



Workers' Party Easter Commemoration, 5th April 2015

Dear Comrades and friends,

We are gathered here today, once again, to honour the lives, the memory, and the sacrifice of all those who gave their lives for Irish freedom and independence and especially those who fought in the Easter Rebellion and the subsequent War of Independence.

On this, the 99th anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916, it is appropriate to ask how the Ireland of today lives up to the hopes, dreams and expectations of the men and women who participated in the 1916 Rising and in the War of Independence. How does the Ireland of today measure up against the 1916 Proclamation or the Democratic Programme adopted by the First Dáil in 1919?

Like today, the Ireland of 100 years ago was a class-ridden society: a society of the haves and the have-nots; a society of great wealth and gut-wrenching poverty; a society of mansions and appalling slums and tenements. And on top of all of this there was the tragedy and misery of World War 1, where millions of working men from right across the continent of Europe and beyond, were killed and maimed in their millions in a battle between empires in which they had no stake.

The people and the movement that we commemorate here today did not accept that status quo. They had a vision of a new society, a better society. The Democratic Programme, adopted by the first Dáil states: *"we declare that the Nation's sovereignty extends not only to all men and women of the Nation, but to all its material possessions, the Nation's soil and all its resources, all the wealth and all the wealth-producing processes within the Nation, and with him we reaffirm that all right to private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare"*.

These were the aspirations of the men and women engaged in the life and death struggle for Irish independence. They were noble aspirations. Sadly those aspirations remain unfulfilled.

Ireland, North and South, is part of the capitalist system. The EU, which controls so much of our lives, is a capitalist construct. After the USA it is the second most powerful capitalist empire in the world today. Since the adoption of the EU Austerity Treaty three years ago every detail of government spending and income is subject to control by Brussels, which in reality means control by Berlin. More and more Boston and Berlin are merging and, if the so-called Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership - TTIP – becomes a reality then the working class on both sides of the Atlantic will suffer even more seriously from the ravages of unbridled capitalism.

A job and a home. Is this too much to ask? After 300 years of capitalism, and 99 years after the 1916 Rising it too much to ask that people can live with dignity and security? Disgracefully, the answer is Yes. Despite almost a decade of emigration at levels not seen since the hungry fifties, both North and South still have huge levels of unemployment, as well as record highs of underemployment. On top of this there are all sorts of government sponsored schemes and scams like Workfare, Jobbridge and Gateway designed to hide the real levels of structural unemployment while providing a pool of free labour to business. For those who do get work short term contracts, minimum wages, zero hour contracts and a refusal to recognise trade unions is now the norm.

There is a fightback. Workers are demanding a living wage and this demand is gaining wide support. In the USA, for example, there are campaigns in the fast food industry in over 200 cities for \$15.00 per hour and a Union. Both demands go hand in hand. In this context we salute the workers in Dunne's Stores and their trade union for their courageous stand in fighting for a living wage and union recognition. We pledge our full support and solidarity in whatever further industrial action they take in pursuit of justice.

The State sector of the economy, for many decades a centre of stable employment and genuine wealth creation, has been stripped down, carved up, and distributed to the international vulture funds and to the financial elite in this country. The litany of state enterprises which have been privatised is increasing daily. Some, like Eircom to Aer Lingus, were sold off in a blaze of publicity. Other areas, like the increasing swathes of our health and education services which have been privatised, have been disposed of by stealth and subterfuge. Even now we can see the dual process in operation. Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus are being privatised in full public view. Irish Water, on the other hand, is the Trojan Horse by which our national water and sewage services will be handed over to private profit operators. Of course this will not happen until the service is commercially profitable – we could never have a situation where capitalists had to put their hand in their own pocket for real infrastructural investment. We believe this can be stopped. The Workers' Party salutes and stands four-square behind the brave citizens and working class communities making a stand through the Boycott of water bills. This people's organisation, and it should remain that, shows that people united can have victories.

Capitalism knows no boundaries and Northern Ireland was already the victim of Thatcher economics in their original formation. Of course the end of Thatcher has not meant the end of Thatcherism as was clearly demonstrated by the recently signed Stormont House Agreement. This agreement signed and touted as progress by both the DUP and Sinn Féin, will lead to 20,000 state sector redundancies. We are not talking here about fat-cat bureaucrats. We are talking about 1,000 teachers, 1,500 classroom assistants, nurses, social workers – vital frontline staff without whom a civilised society cannot operate. And what is the payoff for Northern Ireland? A possible reduction in the rate of Corporation Tax! It is disgusting. But surely what is more disgusting is that some of the parties, North and South, who have disinherited and disenfranchised the people of this country will strut about this town today and proclaim themselves the true inheritors of 1916.

