisation for what cannot but be a long-term, relentless campaign for the achievement of social, economic and political liberation for workers.

The Role of Strategy & Tactics

While we accept that the Party's goal is the achievement of such liberation we also recognise that only by workers' control of the means of production and the goods they produce can such liberation be realised. Just as the capitalist class will employ every known device of trickery, bribery, blackmail and cajolment, as well as outright oppression, so the Party must, in conjunction with the workers, use all of its skills too in order to lead the necessary counter attacks. What this means in real time is the development of a long-term strategy for success coupled with the recognition of an equal necessity to employ short-term tactics where and when appropriate, tactics that will be essential for the success of that strategy in the long-term. In short, it means that while the Party must remain absolutely committed to the long-term strategy of mobilising workers toward the ultimate goal of gaining control over their lives and liberties, it must also remain eternally conscious of and alert to the constant need to frequently adjust such tactics according to the demands of each situation which it and the workers find themselves; to remain always alert to the reality that for the strategy to be successful realistic and flexible tactics must also be employed.

We further note that for strategies and tactics to be real and meaningful there is also a requirement that the Party must be active in all situations where workers are being attacked and demeaned, and that its political programme is both relevant and appropriate to such situations. Ultimately this means that just as it is important to have a meaningful programme of both policies and tasks, the Party must also be organised in such a way that facilitates and enables the most effective, productive uses of the skills, abilities and determination of the members. In this context it is noted that it is absolutely essential that small, highly disciplined and organised branches are to be preferred over large groups; that such branches have clearly set out tasks and duties to perform in their respective geographical areas.

Our long-term strategy is to build class consciousness among the working class, to develop the Party into the leading party of the Left, to increase the influence of our socialist politics within communities, workplaces, trade unions, other people's organisations, and electorally, to promote democracy and equality, to see the introduction of reforms that simultaneously improve the living conditions of workers today and act as stepping stones on the road to a socialist society, to increase the role of the state in the economy, to move the political centre of gravity firmly to the left, and finally to establish a government of and for the working class that can build socialism. Our approach to any given situation must be dictated by these strategic aims. The tactics we adopt – for example standing in elections, developing alternative policies, participating in campaigns that aim to protect natural resources, defend and expand the welfare state, protest against privatisation, unfair taxation and other policies that damage the interests of the working class, promote solidarity among workers – are dictated and shaped by this strategy, and by our socialist analysis of conditions then prevailing. Our strategy and our tactics therefore reflect the link between theory and practice, and the tactics we adopt are meaningful only because of our overall strategy.

The Workers' Party and the Republican Tradition

Just as '98 was an Irish expression of the tendencies embodied in the first French Revolution, as '48 throbbed in sympathy with the democratic and social upheavals on the Continent of Europe and England, so Fenianism was a responsive throb in the Irish heart to those pulsations in the heart of the European working class which elsewhere produced the International Working Men's Association.

James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*

2014 marks 238 years since the US Declaration of Independence and 225 years since the French Revolution. The old world of monarchy, aristocracy, and state religions was shaken to its foundations by these events. The American and French Revolutions opened a new era in world history: an era where the people was declared sovereign and where liberty, equality and fraternity were proclaimed as the principles that should govern political and social relations. The Workers' Party is in a very real sense the direct product of those two truly revolutionary events.

The democratic, secular, internationalist revolutionary republicanism inaugurated by these revolutions developed over time from the demands for social justice of the Jacobins and *sans-culottes* in the 1790s to the social republicanism of the early nineteenth century to the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels, subsequently developed by Lenin and the Bolshevik party. In Ireland, the same process of development saw the revolutionary republican tradition develop through the United Irishmen, James Fintan Lalor, and James Connolly to the adoption of the simple title, the Workers' Party in 1982. Both ideologically and organisationally, that moment represented the culmination of a process that had begun two centuries before.

'Man is Born Free, and Everywhere he is in Chains': Republicanism in the Age of Revolution

Before the American and French Revolutions the term "republic" was applied to countries that were believed to be run in the interests of their people. Britain was therefore often seen as a republic because, unlike most of Europe, it had a parliament, representing the propertied, which shared power with the monarch. The Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, however, had a different view, and the origins of the modern idea of republicanism as meaning "government without a monarch" can be found in his work, *The Social Contract* (1762). Its opening lines were clear: "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." In other words, where laws are not made by the people, where the people are not equal, the people are unfree. This was a message that the American and French Revolutionaries sought to apply by abolishing monarchy, removing the influence of religious bodies over government, and instituting democratic republican forms of government.

This was also what the United Irishmen hoped to achieve in Ireland: the establishment of a democratic, secular, independent republic that would replace government by a corrupt aristocracy that did Britain's bidding with a government of the people of Ireland, serving their interests and allied to other progressive regimes, especially that of France. Their means to achieve this was to put an end to religious divisions among the people, to "unite Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter." A united people, they hoped, could overcome their aristocratic oppressors with the fraternal assistance of the revolutionary French Republic.

The initial phase of republicanism during the Age of Revolution, then, bequeathed certain fundamental principles that have defined its meaning ever since: sovereignty of the people, equality, secularism, democracy, internationalism. In Ireland, the most fundamental of all republican principles is the need to combat sectarianism with secular policies and a secular identity stressing the common needs, interests and oppression of the people. In subsequent

centuries, too many of those who called themselves republican not only ignored this but actively embraced sectarianism.

As well as principles to follow, this phase of republicanism also left harsh lessons, lessons that were learnt by revolutionary republicans committed to social justice in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although it represented the most revolutionary thought in its day, republicanism at this time excluded many from the rights of citizens, especially women, people of colour (including the slaves), and often the poor. Republicanism in the era of the French Revolution had essentially been an alliance between the revolutionary elements of the middle class and the lower orders against the aristocracy. Such an alliance, whether it was in America, France or Ireland, entailed tensions rooted in different class interests, and different attitudes. While Wolfe Tone was prepared to rely on the men of no property, other United Irishmen who were members of a radical Volunteer unit in Belfast used the threat of force to break a strike in 1793. In France, following the coup against Robespierre and the ending of the Terror, bourgeois republicans prospered while many of the sans-culottes who had been the backbone of the Revolution were abandoned by the state, and nearly starved. This tension between the egalitarian rhetoric of middle-class republicans and their rejection of economic equality and fraternity was summed up by Henry Joy McCracken: "The rich always betray the poor".

"Workers of the World, Unite!": Social Republicanism and Scientific Socialism in the Early Nineteenth Century

Faced with the gap between the ideals of republicanism and the attitudes of wealthy republicans who exploited poor republicans, social republicanism emerged as a distinct tendency in the early decades of the nineteenth century, represented by people like James Fintan Lalor in Ireland, Fergus O'Connor in Britain and Louis Blanc in France. Believing that the freedom to starve was no freedom at all, such republicans mixed a commitment to republican democracy with a belief in government intervention to raise the living standards of the poor. In effect, they were early proponents of a welfare state and nationalisation. They were the most determined to push through political reform, realising that democracy was key to advancing their aims. It was from these left-wing revolutionary republican circles that Marx, Engels and others formed the Communist League.

1848 was the crucial year for the development of social republicanism into scientific socialism. Marx and Engels published the *Communist Manifesto* that year, updating revolutionary republicanism for the age of modern capitalism. Revolutionary republicanism had always been about overturning the power of a small elite, the aristocracy, to oppress the rest of society by mobilising the power of the people against them. Through applying a dialectical materialist approach to the study of history, economics and the nature of society around them, Marx and Engels saw clearly that in modern capitalist society, it was the aristocracy of money rather than of birth that was oppressing the working class. Only the working class, they argued, could end its oppression, through developing its consciousness of its own interests and power. It needed its own political organisation to do so, a party of and for the working class. Because capitalism was a global phenomenon, workers needed to respond in kind, with proletarian internationalism confronting international capital. This was why the Communist League was an international organisation. The revolutionary themes within republicanism's theory and practice, in other words, flowered into scientific socialism.

1848 was also the year of revolutions, including the abortive rising of Young Ireland. In France, where the revolutions began, the social republicans at first formed part of the government; national workshops were introduced for unemployed workers in Paris. However, within a few months, the bourgeois republicans allied with the remnants of the old royalist regime and closed the workshops, leading to the June Days, when thousands of workers were killed by the army in

fighting in Paris. The “party of order” had drawn together all those who feared for their property, and crushed the working class. As Engels noted, these events had divided society into “two large hostile armed camps”, the bourgeoisie and proletariat. In the years that followed, the 1848 revolutions were rolled back by the forces of reaction. Many former opponents of the monarchies made their peace, and an alliance of the frightened middle class and the old ruling elite formed against the revolutionary republicanism now represented by socialism; in the decades to come, they would use nationalism to try and distract the workers from socialism.

The Young Ireland movement was formed by those who rejected the tribal politics of Daniel O’Connell, and who wanted independence not devolution within the United Kingdom. Whereas O’Connell had been a member of the government forces in 1798, the Young Irelanders consciously sought to revive the secular, separatist republicanism of the United Irish movement; it was them who turned Bodinstown into a site of political activism. Like the United Irishmen, they saw themselves as part of a wider international struggle. Mixed with their cultural nationalism so common in Europe at the time, the Young Irelanders reasserted the fundamentals of the republican tradition in Ireland, with some developing it further. James Fintan Lalor linked the national question to the social one: “Ireland her own, and all therein, from the sod to the sky. The soil of Ireland for the people of Ireland”. This was a policy that Fenians like Michael Davitt would soon seek to implement.

“The glorious harbinger of a new society”: New Departures

In 1867, the Fenians issued a proclamation declaring the establishment of the Irish Republic. The Republic was to be secular, and governed on the basis of equality. “We therefore declare that, unable longer to endure the curse of Monarchical Government, we aim at founding a Republic based on universal suffrage, which shall secure to all the intrinsic value of their labour.” With the rights of workers protected, the land would also be taken from the aristocracy and restored to the people. There was no dispute between the Irish and English working people, both of whom had the same enemy, their common exploiters. “We intend no war against the people of England—our war is against the aristocratic locusts, whether English or Irish, who have eaten the verdure of our fields—against the aristocratic leeches who drain alike our fields and theirs.” Solidarity was called for not just from the English working class, but from “Republicans of the entire world”, whose cause was the cause of the independent, secular, democratic Irish Republic. The Fenians, then, stayed loyal to the fundamental principles of republicanism and had realised the need for popular support: without it, the struggle to change the social and political conditions of the people of Ireland would be futile.

The proclamation of 1867 renders it no surprise that Fenians were involved in the International Workingmen’s Association established in 1864 (the first International), nor that Marx and Engels took a keen interest in working with them. Both fully-fledged socialists like Marx and Engels and socially-progressive republicans like the Fenians worked together to promote democratic reform and revolution democracy in the UK and across Europe. Although the International soon represented millions of members across several countries, this was an age of reaction, personified by Bismarck’s creation of a conservative unitary German state through the force of arms. The final step in that process, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, however, brought about an event that marked a new era in human history, the first workers’ government.

The defeat of the French army and capture of Napoleon III by the forces led by Prussia caused a crisis in France. While some wished to end the war as quickly as possible on terms dictated by Prussia, the socialist and republican revolutionaries of Paris looked to the successful defence of the French Revolution for inspiration. In 1792, the people of France, and especially Paris, had mobilised and helped drive the counter-revolutionary armies out of France. On 18th March 1871, the revolutionaries established the Paris Commune, modelled on the Commune dominated by the

sans-culottes in the French Revolution. This was the world's first workers' government, and was described by Marx as "the glorious harbinger of a new society". The Communards adopted the red flag as the symbol for their new government. The bourgeois republican government of Adolphe Thiers could not tolerate this threat to property, and the Commune was smashed in the "bloody week" of May, when thousands were killed by the French army. The Commune fell, but the example of the first workers' republic lived on.

One of the consequences of the Commune, and of the spread of the right to vote in the decades after 1870, was that many socialists (including Engels) changed their view of what revolution might entail. Instead of the traditional throwing up of barricades and street fighting, much more likely to fail against a modern army, they saw the electoral process as a possible route to power for the working class. Following the failure of the 1867 rising, the most class-conscious and socially-progressive Fenians also looked for a new approach. The model of a secret society plotting armed rebellion had failed once more. Instead, people like Michael Davitt decided to emphasise social agitation, in particular the land question, as the means of establishing the type of genuine popular support. This New Departure resulted in the Land War, when a mass movement forced concessions from the British government that ultimately broke the grip of the aristocracy on Irish land.

The Land League, the mass movement created by Davitt and others, succeeded because it mobilised almost the whole of society against the landlords, hit the landlords economically by withholding rent money, through use of boycotting, and because it forged an alliance with the Home Rulers in parliament, whose leading figure was Charles Stuart Parnell. In other words, it succeeded because it was strong and active socially, politically and economically, in mass organisations of the people and in the representative institutions of government. The solidarity of the people meant that government attempts to break the movement failed. It demonstrated the strength of the people *en masse* and the possibility of bring about real change through means other than violence. However, in the years that followed, Home Rule and Unionism became the overwhelmingly dominant forces in Irish politics, and the idea of a rebellion organised by a secret society once again took root among republicans.

Not only were many Home Rulers active supporters of the British Empire, they were often Catholic communalist politicians whose main aim was to secure a better deal for Catholics within the Empire, and devolution but not independence. They were thus the heirs not of Wolfe Tone but of O'Connell. These two traditions – the separatist republican and the devolutionist and often communalist – had been separate throughout the nineteenth century. For example, while the Catholic church maintained close relations with the devolutionists, republicans were excommunicated, as they were elsewhere in Europe. In the late nineteenth century, however, Home Rulers made a conscious effort to portray themselves as the heirs of the separatist tradition. They used the celebrations of the centenary of 1798 to help them do so. It was at this point, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, that Catholic nationalism began to bleed more into the organisations previously defined by their secular, democratic and internationalist ethos.

Whereas many republicans in Ireland had embraced some form of socially progressive politics, there were relatively few who had kept pace with revolutionary republicans elsewhere in Europe, who had adopted scientific socialism. By the early twentieth century, countries like France and Germany had developed mass Social Democratic parties, that is to say, Marxist parties. Of course, there were some republicans in Ireland who had embraced Marxism, with James Connolly being the leading thinker and activist among them. Connolly more than anyone exposed the attempts of the bourgeois Home Rulers to pervert the republican tradition in their own interests, and to use it to hide the reality of "the thousand economic strings ... binding them to English capitalism". Connolly was clear that true freedom meant not just an independent state,

but that power must be placed decisively in the hands of the working class so that a socialist society could be built. Hence his recognition that, “only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland.”

“All Power to the Soviets!”: War and Revolution

Connolly, like Lenin, was quite clear about what the working class needed in that fight to establish real freedom within a socialist society: state power – “we propose to conquer that political power through a working class political party”. Connolly therefore believed that the only route to a socialist republic lay in the independent political organisation of the working class, supported by economic organisation through trade unions. He was also clear how this vision of the republic differed from many others who called themselves republican. Nevertheless, he understood the importance of working with other forces for common goals, and it is this fact that explains his alliance with other progressive forces in the run up to 1916, and especially once the imperialist World War had broken out.

World War One shattered the European Social Democratic movement as the majority of the major parties betrayed the cause of workers’ unity and supported their national governments. Connolly was disgusted at this betrayal. “What then becomes of all our resolutions; all our protests of fraternisation; all our threats of general strikes; all our carefully-built machinery of internationalism; all our hopes for the future? Were they all as sound and fury, signifying nothing?” Instead of workers rushing to kill each other in the interests of kings and capitalists, he called for “a great continental uprising of the working class” to stop the war. In other words, he countered reactionary nationalism with proletarian internationalism. Lenin did the same, calling for the imperialist war to be turned into a civil war across Europe. Connolly and Lenin were among the few who stayed true to the basic socialist principle of internationalism.

Connolly’s participation in 1916 was an act born from the deepest socialist and internationalist intentions. He hoped its example would help workers across Europe return to their socialist principles, and be the spark for socialist revolution across Europe. “Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord.” His influence on the 1916 proclamation is clear. But it is also clear that the proclamation reflects the democratic and secular republicanism within Ireland that had not embraced Marxism, but that remained socially progressive. Pádraig Pearse’s *The Sovereign People*, intended as his last statement before the Rising, is a testament to this thought. He sides with Tone and Connolly on the need to rely on the men of no property, and with Lalor on the right of the Irish people to own the land as well as to form the government, and states, “Let no man be mistaken as to who will be lord in Ireland when Ireland is free. The people will be lord and master.” It was for that goal that 1916 was fought, and that is why it is commemorated annually by the Workers’ Party.

The First World War provided the conditions for 1916, and for the great October Revolution of 1917. Its inability to prosecute the war and feed its people led to the fall of Tsardom, an event of the greatest importance in itself. The decision by the government composed of the liberal bourgeoisie and their Menshevik allies to continue the imperialist war gave Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who were armed with the proper theory, practice and programme to unite the urban and rural workers, the popular support to carry out the world’s first successful socialist revolution. Thus the process that began with the American and French Revolutions, a process of liberation of the people from social and political domination by elites through the means of revolutionary republicanism, reached a new stage. The revolutionary republicanism of the earlier era had evolved into Marxism, and Lenin and the Bolsheviks had refined the theory and developed a successful practice of Marxist politics. A new type of republic, one prefigured by the Paris Commune, had been successfully born.

The Bolsheviks were enabled to seize power because of the situation of Dual Power that had existed in Russia after the overthrow of Tsardom in February 1917, where the Soviets effectively carried out some of the functions of the formal government, and exercised control over it. When the government went against the wishes of the people, a ready-made alternative already existed, capable of taking control not just of the state but also of workplaces. It was a similar strategy that rendered Ireland ungovernable, and led ultimately to the formation of the free state. The formation of an alternative power structure legitimised by election results – such as Dáil Éireann, Dáil ministries and the Dáil courts – the boycotting of official institutions, and the guerrilla campaign produced the conditions that led to the Treaty negotiations. The strategy could be successful only because it sought to gain popular support, and successfully won it. In the aftermath of the civil war, the lesson of the importance of popular support was once again forgotten by republicans as a focus on a military approach predominated, an approach that was only successfully altered under the leadership of Cathal Goulding and Tomás MacGiolla in the 1960s.

In the period 1918-21, republicanism in Ireland was more popular than at any time since the 1790s. Like the 1790s, however, there was a gap between republicanism as a developed political philosophy and the sentiments of many of those who regarded themselves as republican. As already noted, from the late nineteenth century, an increasing number of people whose attitudes were shaped more by Catholic nationalism than by republican political philosophy were calling themselves republican. This naturally increased as republicans gained many new adherents in a short space of time. With many of the more class-conscious elements of republicanism leaving to join other organisations in the 1920s and then in 1934 with the establishment of the Republican Congress, the Republican Movement became increasingly trapped by a narrow nationalism and militaristic approach that paid little or no attention to the actual conditions in which the people were living – poverty, mass unemployment, mass emigration, a society stifled by religion and sectarianism – and consequently it declined. Revolutionary republicanism, now in its fullest form scientific socialism, did not disappear. There remained those committed to it both inside and outside the Movement, but they constituted only a minority.

“The Prize is Freedom. Oppression is the Enemy. Our Weapon is the People through the Party”: The Emergence of the Workers’ Party

In its initial stages in the 1790s, republicanism in Ireland had been in the vanguard of revolution internationally. However, the proportion of republicans who were committed to the most revolutionary interpretation of republicanism compared to other countries fell across the nineteenth century, partly due to the national question, partly due to the absence of a large industrial proletariat, and partly due to the influence of religion and sectarianism. By the early 1920s, republicanism in Ireland had fallen far behind the ideological developments taking place elsewhere.

Outside of Ireland, the revolutionary republican tradition became dominated by socialism and those heavily influenced by it. To take one example, many parts of France that had been the heartlands of revolutionary republicanism since the French Revolution now became dominated by the Communist Party of France. In the colonies, Communist parties and national liberation movements heavily influenced by Marxism-Leninism took the lead in the struggle against imperialism in the great wave of decolonisation in the decades following World War II. Some of these new governments degenerated into corrupt puppet governments for their old imperial masters; some were led by Communists; and others, such as in Cuba, began as national liberation movements before embracing socialism as their goal. While their goal was a republic, these revolutionary movements used other terms to describe their politics – Communism, socialism,

national liberation – because many right-wing forces were also republican in the most basic sense of not wanting a monarchy. They needed to distinguish revolutionary from other types of republicanism.