One hundred years ago the slums of Dublin rivalled those of Calcutta in their squalor, filth and misery. Fifty years ago the housing crisis and housing corruption from Dublin to Derry and from Cork to Belfast spurred both the growth of NICRA in Northern Ireland and housing action groups in Dublin, Bray, Galway and elsewhere. Now, as we approach the centenary of

the Rising, we again face a housing crisis which is spawning immense human suffering. The economic bubble of the Celtic Tiger landed thousands of families with unpayable mortgages and the bust landed them in negative equity. The new mini-bubble in house prices has in no way helped relieve the misery of these families. Quite the opposite. Now the financial vultures see it as profitable to pounce on these homes. 70,000 homes face repossession. That will put another 70,000 on the brink of homelessness and on an already existing 90,000 waiting list for non-existent social housing. The rental market has now spiralled out of control. Rents in the private rental market are back at Celtic Tiger levels while wages are at recession levels and standards far too often are at Dickensian levels. This is a housing crisis the likes of which we have not seen for 100 years.

The common feature which spans the century of housing crises is that the state has abdicated its responsibilities. The state had handed over the ownership and control of the housing to the market – in real terms to bankers, builders, speculators and local gombeens. These people and institutions are not interested in meeting a social need, in looking after families. They are interested in profit – maximum profit and minimum responsibility. And they are protected by the law, they are protected by the constitution, they are protected by the courts. As private profit triumphs over the basic rights and dignity of people how forlorn the aspiration of 1919 that: “.... *we reaffirm that all right to private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare*”.

“The state shall cherish all the children of the nation equally” is one of the most famous lines from the 1916 proclamation. The treatment of travellers by national and local government; the internment like conditions of long-term, profit oriented Direct Provision; the ongoing abuse scandals all clearly demonstrate that the Irish state has not lived up to that ideal. But what is worse is that in neither the North or the South is this aspiration seen as valid by the political elite. It is deplorable that Connolly’s statement: “The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave.” With these words, Connolly got to the core of the oppression of women in the Ireland of his day. The continuing existence of the sectarian and life-endangering Eighth Amendment to the Irish constitution and the unity of the sectarian blocs in Northern Ireland in ensuring that the UK law on abortion is not extended to the North is truly appalling and we continue to campaign strongly on this issue. We are also fully committed to campaigning for a massive YES vote in the marriage Equality Referendum on May 22nd. We have stated on many occasions that Ireland needs to move from a Theocracy to a Democracy and passing this referendum, as well as bestowing basic human rights to a specific minority within our society, will help move Ireland in a more democratic constitution.

In the period 2014 – 2016 the Party will contest 5 major elections – Local Government and Dáil elections in the South; Local Government, Westminster and Assembly elections in the North. In the present Westminster elections we are contesting five seats: three in Belfast and two outside Belfast. We know the struggle we are facing. We know the levels of ingrained sectarianism in Northern Ireland and we know that the two major parties in Northern Ireland relish and thrive on continuing sectarian division. In the key marginal seats we can see the electoral contests have been reduced to crude tribalism, to a sectarian headcount and a competition as to which sectarian bandwagon has more momentum on election-day. As an anti-sectarian party we reject this vision of society and politics and strive at all times – not just during elections – to develop real class politics. There are real economic and social issues facing the working class in Northern Ireland and in that regard we commend the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU for the success of the recent one-day National Strike against

the Stormont House Agreement. WE recognise that the recent posturing by Sinn Fein for what it is – a crude election ploy to divert attention away from their economic policy and on to dome mock SF – DUP dogfight. We all know that the day after the election count the posturing will end and the Stormont House agreement will be fully enforced in all its savagery.

In the present Westminster elections 40% of our candidates are women and 60% are first time candidates. In Dublin a new young City Councillor, Éilís Ryan has joined our ranks. Across the country branches are being revitalised and new and active people are being recruited. It is through this recruitment, through building vibrant campaigning party branches, through talking to people, through selling and distributing Party literature, through building class-unity and through inspiring hope and unity amongst people bowed down by the last eight years of economic and social depression that we achieve our goal of a socialist Ireland. And it is only through building a socialist Ireland that we can bring to full fruition the vision of Connolly; the words of the Proclamation or the resolution of the First Dáil as expressed through the Democratic Programme.

Comrades I thank you for your attention.

SlánAbhaile.