In Ireland, attempts were made to move the Republican Movement to the left, most obviously by Peadar O'Donnell, George Gilmore, Frank Ryan and others in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This was a period when many republicans had membership of the IRA and the Communist Party. O'Donnell and others realised that they were becoming isolated, and so they embarked on a programme of social agitation, especially on the land question, with ranchers associated with the most reactionary political elements in the state a particular target. A new political project was drawn up, Saor Éire, which was explicitly socialist. However, a red scare orchestrated by the Catholic church and rival political parties saw the plan stillborn. The socialists' efforts to have the IRA declare its goal as a socialist republic failed narrowly at the 1934 army convention, and rather than re-organise and try again the next year, they left to form the Republican Congress, which initially gained some momentum, drawing support both from ex-IRA members and those in other organisations. The explicitly socialist nature of the Republican Congress famously did manage to draw some support from working-class northern Protestants, but the Congress itself split very quickly and the project rapidly fell apart. Ryan, along with many other socialist republicans, went to fight fascism in Spain before dying during World War II, while O'Donnell ended up more famous for his literary than his political activities.

Socialists remained within the ranks of the IRA, but it was not until the failure of the Border Campaign due to a lack of popular support that republicans moved decisively to the left, breaking with narrow nationalist militarism. Under the leadership of Goulding, MacGiolla and others, they studied the principles and strategies of previous generations of republicans, especially those times when revolutionary republicans in Ireland had succeeded in building mass support. Anti-sectarianism and secularism were restored to their place at the heart of republican ideology, along with a focus on fighting for democratic rights and addressing the practical concerns of the people. Connolly's notion of the re-conquest of Ireland by the people of Ireland was also embraced. So too was his realisation that only the working class could establish genuine freedom in Ireland. All this took place within the context of national liberation movements, decolonisation and the spread of socialism abroad. International revolutionary thought and practice influenced this rethink, this second New Departure. The Republican Movement declared socialism as its goal, the goal of revolutionaries everywhere.

With a clearer and more developed revolutionary ideology came to the need to re-examine strategy, tactics, and organisation. Those things that would hold the project back, such as abstentionism and militarism, were changed; in line with socialist practice elsewhere in the world, and inspired by Lenin, the decision was taken to transform the Movement into a party of and for the working class, composed of a cadre of class-conscious members steeped in the ideas and practice of revolutionary politics. Members were encouraged to become active in a range of agitation and activity, from fish-ins to trade unionism to international solidarity work with countries like Vietnam. This transformation was a gradual process that culminated in the decision to adopt the simple title, the Workers' Party at the 1982 Ard Fheis. There was no clearer way of illustrating the revolutionary socialist politics that had been developing since the 1960s. Both organisationally and ideologically, this moment represented revolutionary republicans in Ireland fully merging once more with the international revolutionary tradition, now expressed by socialism as represented by the ideas of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

The dynamics for the emergence of the Workers' Party were present in Ireland's republican tradition and Irish circumstances. In Ireland and at home, republicanism from the start had represented the interests of the people against oppressive elites. As the character of the economy changed, class relations within society changed, and a new exploiter of the people emerged to

prominence, the bourgeoisie that had once been a revolutionary force itself. Republicanism had to change to respond to these new circumstances. Socialism better described the purpose of the revolutionary struggle in the modern era, especially as the bourgeoisie often maintained its republican illusions; adopting the name of socialists meant that there could be no confusion between the two types. For our party, while the change of name in 1982 was an illustration of our unreserved adoption of class politics, it was also a symbol of the rejection of nationalism and sectarianism. Republicanism meant different things to different people, and the term could cause confusion, but the name the Workers' Party leaves no ambiguity about our politics.

The Workers' Party stands for the modern expression of the core principles of Ireland's revolutionary republican tradition: anti-sectarianism, separatism, secularism, and equality. In a word, socialism. In this we stand with our fraternal parties seeking to revolutionise society across the globe, as revolutionaries in Ireland have always done. Our tradition draws strength not from standing still, but from adapting to circumstances as they change while maintaining its core principles and aims. The circumstances in which we struggle to establish the working class in power will change, but that goal will not: a secular, socialist, unitary state on the island of Ireland – a Republic.

The Workers' Party is a revolutionary party, forged in the specific conditions of Irish society, drawing on its historical roots in anti-sectarian, secular and radical republicanism and based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism. It is the vanguard political party of the Irish working class.

Understanding Society, Understanding Change

We live in a world of change. In the course of our lives we have witnessed dramatic developments in technology, communications and scientific progress. Ireland today is very different from 20, 40, 80 or 100 years ago. A political party which wishes to establish its relevance and to advance must recognise the nature of change and its potential. To understand change it is necessary to have a worldview which explains it.

Social life, the history of society is not a matter of happenstance. We have not arrived where we are by a series of “accidents” or by the intervention of some “absolute idea” or “universal spirit”. The history of the development of society is above all the history of the development of production.

In order to live, people must have food, clothing, footwear, shelter, fuel, etc. and in order to have these material necessities, people must produce them; and in order to produce them, people must have the instruments of production by which they are produced. The production and continuous reproduction of material benefits is an indispensable precondition for the existence and development of society.

The instruments of production, the people who operate the instruments of production and carry on the production of these material values together constitute the productive forces of society.

A vital aspect of production is the relation of men and women to each other in the process of production, the relations of production. Production is social production in which people enter into mutual relations. These may be relations of co-operation and mutual assistance between people who are free from exploitation; they may be relations of domination and subordination. The main element is the ownership of the means of production.

As Marx explained: *“In the process of production, human beings work not only upon nature, but also upon one another. They produce only by working together in a specified manner and reciprocally exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations to one another, and only within these social connections and relations does their influence upon nature operate – i.e., does production take place.”*¹

Consequently, the mode of production embraces both the productive forces and the relations of production.

The main element of production relations is ownership of the means of production. Production is not static. It constantly changes and the productive forces are the more dynamic element. For example, as capitalism developed the productive forces began to grow rapidly. The basis of the capitalist socio-economic formation is the system of production relations. The superstructure is the system of political, legal, philosophical cultural, religious and ethical ideas and the corresponding institutions.

During the era of the capitalist mode of production the productive forces have changed, developed and grown. However, at the same time the essence of capitalist production relations has remained intact and remain based on private ownership and exploitation. Workers, deprived of the means of production are forced to sell their labour power. The surplus value of labour is

¹ K Marx: *Wage Labour and Capital*

appropriated by the capitalist. In these circumstances contradictions arise between the new productive forces and the old production relations. When the relations of production do not correspond to the character of the productive forces or conflict with them this gives rise to crises. Since the productive forces on one side and the maintenance of social relations on the other are inextricably linked with the interests of different classes, this conflict is manifested in class struggle.

Where the productive forces come into conflict with property relations this contradiction can only be resolved by changing the relations of production to relations based on social ownership. In turn, the change in the relations of production, which means the substitution of the new economic basis for the old one, leads to change in the entire society. Accordingly, conflict between the productive forces and the relations of production is the economic basis of social change.

In capitalist society, the working class, which is the exploited class under capitalism has a vested interest in abolishing the private ownership of the means of production and replacing it by public ownership. **The replacement of capitalist production relations with relations based on public ownership of the means of production is essential for progressive social development.**

The working class is, accordingly, the revolutionary class and the achievement of revolutionary transformation, the overthrow of the capitalist system, necessitates the existence of a revolutionary party committed to raising class consciousness among workers and advancing the principles of class struggle and a socialist vision of society.

The fundamental principle of historical materialism is that social being determines social consciousness. Social ideas do not emerge by accident but rather reflect the changes that occur in the material life of society. As Marx stated: *"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."*² Of course, that is not to say that social ideas do not have any effect on social being or the material conditions of the life of society.

The Class Character of Society

Marx identifies the various historical modes of production. Each socio-economic formation (except for the primitive-communal system) is characterised by a definite class structure and inter-class relations. The mode of production determines the course and direction of historical development. Marx, having connected the existence of classes to definite historical phases in the development of production, then elaborated the material foundations of the class division of society. Lenin described classes as "groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy."³ He stated that accordingly, the fundamental criterion by which classes are distinguished is the place they occupy in social production, and, consequently, the relation in which they stand to the means of production. Classes and class antagonism are due to the development of the productive forces. The state, far from being neutral, is as Lenin wrote, *"a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms."*⁴

Accordingly, from our perspective the driving force of modern history and social change is the struggle of classes and the conflict of their interests. Capitalist production relations are based on private ownership of the means of production. A conflict of interests is inevitable between classes in a society based on private ownership of the means of production, where class interests

² *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

³ "A Great Beginning", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p 421

⁴ V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*

are mutually antagonistic in a system based on exploitation, expropriation, inequality and oppression. Our world view permits us to analyse society, to critically examine and draw lessons from the past and to plan for the future.

Bourgeois ideology seeks to demonstrate and defend the necessity of the capitalist mode of production. As Marx stated: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas."⁵

In our Party programme adopted in May 2010 we adopted a comprehensive analysis of the creativity and dynamic of socialism and the viability and necessity of the socialist project. We recognised the theoretical and practical strengths of Marxism as a guide to action; the importance of the Great October Socialist Revolution; the valuable contribution of the experiences and achievements of building socialism in the 20th century; the necessity of confronting and defeating anti-communism, opportunism and reformism and the central importance of ideological work in generating revolutionary class consciousness among workers and advancing the prime role of class struggle in the battle for social progress. Those principles remain at the core of our work. Our era is defined by the struggle between the working class and the bourgeois class and by the necessity of the organisation of the working class as a class for itself in order to fulfil its historic role as the gravedigger of capitalism.

Our current analysis takes place at a time of deep capitalist crisis - a crisis of over-production and over-accumulation of capital.

Contemporary capitalism is monopoly capitalism, imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism. Today, a century after World War One, imperialism continues to mean war. As the old imperialist centres decline and new ones rise, inter-imperialist rivalry grows sharper. The competition for control of resources from oil to gold to water will continue to cause friction among the imperialist powers, which will use every means at their disposal to ensure these resources are deployed for private profit. It is likely to continue to produce wars, especially attacks by imperialist blocs against small but resource-rich countries. Regional but limited war among the major imperialist centres cannot be ruled out in the coming years and decades. As a century ago, the imperialists will turn to nationalism and chauvinism, including racism and religious and ethnic sectarianism, to divide and weaken the workers' movement. As a century ago, they will be aided by the betrayals of social democracy.

The EU, in common with the G8, serves the interests of big capital and the monopolies. It collaborates with the US and NATO. The attacks on social and economic conditions, the impoverishment of working people, the increased power of the monopolies is evidence of the anti-people political line of the EU and its member states. All G8 member states, with the exception of Russia and Japan are members of NATO. Japan collaborates closely with the US in its plans for the Asia-Pacific region.

And yet, in the midst of the crisis of capitalism, the profits of the war industries expand. Military expenditure increases. Most recently, the dangerous developments in Ukraine and Syria, where the hand of imperialism is clearly visible, underline the threat imperialism poses to peace. As long as capitalism exists we will live with the constant threat of war. Capitalism can offer no solutions to the problems of the working class. It is the cause of those problems.

⁵ The German Ideology

As a Party committed to the principles of Marxism-Leninism we struggle for a new society based on common ownership of the means of production, organised not for profit but for the benefit and in the interests of humanity as a whole, in harmony with the natural environment, its resources and species. Capitalism is not compatible with the sustainability of the natural environment. The relentless pursuit of profit and the accumulation of capital creates vast amounts of waste while simultaneously destroying nature and vital natural resources, polluting the environment, devastating and eliminating entire species and diminishing biodiversity. It is our task to organise workers to replace capitalist production relations with relations based on the public ownership of the means of production. A world free of poverty, inequality, exploitation, oppression and war is only possible under socialism. There is no capitalism with a human face.

We wish to build a society free from discrimination based on gender, religion, nationality or race and based on social justice, equality and equal rights, for example LGBT rights, rights for disabled people and the right of women to free and safe abortion in their own country.

We wish to build a world free from the continual threat of imperialist war and intervention. We will resist all attempts to restrict or curtail workers' rights, gains and achievements.

We explicitly reject all manifestations of bourgeois nationalism and national chauvinism.

We remain committed to the high principles of proletarian internationalism. Internationalism is a fundamental principle of the ideology and policy of the Workers' Party. This embodies the international solidarity of the workers of the world in their struggle against capitalism, for liberation from oppression and for socialism-communism best expressed in the slogan formulated by Marx and Engels: "Workers of all countries, unite!" To this end we work in active collaboration and in the spirit of solidarity and socialist internationalism with our comrades in the communist and workers' parties around the world.

We are committed to the struggle for democracy; to defend the social, economic and cultural rights of working people; to end discrimination and oppression; to build a secular socialist society in which genuine equality, social progress, real democracy and the full realisation of freedom are secured.

To achieve change we believe in the necessity of a revolutionary party, a radical party of agitation and social change, a disciplined party of struggle. All our actions must be based on a class analysis of society and an acceptance that the irreconcilable antagonism between classes is at the core of our system and is the dynamic for change. We insist that "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement".⁶ We reaffirm our commitment to the Leninist position that an organised and disciplined party forms the best class-based organisation of the working class. We recognise the need to create a cadre of disciplined, committed and ideologically clear and coherent members to awaken and raise the class-consciousness of the broad mass of workers, to suffuse them with Marxist ideas and to rally them as fighters in the struggle for workers' power and socialism. That struggle can only be advanced by creating an alliance of forces on a clear class basis, moving in an anti-monopoly, anti-capital direction. It is important in the context of alliances that we vigorously resist the concept of social consensus which denies the nature and importance of class struggle and that the party maintains its credentials as a revolutionary party of the working class. The concept of as vanguard party is not inconsistent with mass involvement and activity which are vital for success. It is essential to forge the widest links with the working class and its allies among the people, and to build class consciousness, consolidate the socialist and secular character of the Party, to struggle against opportunism and social democracy and develop revolutionary theory in the light of current

⁶ V.I. Lenin, *What is to Be Done?*

conditions. As the *Communist Manifesto* declares: "*The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.*"

The counter-revolution in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries led to an opportunist retreat from core ideological and organisational principles and the abandonment of the central significance of class struggle.

Writing over 100 years ago James Connolly stated: "*The day has passed for patching up the capitalist system; it must go.*"⁷ Socialism is the alternative, a vital prerequisite for social progress.

Democratic Centralism

The concept of democratic centralism is often misunderstood and frequently deliberately distorted by the enemies of the Party and, indeed, by many other political parties who claim to operate it. It is best summarised as democracy in decision-making, unity in action. At the time of the First International Engels was scathing of those who sought to oppose the adoption of principles which were necessary for the organisation of the struggle of the working class for the revolutionary transformation of society. Democratic centralism, properly understood, ensures both democracy and democratic life within the Party and the effective organisation and unity of the Party as an instrument of class struggle, the advanced, conscious, organised detachment of the working class. The strength of the Party derives from its theoretical position, based on its dialectical and materialist view of the world, and its ideological, political and organisational unity. A refusal to adhere to decisions adopted after democratic debate, engaging in factionalism, rejecting party discipline all weaken and destroy a party of the working class for whom the only weapon is unity and organisation based on a firm ideological foundation.

The first principle of democratic centralism is democracy. The Party is committed to the principle of strong inner-Party democracy. Members are encouraged to take part in the decision-making and activities of Party bodies to which they belong and shall have the right to freely express their views within those bodies or within any body or conference to which they are elected. Debate is conducted in a spirit of solidarity and respect. All those who accept the Party Programme, Constitution and Rules are entitled to be members of the Party. Party members cannot belong to other political parties or to political groups or political organisations whose views or positions are inimical to the policies and political position of the party. All party members have equal rights and duties. All members of the Party, who are in good-standing, have the right to take part in free and open discussions at Party meetings, to be elected to Party Committees in accordance with the Rules, and to raise any matter of legitimate concern with Party bodies up to and including the Central Executive Committee.

Democratic centralism means that all committees of the Party, from the branch level upwards through the regional committees etc., including in particular, all Party leadership bodies, shall periodically be democratically elected in accordance with the Rules⁸. From time to time, specialist or organisational bodies may, where appropriate, be appointed at the direction and under the supervision of the CEC. All Party Committees are accountable to the Party and are required to report back to the members who appointed them. In accordance with the Constitution and Rules of the Party decisions democratically arrived at by majority are binding on Party members and the decisions of the higher organs of the Party adopted democratically are binding on lower organs of the Party and Party members, subject only to the democratic decisions of the Ard Fheis which is the supreme decision-making body in the Party. Accordingly, all Party

⁸ Provided that the option of co-option is also available

members must abide by decisions taken by consensus or majority until that position is changed. While opinions may be freely voiced and considered for debate the creation of factions is not permitted.

Party organisations and members act with collective responsibility. As part of its democratic process the Party is committed to the organisational principle of a single central collective leadership directly accountable to the members, and to respect the democratic decisions of that leadership. All Party members are accountable and subject to the discipline of the Party. Criticism and self-criticism should be encouraged.

Party Audit Commission

The Party shall establish a Party Audit Commission responsible for the preservation of the party Constitution, monitoring recruitment and the composition of party membership and the finances of the Party. The Commission shall also have the power to intervene to solve difficult and complex problems where such arise. It shall also have an appellate function in relation to grievances raised by and/or disciplinary sanctions imposed against any Party member.

Party discipline is based on the acceptance of the Party Programme, Constitution and Rules. Party members who violate party discipline are subject to precautionary suspension from membership and/or disciplinary sanctions. All disciplinary sanctions can be appealed to the Audit Commission in the first instance, and then to the CEC with the Ard Fheis as the final appeal body. All disciplinary sanctions against members of the CEC shall be heard by the CEC. No sanction may be imposed without a prior hearing and a member subject to a sanction shall be entitled to be heard at the appeal stage.

Educating, Agitating, Organising: Party Work

The Workers' Party seeks to build a party composed of the most class-conscious elements among the working class and capable of effecting the creation of a democratic, secular, socialist Ireland. The party we seek to create, and the type of Ireland that we want to see, will not be built overnight. It would be nice to think that capitalism will soon collapse or that an unexpected great leap forward in socialist consciousness will soon see it overthrown, but this seems highly unlikely. Our political work must reflect our belief that Socialism is the Alternative, and be rooted in a long-term strategy of bringing about the transformation of society.

It is essential that we play an active part in political life and political debate, raising class consciousness and increasing the space for socialist politics within political life north and south. Our task is to connect with the people, engage with them, bring our politics to them but also listen to them and try to address what matters to them. Only then can we make ourselves and our politics more relevant to the working class; only then can we grow both our membership and our support and influence among workers and within our society.

The only way that we can advance the struggle to build socialism is to be active in our workplaces, our communities, our trade unions, and in other organisations of the people. We must engage in a range of campaigns that advance the goal of building a culture of democracy, secularism, equality, and solidarity. We need to work with other people and organisations on campaigns and issues of mutual interest while always maintaining our distinctive analysis based on the interests of the working class, and our distinctive identity as a party of and for the working class.

Our aim must be to push politics and society to the left, to work for the construction of socialism, and to agitate against and resist attacks on the working class and work for improvements in conditions for working people. Fighting for reforms in the here and now, while resisting assimilation into the capitalist system, and advocating that only socialism can end exploitation, will, by raising class consciousness, ease the path to the revolutionary transformation of society.

A number of key areas should be priorities for party work in the coming period, both in terms of policy development and campaigning.

Trade Unions:

Recent decades have seen rampant capitalism mount a major assault against the trade union movement and the rights of workers, and against the very idea of trade unionism. These attacks have taken place at national and international levels, from Thatcher's laws in the UK to the likes of the Laval judgment in the European Court of Justice. Union density has been falling, especially in the private sector, while, especially during the current period of cuts, the right-wing media have sought to portray workers represented by trade unions as just another vested interest group, standing in the way of necessary reform. However, north and south, trade unions remain mass organisations, and they potentially offer both a site of resistance to attacks on the working class, and a vehicle for raising class consciousness and for progressive interventions in political life.

The Workers' Party has over many decades developed strong links to the trade union movement, and a large number of our members are active trade unionists. This is as it should be. Trade unions are a vital forum for protecting and advancing the interests of the working class, both in individual workplaces and at a broader societal level. Both as individual employees and as socialists, it is important that Workers' Party members are active in trade unions, defending workers' interests and advocating for unions to take progressive positions. If we seek to lead by

example, to demonstrate that our approach can bring real benefits to workers in the here and now, and to recruit class-conscious workers, then our activity as trade union members is vital.

At the same time, we recognise that trade unions are exactly that – trade unions, with all the limitations that form of organisation entails. They are not political parties, much less revolutionary political parties, and we should not expect them to operate as such. It was not for nothing that Lenin made a clear distinction between trade union consciousness and the class consciousness of those who embrace Marxism. While it is correct that we criticise trade unions and their leaderships when they fail to live up to their responsibilities towards their members, or adopt reactionary positions or oppose the raising of class consciousness among workers, it is both futile and infantile to condemn them for not being something they were never intended to be. Equally we need to be clear that trade union consciousness is not class consciousness.

Our attitude towards trade unions and their leaders must be rooted in an objective analysis of the attitudes of their members. There have been occasions where there has been a gap between a more militant membership and leadership elements, but the idea propagated in some quarters that there is a near-permanent division between an angry and militant mass membership and a weak, cowardly and treasonous leadership is a fantasy. Part of the nature of trade unionism is that the options of negotiators are limited by what the membership is prepared to do; this has been seen, for example, in a number of recent votes in the UK where members have rejected the idea of enhanced industrial action. Like everything else, our position on trade unions must be dictated both by our principles and a hard-headed analysis of the facts.

We must also give credit where it is due. For example, the trade union movement in Northern Ireland has for decades played a vital role in opposing sectarianism and promoting peace, providing an alternative based on the common interests of all workers. More recently, it has been pivotal in organising solidarity with those targeted by racists and in organising events to oppose the war on Gaza. They have also opposed the cosy consensus among the Executive parties in the north that cutting corporation tax was the way forward. Trade unions across the island have produced economic analysis demonstrating the effects of the cuts on working class people, and their inability to stimulate economic growth, as well as providing alternative policies (of course, the Workers' Party is clear that we are not in the business of managing capitalism and that social democracy has failed working people). Trade unions have also supported a wide range of activities promoting distinctively working-class culture. The Workers' Party recognises, welcomes and supports such actions by the trade unions that defend public services and workers' living standards, and promote progressive politics.

Our aim in the coming period should be:

- to seek to strengthen the trade union movement by encouraging recruitment to it to encourage our members and supporters to become more involved in trade union activity
- to support the efforts of the trade union movement to oppose the cuts and offer an alternative; we should, within the unions, promote socialist politics and advocate socialism as the alternative
- to support trade union efforts to oppose sectarianism and racism
- to promote *LookLeft* and other Party publications within the trade union movement and deepen their ability to stimulate debate within the unions
- to engage in a positive way with those within the trade union movement looking to build a socialist alternative, to work with them, and, where possible, to recruit them to the Party.

The Workplace:

The workplace must be a centre of activity for Workers' Party members, especially if they are trade union members or representatives. People are often disenchanted with their jobs. Pay and terms and conditions have been under sustained assault in both parts of the island. For example, average wages in Northern Ireland are almost £6,000 below the UK average, and fell in real terms by 6.9% between 2007 and 2013. Wages have been falling in real terms in the Republic since 2009, and the south is now third among the OECD countries for the number of people earning low pay. At the same time, taxes have been increasing. The rise of precarious employment reflected in measures like zero-hours contracts are designed to weaken workers' ability to secure their rights and decent pay.

Rises in productivity and in the number of hours worked for no extra pay are another common feature of modern working life, facilitated by the communications revolution. Mobile phones and email mean that companies very often expect workers to be available long after they have left the office, at weekends, or on holidays. What is portrayed as convenience is in fact increased exploitation of labour.

The decline in wages and the worsening of terms and conditions is a systemic issue stemming from the nature of capitalism and the relentless drive for profit. The discontent many feel with their work is a result of the system within which they work, which is based upon their alienation and exploitation. Workplaces offer the opportunity to connect our analysis of capitalism and the need to build a socialist alternative directly with each worker's own experience, reminding individual workers that the problems they face are those that affect all workers, and that the solution lies in the hands of workers.

It is impossible to build the socialist alternative without Workers' Party members who try to raise class consciousness at work.

The socially and economically disadvantaged and disenfranchised:

Capitalism relies on the unemployed as a reserve army of labour to drive wages down, render employment precarious, and, as the Greyhound workers of Dublin know all too well, to try and deny workers the opportunity for effective collective action. It also condemns the long-term unemployed to a life of poverty, drudgery and misery which all too often brings with it physical and mental health problems, as well as other social problems such as substance abuse and crime. Communities where mass and long-term unemployment are prevalent are neglected by bourgeois and social democratic parties, and all-too-often seen as problems to be dealt with by the coercive apparatus of the state.

Recent developments, heightened by the capitalist crisis, have brought a large increase in the number of people in precarious, low-paid work, a situation that disproportionately affects women. The state often encourages employers to create such jobs through legislation and financial incentives using the benefits system, partly to massage unemployment statistics, partly to facilitate the privatisation of public services and the super-profits of transnational corporations like G4S and Serco. The precarious nature of such work also acts as a disincentive to union organisation and to workers standing up for their rights.

The unemployed and low paid are also the least likely parts of society to vote. This makes them all the more vital a constituency for Party work. Being among those who suffer most from the capitalist system, they are among those who will benefit most from its abolition. We need to mobilise them if we are to establish working-class political power and effect the transformation of society. Obviously, we must also work for improvements in their lives within the system as it

stands, such as better job security and conditions and the creation of a better welfare state. The present is the terrain on which people can be convinced that only socialism is the alternative.

In the coming period, the Workers' Party needs to develop policies aimed at addressing the concerns and interests of the unemployed and low paid, and we need to strengthen our agitation amongst them. New materials need to be created aimed explicitly at such groups, and we must then go out into workplaces and communities to deliver them, and engage in a dialogue with as many people as possible. At all times, our addressing of specific issues must be set within the framework of our broader socialist analysis.

There are many other groups marginalised and disenfranchised in our society. For example, ethnic minorities, especially in Northern Ireland in recent times, are the victims of many types of racism, from silent discrimination to violent attacks. LGBT people continue to face daily discrimination, both from the state and within society itself. The sick and disabled have been targeted by some of the most cynical and savage cuts in both parts of our island. Disabled schoolchildren were robbed of their educational support early on in the south, while the news of four people a day in the UK dying within 6 weeks of being passed fit for work by Atos speaks volumes.

It is our duty as democrats and as socialists to fight for equal rights for marginalised and disenfranchised groups. A party with our proud record in fighting for civil rights must prioritise these issues, become more involved in them, work with those campaigning on them, and all the while seek to educate about them. The good work done in recent years in Lucan, for example, offers examples of the approach we need to take. So too does the Party's work for equality for LGBT groups in Northern Ireland. We must work to advance protection for such marginalised groups, but the conditions that breed prejudice against them stem from the economic system that depends upon keeping workers divided.

At the heart of all these issues lies the question of equality, and the creation of a culture of respect for human rights. These are central parts of our ideology, and have been core to the revolutionary tradition since the late eighteenth century. A degree of political and civil equality ought to be realisable even within the confines of the current system. We must challenge specific instances of injustice and oppression; display solidarity with those under attack; campaign for new laws and administrative practices. These struggles are not inconsistent with the class struggle and our vision to construct a socialist society. These tasks are a vital component of our work.

Women:

The position of women within Irish society remains scandalous, whether it be in the workplace, the pay packet, or in the area of reproductive rights. The tragic death of Savita Halappanavar has been the most spectacular and brutal recent illustration of this reality, but it is the daily experience of millions of Irish women. The ongoing revelation of the history of institutional abuse of women and children is another reminder of how patriarchy has dominated our society. Despite the progress made, that remains the case. Equality remains a long way off.

The Workers' Party has a record of work on women's rights that is second to none, stretching back to the prominent role of members in the foundation of the Irish feminist movement. Much of our past success was based on the fact that we were able to mobilise large numbers of women members and voters. We were able to do this because we not only offered policies stressing women's rights and interests, but because we created a culture within the Party that was welcoming towards women. A major priority is not only to agitate and educate on women's rights, but also to provide a vehicle for organising women. A strong and active women's

committee is essential, but the situation of women within society and political life is something that must permeate every aspect of Party work.

Youth and Students:

Emigration, unemployment, low-pay, addiction, and other economic and social problems that we were told were behind young people in Ireland have returned with a vengeance. The education system is increasingly run along the principles of business, and to meet its needs, rather than as a social good. That the education sector is the third largest user of zero-hours contracts in the UK (the health sector is the second) is a stark demonstration of this fact, as is the de-emphasising of critical thought in favour of “employability” and “transferable skills” – in other words, that school pupils and university students will make efficient and unquestioning employees. The island of Ireland has a young population, and capitalism is failing our young people.

Young people today grew up in a post-Soviet world. Many are led to think socialism discredited, while for others it has none of the associations produced in their elders by the anti-communist propaganda of the Cold War. We have an opportunity to present socialism for what it is: a means of analysing the world around us, understanding what is wrong with it, and pointing to how we might fix it. To make socialism attractive to young people, as with everyone else, we must make it relevant to their lives. The need to forge a strong socialist cultural identity with its own imagery, songs and practices within Irish society is of particular relevance to the campaign to convince young people to embrace socialism.

We need a vibrant Workers’ Party Youth, one that is active in schools, campuses, workplaces and communities. This means providing our young members with the political education, resources, and material they need to argue the case for socialism among their peers, and trusting them to do just that.

The Building Blocks of Socialism: Popular Participation and the Battle for Democracy:

What we are talking about when we speak about the Workers’ Party being active among the people; when we speak about the need to grow the constituency for socialist politics; when we speak about the need to build a socialist society, is the need for mobilisation. We must turn the sense among many people that something is wrong, that things could be better, that there must be an alternative into active participation in trade unions, community campaigns, political struggle, and the Workers’ Party.

When we talk about the need to build a vanguard party of and for the working class, we do not mean a small self-appointed elite. We mean a mass party of class-conscious workers who understand the need to transform society and how that transformation can be achieved, namely through the collective action of the working class to win social, economic and political power for workers. Unless we can mobilise the people, socialism cannot be built.

In 1962, the leaders of the then Republican Movement grasped that nothing can be achieved without the support and participation of the people. They also understood that the only way to gain the people’s support was to address their immediate concerns while explaining that the ultimate solution to the problems faced by the working class lay in the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by socialism. They rightly identified the struggle for democratic rights, north and south, as the means to transform not only the Movement but also to carve out a role for a revolutionary party of the working class within Irish life.

The struggle for democratic rights remains a starting point for the transformation of Irish society north and south. By taking the lead in battles for equality and democratic rights within capitalist

society, the Workers' Party can help build the road beyond it. It is workers who suffer most from discrimination, unequal rights, sectarianism, exploitation and oppression.

Fighting against the usurpation of democratic rights, whether by county managers or EU bureaucrats, serves the interests of the working class; fighting against unfair taxation, whether double taxes like water charges or tax avoidance and evasion by businesses, serves the interests of the working class; fighting for the right to be represented by an independent trade union serves the interests of the working class; fighting against bigotry and prejudice that divides the people serves the interests of the working class; fighting for reproductive rights for women serves the interests of the working class; fighting the privatisation of natural resources and state companies, and defending public services and opposing cuts serves the interests of the working class; promoting (re)nationalisation, increased state involvement in the economy, and state-supported job creation programmes serves the interests of the working class.

In other words, fighting for democratic reforms helps pave the road to revolutionary change. In mobilising the people, in increasing class consciousness, in demonstrating that there is an alternative, in showing that the ideas that make up socialism bring real benefits, the battle for democracy is also a vital part of the battle for socialism.

A small party like ours seeking to intervene on such a wide range of issues will naturally require allies, and will work as part of broad campaigns. This is essential. In working with others, we must ensure that we continue to voice our distinctive socialist analysis. Inevitably, working in very broad campaigns on things like anti-war coalitions or a European referendum means working alongside people whose politics we utterly reject. It is essential that none of our members can be seen, either as individuals or as representatives of the Workers' Party, as giving any credence to individuals or principles that run counter to our core principles and ideology, whether it be opportunism, reactionary anti-social policies, such as the "no consent, no contract" idea, with their origins in the American far right belief that individual citizens can refuse to pay taxation of any sort, or nationalism, national chauvinism or religious fundamentalism. Our enemies will attempt to tar us with the same brush, and we must completely avoid giving them the opportunity to do so as some other left groups have done.

"The Prize is Freedom. Oppression is the Enemy. Our Weapon is the People through the Party"
Tomás Mac Giolla

Our prize is great, and our task equally great. We want to build the Workers' Party into a political force capable of transforming society. There is no other means of doing this than long, hard and patient work. It requires that we approach our attempts to agitate, educate and organise from a principled perspective, but with a clear-headed analysis of circumstances as they are, and according to those circumstances. We must be an active party, intervening in the whole range of issues that affect the working class, political, social, cultural and economic. We can do this through our publications and through our activity – the propaganda of word and deed – with the goal always of raising class-consciousness and mobilising more and more people behind progressive demands that point the way towards socialism.

Our work as a party must have a clear strategy; not simply to react to events, but to help shape them, by fighting for equality and democracy at every level from a working-class perspective, and thereby to raise class consciousness and the space for our politics. In communities, trade unions, workplaces, schools, universities, and in the media, we must deliver a consistent message and rally people behind it: that socialism is the alternative.

The future is socialism – what do we mean?

‘The future is socialism’. Anyone reading this Workers’ Party slogan would be entitled to ask two questions: what do you mean by ‘socialism’ and what do you mean by the ‘future’? Is this socialist future so far distant that no-one alive is likely to see it? Or is it in any way on the horizon? Is ‘socialism’ some inevitable outworking of the contradictions of capitalism, or do we have to fight, plan and prepare for it?

There is nothing inevitable about the socialist future. The negative consequences of the capitalist economic crisis do not automatically give rise to class struggle. However, it is increasingly clear that if men and women of the present and of the future fail to bring some form of collectively owned, planned economy into being, the whole world faces a future of increasing barbarism as economic, military and ecological crises spiral out of control. Socialism is not the only possible future but the only good future will be socialist.

The socialist vision

By removing the inequality, oppression, greed and class conflict inherent in the private ownership of the means of production, and replacing it with communal ownership and the democratic control and rational use of resources, socialism will open the way to construct a society of genuine equality, where true human liberation can be achieved, and where humanity can meet its needs without exhausting and destroying the world in which we live. This is the society that the Workers’ Party seeks to build not only in Ireland, but globally, in alliance with similar forces across the world. Conditions are now favourable for setting out a socialist vision of the future but it is the task of our Party to present that vision, the vision of the socialist alternative. The Workers’ Party along with the other Communist and Workers Parties’ must continue to develop and organise around a clear vision of what a socialist future might mean.

The fundamental precondition for the construction of socialism is the transfer of state power into the hands of the working class. Without it, any progress made towards socialism will always be vulnerable to counter-attack from reactionaries serving the interests of the capitalist class. However, the Workers’ Party has never been of the opinion that everything must be done all at once, that no progress on the path to socialism can be made short of the transfer of power. Quite the contrary. We have always recognised, and we continue to recognise, the need to struggle to defend and to extend workers’ gains and achievements in the present, such as civil liberties and equal rights, trade union rights, the welfare state, the public ownership of natural resources like water, publically-provided education, state-owned companies, or the provision of quality public housing.

The road to state power for the working class begins with the development of class consciousness and unity among workers. This has proven particularly challenging in Ireland, where not only has society been traditionally dominated by rural conservatism, but also simultaneously strangled and deeply divided by religion and sectarianism. The national question has also impacted negatively on the prospects of building class consciousness, not only in dividing workers according to national allegiance but also the mentality summed up in the dictum “Labour must wait”. However, class consciousness and unity among workers can be built, as demonstrated not least by the history of our own Party.

The capitalist crisis has brought dramatic falls in spending power and drastic cuts in essential public services, while the bankers and industrial magnates are growing still richer with well-publicized assistance from the taxpayers. All this is topped by an assault on the trade union movement. This naked class war waged by the local and global bourgeoisie on the peoples of many countries, including this one, has brought a growing realisation of the class nature of power under capitalist society. This affords opportunities to us as a Workers’ Party that we

simply must take. It is becoming apparent to more people that the system itself is responsible for the common problems faced by working people. The growing popularity of perceived anti-establishment parties and the so-called independents in the Republic is proof that people are looking for a different approach. However, without a disciplined Marxist-Leninist Party organised in the working class in Ireland (and throughout the world) working people may still not believe that the socialist alternative is viable. There is a danger of pessimism, and of the growth of far-right organisations, who will scape-goat and act against immigrant workers and others. Recent spikes in sectarian confrontation in Northern Ireland also remind us how socio-economic problems can send working-class people in the wrong direction. In the past 15 years, and particularly since the onset of the recent capitalist crisis in 2008, various “leftists” outside the Marxist-Leninist tradition have sought to articulate what a “post-capitalist” world might look like and how it might come about. In essence these amount to little more than the articulation of a hopeless utopia, neglecting the class nature of society and the centrality of class struggle. Many of these ideas are based around the fallacy of a ‘market socialist’ future, and most are blatantly anti-communist, assiduously avoiding drawing any positive lessons from the lived experience of the Socialist countries. Because these ‘alternatives’ are doomed to fail we must articulate loudly and clearly the Workers’ Party’s socialist programme for the immediate and the longer term.

The struggle for socialism is in large part a battle of ideas, an ideological struggle. Building workers’ unity means convincing people that our ideas offer genuine solutions to the problems they face, and the real hope of a better future. This is not an easy struggle, when the state apparatus, all the major parties, the education system at all levels, and the capitalist media all pump out the message that there is no alternative to capitalism (and in the north, to capitalism and sectarianism), and do so with resources that dwarf those who oppose them. This makes Party communications, whether in the form of print publications, policy documents, Party websites, or through social media, all the more important. These are the means we have to articulate not simply our criticism of society as it exists, but also our vision of how things can be improved in the short term, and of the type of society we ultimately want to build.

Given the transnational nature of modern capitalism, seen, for example, in the extent to which multi-national corporations seek to threaten workers in the advanced capitalist countries with moving to countries where labour is cheaper in order to reduce them to docility, proletarian internationalism is more important than ever. We must work to ensure that workers reject nationalistic solutions that do not benefit them, but instead seek to act according to their common interests with workers in other countries. Cooperation with our fraternal parties is essential here, as is working within the trade union movement to promote greater international cooperation.

We must wage the ideological struggle at every opportunity. This is part of the importance of having a class-conscious membership. We need members who can relate everyday social, economic, cultural and political occurrences to the larger systemic causes and the necessary solutions. All members should educate themselves in the Party’s positions by keeping up to date with Party publications so that they can communicate our politics effectively.

As noted already, socialism cannot be built unless the working class possesses state power. Our aim therefore is to make the Workers’ Party a party capable of assuming state power. In modern society, this of course means fighting and winning elections, but that is only one area of the battle to take state power. We cannot win elections unless we build class-consciousness and the unity of the working class. This means agitating on a wide range of issues using a variety of means, and being active in communities, workplaces, schools and colleges. We recognise that the experience of the socialist countries of the twentieth century demonstrates that taking state power is not enough on its own to guarantee long-term success. The absence of substantive working class participation and accountability in the socialist countries – while being perfectly explicable through a Marxist analysis of the conditions those countries faced, most obviously the

threat of internal counter-revolution, capitalist encirclement, the previous experience of fascist dictatorship and the war against the Nazis, and then the threat of nuclear weapons rather than primarily due to some ideological failure – are lessons that those of us seeking to build a socialist future across the globe have learned. We have also, of course, learned what can be done through the planned economy to transform the living standards of hundreds of millions of workers.

State power, however, is not simply an end in itself – it is the means to the guarantee the successful transfer of the ownership of the means of production, and the means to direct the operation of the economy in the interests of society as a whole. It is once again essential to learn from the experience of the twentieth century here, both the positive and negative experience of the economies of the socialist countries. The Workers' Party believes that in order both to maximise the number of high-quality jobs in the present society and to prepare the ground for the transition to socialism, that the role of the state in the economy must be expanded. Despite all the propaganda to the contrary, the state is already far and away the key driver of the economy. What neo-liberalism has done is successful transfer a large amount of government spending to the private sector.

Lessons from the Soviet Experience

While the economies of the Soviet Union and many socialist countries were severely undermined by US Cold War spending it is not correct that the Soviet economy stagnated in the 1980s to the point that the only alternative was the reintroduction of a free market economy as happened in the 1990s? This is certainly the mainstream bourgeois view, but it is not true. The record shows that the Soviet planned economy did not collapse. It was dismantled through political means, as power shifted to a pro-capitalist coalition within the Communist Party bureaucracy led by Boris Yeltsin. Moreover, far from clamouring for the 'free market' the Soviet public never embraced a capitalist future. "Polling evidence from 1990-91 consistently showed only marginal support for capitalism. For example, a very large sample survey of public opinion in May 1991, conducted by a US-based firm, found only 17% of respondents favoring 'free market form of capitalism such as found in the US or Germany,' while other surveys found even smaller percentages for capitalism. Moreover, the preservation of the Soviet Union was favored by 76.4% of voters in the referendum of March 1991, a fact ignored at the time by Yeltsin and his clique and conveniently forgotten ever since by peddlers of the bourgeois view.

Prior to their demise, distribution of income in the socialist countries was relatively egalitarian. A large part of the consumption of the population was supplied free or at a nominal price, including housing, health care, education, entertainment and culture, and transportation. Full employment was also a feature of the system and the Soviet economy never went through the cycles of boom and bust which have scarred the economies of the capitalist countries. Despite some disruptions from economic reform legislation that took effect in 1988, real output and real aggregate consumption grew continuously from 1985 through the first half of 1990. The economy collapsed and chaos was unleashed with the arrival of capitalist relations in the former socialist countries after 1991 when the counter-revolution took place.

Despite severe weaknesses and problems which developed in the socialist countries – particularly in relation to the absence of substantive working class participation and control – it cannot be assumed that 'inherent flaws' of Soviet planned socialism caused the Soviet Union to fall. In the Soviet Union and the socialist countries there was a counter-revolution in which socialism was betrayed and capitalism was restored.

This Ard Fheis reiterates the Party's position that it is essential that the state intervene much more actively in the economy, not merely through stimulus, but through the development and, where necessary, the creation of state and semi-state companies and their role in the economy.

The sickening sight of yet more natural resources being handed over to private companies is an urgent reminder of the need for energy and other natural resources to be taken into state ownership. Similarly, the huge amounts of public money sunk into the banks are a reminder of the need for banking to be fully nationalised. North and south, obscene amounts of public money goes to private landlords while the state practically withdraws from the building of new housing. The abolition of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is one of the most reactionary moves seen in recent years, both in terms of government involvement in the economy and anti-sectarianism. The need for the state to secure to itself the commanding heights of the economy has never been greater, and the Workers' Party remains committed to growing the role of the state in the economy as a stepping stone to socialism.

It is increasingly clear that socialism must be eco-socialism. If planned economies are workable, then we must look to them as an answer to the serious ecological problems which derive from the growth imperative inherent in capitalism. The dangers of species extinction, destruction of marine habitats, desertification, and loss of irreplaceable water sources indicate the need for planning in the use and distribution of the social surplus, which under the current system feeds the endless accumulation at the heart of capitalism.

Socialists have historically tended to argue that the planned economy is an engine of growth but in light of current environmental degradation we may need to think again. To prevent global ecological catastrophes, the economic growth rate needs to be adjusted to take account of the pace of ecological technological progress. For this to happen, it requires an economic system where the society exercises collective and democratic control over the use of the surplus product (the part of the society's total product that is above the population's basic consumption), so that the society could collectively decide to use the surplus product not for capital accumulation, but to contribute to the population's physical and mental development and to improve the ecological system. This perspective should inform our development of the socialist vision as the Party develops future economic policy.

We know the principles upon which a future socialist society must be built – including collective ownership and democratic control of the means of production; state power in the hands of the working class and under their democratic supervision; respect for the environment; equality; from each according to his/her ability, and to each according to his/her needs – but it is impossible for us to say now exactly what it will look like, or in what exact circumstances it will come about. We can, however, identify some features that are likely to form part of the make-up of socialism, and that we should agitate for now as contributions to building towards socialism.

These include:

Public ownership and provision of the most important sectors of the economy, including banking, communications, health, education, the power supply, and natural resources, with government taking responsibility for developing the necessary infrastructure to support their use for the benefit of society as a whole and not for profit

The development of an effective mass transit model that reduces dependence upon private transport, especially cars, thus cutting pollution and improving quality of life for all

Collective ownership and central planning with the aim to promote economic development in areas where it is needed most, and ultimately to eradicate unemployment and poverty

Cooperation with other progressive countries who seek to resist the political, social and economic control of imperialism, and to build towards socialism

The aim of socialism is to construct a higher society, one where humans, both as individuals and as a species, can reach their full potential. It can do this because exploitation and oppression will be removed along with the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production. This is not some utopian dream, but is instead grounded in the materialist conception of history developed by Marx and Engels, which revealed the relationship between the mode of production and the political, social and cultural superstructure of society. With the material basis for oppression (private ownership of the means of production) gone, so too will be the basis for the class oppression that has blighted humankind for so long. In such a world, anything seems possible. It is our job as a Party to help ensure such a world is constructed by educating, agitating and organising among the working class.

It is the role of the Communist and Workers' parties to build the unity of the working class and the alliance with the peoples in struggle; to develop political and programmatic initiatives which establish a clear class identity; to set out clearly the social and political transformative project on which we are engaged – the creation of a centrally planned economy, based on workers' power in which the means of production is socialised in the interests of the workers and their allies.

The first task is to build and strengthen the Party. This requires consistent effort to recruit new comrades to the Party and intense political and ideological work to raise their level of consciousness. It also requires a high level of activity to develop and strengthen the Party organisations and to ensure that these are properly financed and resourced.

The second task is to strengthen the connection between the Party and the working class. This will require effective organs of communication (the Party press and publications, the use of the internet and social media) which reflect and highlight the day-to-day struggles and concerns of working people, and other popular strata. This will also require hard and consistent work at ground level by Party cadres, organising workers and participating in their struggles, agitations and campaigns.

Essential to each of these tasks is the importance of ideological work. Political struggle is impossible without an ideological struggle. The bourgeoisie uses its dominant position to disguise the contradictions in capitalist society through its all-pervasive ideological offensive, reinforced where necessary by the use of force. Accordingly, it is necessary to launch an ideological counter-offensive which challenges these distortions and which emphasises the importance and vitality of class struggle. Marxism-Leninism is the ideology of class struggle.

Appendix A: From 2010 Clár

Why Socialism for the 21st Century?

“The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view, the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men’s brains, not in men’s better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange.” Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*.

The history of humankind is one of steady ascent through the stages of social, economic and cultural progress. In the last century alone capitalism plunged humanity into two world wars and multiple regional conflicts killing and injuring millions, destroying the world, its resources and environment. From 1945 there has not been a year free of conflict and war and there were at least a hundred wars in the thirty years after the end of the Second World War alone.

Imperialism, which Lenin characterised as the monopoly stage of capitalism, has sought to undermine and marginalise the United Nations and international law. The US objective of achieving military control of the planet, together with NATO’s criminal acts of aggression have sought to dominate the discourse on “democracy”, “human rights” and what constitutes an appropriate system of government. NATO is an aggressive military alliance which historically is linked with imperialist war and hostility to socialism. The Lisbon Treaty emphasised the commitment of European countries in the political and military structures of NATO. The EU and NATO are inextricably intertwined.

Imperialism denies peoples the right to self-determination, including the right of peoples to use and exploit their natural wealth and resources as provided in international law. Imperialism violates the UN Charter and those principles of international law which establishes that all states enjoy sovereign equality, have equal rights and duties and are equal members of the international community, that the territorial and political independence of the state is inviolable and that each state has the right to choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems. Imperialism subjects millions to terror and war.

The driving force of modern history is the struggle between classes and the conflict of their interests. Modern capitalist society is an arena of class struggle. It is the task of workers in the class struggle to bring about the transition from capitalism to socialism and in order to do this the working class must take power into its hands. Under capitalism the contradictions between capital and labour arise from the capitalist relations of production, from the exploitation of labour by capital. The interests of the capitalist class and the working class, despite the assertions of the right-wing and social democratic parties to the contrary, are irreconcilable. Political struggles, the battle of ideas, the fight for social progress – all are waged locally, at regional level, nationally and on a global scale.

For a time, after the counter-revolution in the former socialist countries, the ideologists and apologists for capitalism declared socialism and class struggle to be obsolete and the world was opened up again for further capitalist penetration.

The peoples of the world were told there was no alternative, no such thing as society, that lower taxes would promote increased growth, that public expenditure had to be reduced (except, of course, military spending) and that competition both generally and in the financial services sector of the economy was being constrained by excessive regulation.

The “free market” ideology of Hayek, Friedman and Williamson put into practice by Reagan, Thatcher and Pinochet and eagerly pursued by transnational organisations such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO which served at the forefront of the Right’s neo-liberal capitalist agenda, and which had been exported and pushed through its “shock therapies” across the capitalist world gave rise to a new wave of neo-liberalism particularly through Clinton’s “market globalism” and Blair’s “Third Way” and the Lisbon Agenda. These developments were embraced not only by the Right but by the social democrats. The propagandists of neo-liberalism sanctified “the market” and portrayed it as infallible, inevitable and irreversible. At the same time, and consistent with the long history of imperialist aggression neo-liberal “institutionalism” led to a series of imperialist interventions into the affairs of sovereign states such as Yugoslavia, in violation of the norms and principles of international law, often on the ancient pretext of so-called humanitarian intervention.

Privatisation, the liberalisation of trade and de-regulation encouraged company mergers, acquisitions and leverage buyouts. Companies with attractive assets, including employee pension funds, were targeted and plundered. Financial speculation and speculators thrived. Workers lost their jobs. Despite the collapse of the New York Stock Market and Stock Markets around the world on “Black Monday”, 19th October 1987 regulatory oversight was resisted. The collapse was the largest one-day percentage decline in stock market history.

The private ownership of the means of production, the use of debt-credit to finance accumulation, the buying and selling of labour power are inherent characteristics of the system. Every attempt by the capitalist ruling class to reconcile these contradictions, to avert the economic cataclysms and convulsions which constantly threaten the system or to lessen their effects has failed. The crises are endemic and the structural contradictions remain.

The current crisis is no different in that respect. Capitalist accumulation reflects the concentration and centralisation of production and capital together with the growing exploitation of millions of workers throughout the world. The power of the banks and finance capital characterised by the creation of a transnational currency market with massive capital flows and increased financial speculation with its dependence on high risk financial instruments such as derivatives, futures etc. as opposed to productive investment has played a significant role in the current crisis.

The current crisis in capitalism has once again laid bare the fallacies of market economics and exposed the inherent contradictions and weaknesses within the system.

In the world of capital the means of production are in the hands of the capitalist class which judges everything by the yardstick of profit. It is inherently unequal, exploitative, wasteful and fundamentally undemocratic. It pollutes life with its concentration on consumption, competition, profit and the accumulation of capital. It turns everything, including living beings, into a commodity. It destroys the environment and plunders the earth’s natural and human resources for the benefit of the few.

Under capitalism millions are condemned to a life of poverty, drudgery and despair. It is a system based on exploitation and social discrimination. Inequality is a fundamental characteristic of capitalism. Behind a façade of prosperity millions are consigned to a life of inequality, poverty, hunger and deprivation. It is based on a world view which demands the accumulation of wealth for the few from the exploitation of the labour of the many. In its pursuit of profit it pollutes the environment, encourages child labour, exploits migrant workers and women, maximises profits through minimum wages, casts millions of workers onto the dole queues in a system where mass unemployment is regarded as a permanent feature of life, carries on murderous colonial wars, plunders the talents, mineral wealth and natural resources of the developing world, inspires militarism and war and imposes hunger, disease and ignorance around the world.

When the Indian government agreed to accept \$470 million, and no more, as compensation for the criminal Bhopal industrial disaster in December 1984, the consequences of which the people of Bhopal live with to this day, shares in Union Carbide rose by \$2. Tackling environmental issues requires more than scientific and technological solutions – it requires a fundamental transformation of the capitalist economic system and power relations across the world.

Freedom under capitalism is the freedom to pay. Under capitalism there are no citizens, just consumers. The French poet and novelist, Anatole France, encapsulated this “freedom” in his famous quotation: *“The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread”*.

The “right” to education and healthcare under capitalism is increasingly dependent on ability to pay. The once well-established ideas of a welfare state and basic social security are now openly challenged as outdated and redundant.

Global capitalism is in crisis. However, the ruling class seeks to retain its grip on power. The bourgeois parties and the social democrats in the Irish labour party believe that the system can be fixed, adjusted, reformed and restored. They still fail to accept the irrationality of “the market” and the fundamental inherent contradictions of capitalism.

In each class social formation the ideology of the ruling class predominates. In *The German Ideology* Marx wrote: *“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it ...”*

Ideology serves either to consolidate or overthrow the existing economic system. The ideological apparatus of the ruling capitalist class encompasses the institutions of the state, the bourgeois political parties, the system of education and the mass media. In circumstances where the dominant ideology of the capitalist class is not confronted in ideological battle by principled socialist forces the capacity for political organisation and resistance is weakened. As the class struggle develops antagonisms deepen and the opposing classes become more acutely aware of their class interests and acts accordingly. The ruling classes manage to maintain their dominant position only for so long as the material conditions for the establishment of a new social system have not matured. The prospects for working class hegemony are increased when conflict between the new productive forces and the old relations of production come to a head.

In these circumstances, at times of crisis in the capitalist system, the working class has a vested interest in destroying the old economic order creating the conditions for the development of a new mode of production and advancing society to a new and higher stage. Ultimately, in these conditions, the working class can only emancipate itself by abolishing capitalist relations of production and constructing a socialist society.

The threat to the social and economic conditions of workers and small farmers across the world and the escalation of imperialist war has sharpened the ideological struggle and provides new conditions for building class consciousness and preparing workers for political action. Economic globalisation, the relentless quest for markets and profit, the corporatisation of the world order, the subordination of national economies and natural resources to US interests, the continuing indebtedness of the developing world and inequitable trade relations, the ever-increasing expansion of US military bases worldwide reinforces the reality of imperialism. Within Europe, under the ideological guidance of the EU, the role of capital has been expanded and simultaneously the democratic deficit has increased.

In Preface to the Critique of Political Economy Marx wrote: “No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society. Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation”.

It is the task of the revolutionary party as the advanced, organised and class conscious vanguard of the working class to combine socialist ideology and politics with the mass movement of workers in the struggle to abolish the capitalist system and to carry out a revolutionary transformation of society.

It is only under socialism with its social ownership of the means of production and a planned economy that the development of production will be subordinated to the interests of society as a whole, that social property can be used to create the material basis for a planned and sustainable economy and that true equality can be ensured.

Under capitalism, a time of crisis presents an opportunity to alter the balance of class forces. It is vital for socialists to analyse the material changes taking place in capitalism, to examine the contradictions and to actively seek out opportunities for progressive struggle. The people are now acutely exposed to the vast differential between immense wealth and appalling misery and inequality. While the statistics of global inequality demonstrate the immense wealth and resources held by a minority while millions lack the basic necessities for life that differential is now highlighted to workers in the developed world by the current crisis. The preservation of capitalism as the dominant system on the planet poses a serious threat to humanity.

The *Sunday Times* “Rich Lists”, the glossy magazine coverage of “city moneymakers” heading for the “high life” in Switzerland to preserve financial secrecy and avoid tax, the continuing exposure of grotesque payments of bonuses to bankers, the scandalous payouts to CEOs at a time when the capitalist strategy for recovery is to drive down wages, cut public expenditure, attack the public sector and make the workers pay for the crisis in capitalism provides an opportunity to raise the class consciousness of workers. It demonstrates the contradictions and weaknesses of capitalism. It is a time to demonstrate that there is an alternative, that another world is possible – a world based on freedom and equality where the distribution of goods, services and wealth is determined by the people.

The experiences of the October Revolution of 1917 are characterised by certain features which remain of universal significance. First, the goal remains the abolition of capitalist ownership of the means and instruments of production. Second, the task is to build the hegemony of the working class. Third, the indispensable requirement is for a militant, revolutionary party of the working class. The political struggle of the working class cannot be advanced without a revolutionary party which is ready and capable of engendering the growth of political class consciousness and injecting revolutionary theory into the working class movement. As Lenin said, the working class has no other weapon in the struggle for power except organisation.

The October Revolution was a decisive break with the old world order and laid the basis for the political, social and economic liberation of humankind. It brought about a new social system which abolished private ownership of the means of production, rejected the barbarism of capital and created the conditions for the establishment of a new type of civilization throughout the world.

This is the time to present that alternative when the bankruptcy of capitalist production relations has been exposed. It is also time to expose the illusion of social democracy and its inevitable failure to humanise capitalism.

The democratic struggle is an essential component in the battle for socialism and socialist ideas. It is vital to commence the struggle by the imposition of effective controls on the movement of capital and the democratisation of control over the means of production distribution and exchange. Workers must, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, win “the battle of democracy” as a condition for establishing the political hegemony of the working class. Agitation for radical, popular democracy must constitute a fundamental practical priority. The democratisation of education, in terms of content, access and control; the democratisation of public health; the campaign for democracy at all levels of public life and in the workplace must form a necessary tactical and strategic element in the struggle to build a mass movement for social transformation and the transition to socialism and the emancipation of the working class.

Socialism is alive and creative. It is the rational social organisation of society for the benefit of the people, a real alternative to capitalism. Socialism means peace, equality, a revolution in social relations, international solidarity, a new international order, the transformation of the world.

The Cuban Revolution provides an inspiration. It is proof that socialism can be constructed and maintained even in the face of aggression. The government of Venezuela has brought about a real democratisation of society. Workers, small farmers, women and the poor who have traditionally been excluded from political life have been provided with a powerful voice. The introduction of free education, universal health care, land reform, opposition to privatisation and neo-liberalism together with the control over the country’s wealth and natural resources has brought about far-reaching change for the people. It is also important to remember and acknowledge the real achievements made in the efforts to construct socialism in the 20th Century.

We must reassert the dynamic of socialism as a viable alternative world vision. It is necessary to develop working class consciousness and organisation on a mass scale. Marxism provides us with a vital theoretical tool for interpreting the world and Lenin and the October Revolution have demonstrated how that revolutionary theory provides the basis for changing it. The ideas of the October Revolution continue to offer the prospect of change and the creation of a socialist state.

Marxism is a plan of action, not a dogma. It provides a critical analytical class-based tool for an examination of the existing capitalist mode of production but it is more than that. It sets out the basis for the transformation to a just, equal democratic society. The object of the socialist project is to rise above capitalist relations based on exploitation for profit to create a truly democratic society.

The October Revolution invested the workers’ movement with a revolutionary consciousness and objective, the function of educating, organising and mobilising the mass of the working people in the struggle against capital and the task of building a new society. The events of October 1917 demonstrated the creativity of Marxism and the potential for the enrichment and practical application of the principles of socialism and internationalism.

It remains the task of the revolutionary parties to apply those principles to present conditions in a creative manner, preserving the core values and principles of revolutionary socialism, but also encompassing the peoples’ struggles around other issues such as gender, race, the environment, peace and democracy. Our parties must be centrally involved in the progressive struggles of workers, urban and rural, women, youth and students.

Central to those struggles and consonant with the ideas of the October Revolution we must challenge the prevailing ascendancy of bourgeois ideology at all levels of political, economic, social and cultural life. It is necessary to confront and defeat hostile anti-communist propaganda

from whatever source it emanates and to stand in solidarity with Communist and Workers' parties under attack. We must actively defend the socialist project and mount a co-ordinated ideological counter-attack. The fundamentals of capitalism must be interrogated and exposed. A revolutionary socialist party must engage in a continuous analysis and critique of the political, ideological and cultural representations of capitalism.

Today workers face a choice: to continue to live with the vagaries and inequalities of a system built on exploitation and imperialist war or to construct a more advanced society based on a system which abolishes oppression and social exploitation.

The workers of Ireland and the workers of the world have not abandoned their aspiration for a better life, for a world free from exploitation, inequality, injustice and war. Workers retain the hope for a society which meets their material needs but which is constructed on principles of fairness and equality. Without the intervention of a revolutionary socialist party there is a danger that in the conflict with capital the working class movement will not go beyond trade union consciousness and demands for improved conditions within the existing capitalist system particularly when confronted with the social democrats' capitulation to and acceptance of the capitalist world view.

This task requires a disciplined and effective Workers' Party, committed to its ideology, capable of generating revolutionary class consciousness and confronting and exposing opportunism and reformism through consistent activism, propaganda and political work. The Workers' Party must consistently seek to develop and perfect the forms and methods of its activity, taking into account the information acquired from the experience of the working class, new forms of social struggle and changing processes of capital accumulation.

It is the task of a Workers' Party to build its base and consolidate its position with a view to ultimately taking state power for the working class. This is a daunting but necessary task in a country where the Left has traditionally been relatively weak. Nonetheless, that task remains and every journey begins with the first step. This requires a political party committed to constructing a socialist society and capable, ideologically and organisationally, of fulfilling that objective – a party of the most advanced activists in the workers' movement, organised around principles of equality, comradeship and democratic centralism. It must engage with and raise class consciousness in the mass organisations of the workers' movement, democratic community and peoples' organisations and other progressive social movements and it must actively participate in principled and practical solidarity with workers and Workers' and Communist parties in other countries on the principles of socialist internationalism and workers' solidarity.

It is vital to articulate an alternative, to revitalise the socialist project as a credible, and the only, model for future development. It is necessary to insist on the primacy of the working class as the agent for general emancipation, however, in the movement for democracy the revolutionary party must mobilise around progressive social demands, embrace other campaigns and social movements, campaigns for jobs, better housing, trade union campaigns, civil and human rights, women's rights, including reproductive rights, environmental protection, animal welfare, prison reform and those struggles by democrats and progressives who can be won to the socialist cause. It must be clear, however, the objective of our struggles is not to refashion or reform capitalist society but to broaden the battlefield against it with the aim of destroying capitalism. The separation of the class struggle from the struggles for democracy will weaken the prospects of winning workers' to the socialist project. It is necessary to restore the centrality of the struggle of class against class, engage in active political protest and agitation, provide ideological leadership and make the case that socialism is the alternative.