

# Workers Party

## What Really Matters?



Westminster Election Manifesto 2017

# What really matters to working people?



The Workers Party is committed to the primacy of a socialist, secular, democratic society based on principles of equality and justice.

We stand for the creation of sustainable, well paid jobs, fulfilling and dignified work in safe and healthy conditions. This is one of the key tasks of government.

We reject low-pay and precarious employment, the dismantling of work-place rights, the privatisation of public assets and restrictions on trade union freedom.

We demand a real living wage.

There is sufficient wealth and enough resources to tackle our most pressing issues. Yet the gap between the rich and working people grows relentlessly wider.

The problem is that this wealth and these resources are held in the hands of too few people and are not being used productively to create the growth and jobs we need. Income differences between top earners and those on the lowest wages are now higher than at any time since records began.

The other parties want this election to be a sectarian headcount. They want it to be about Brexit and the Border.

Of course they do because it shifts attention away from what really matters in our lives. But we believe in class politics and uniting workers

Working class people - employed, unemployed, young people and pensioners - have never been more marginalised from the major issues which effect all our lives.

A better future is possible: one in which working people have real power over their own destinies and where their interests are paramount and supreme.

The Workers Party is committed to that alternative - to the construction of a socialist society.

# Jobs & the Economy

The only substantive plan for the economy in Northern Ireland hinges on lowering corporation tax - at a cost of anywhere between a £300 and £500 million reduction in the block grant - and the compensatory rise in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) which they hope it will attract.

This tax break for big business was not a policy forced on the Executive here, but was the home grown initiative of the DUP / Sinn Fein coalition supported by all the main Assembly parties.

The Workers Party believes in economic interventionism. Elected representatives must take responsibility for, lead and coordinate a Northern Ireland wide economic development plan which at a minimum:

- addresses the major upgrading and development of our infrastructure, including a publicly owned electricity grid, takes significant steps away from our dependency on fossil fuel to energy renewables, updates our water service, reinvigorates our public housing stock and upgrades and integrates our railway and transport systems
- recognises the role and utilises the skills, experience and commitment of workers, their representatives and the broader civic society in developing, implementing and progressing a Northern Ireland Economic Development Strategy
- harnesses the experience, skills and talents of the public sector to modernise services and to develop local public enterprises.
- establishes a Northern Ireland public investment bank to fund development initiatives and infrastructure modernisation.

A fundamental pre-requisite to this approach is a recognition by the Exchequer at Westminster that Northern Ireland requires legacy and infrastructure capital funding to allow it to embark on sustained and sustainable economic growth.

That the Assembly has not embarked upon this type of public focused and financed approach to economic development is testament to its blind faith in market forces and its dogged determination to dismantle Northern Ireland's public sector.



## 'Re-balancing' the economy

We have witnessed the outworking of this particular strategy over the lifetime of the last Assembly. It has meant:

- fewer teachers in schools
- fewer bus and train services
- longer hospital waiting times
- cuts to community projects
- reduced funding for the arts
- low pay, zero hours and temporary contracts and "internships" with diminished workers' rights
- more women in low paid, part time work
- thousands of redundancies
- fewer services delivered by fewer people
- tax reductions for big businesses, and
- selling off public assets

# Health & Social Care

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



## Health Inequalities

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

*"...the absence of a whole systems approach in Northern Ireland has resulted in Health Inequalities persisting at the same level or worse for the previous ten years".*

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

The Public Health Strategy NI, Investing for Health NI and the various reviews carried out by Sir Michael Marmot , Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London, all make the crucial point that

*"...social and economic issues must be addressed to improve health standards and deal with health inequalities".*

## Compounded by Austerity

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

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

Developing a cohesive health and social care strategy, which tackles existing health inequalities and agrees a proper level of funding to meet the health and social care needs of our citizens should be a social and political priority.

We can continue to ignore our health and care needs or we can address the problem.

## Courageous debate

We need an open, transparent, and courageous debate on the type of health and social care services that are required to deliver quality health outcomes and deal with decades of inequalities.

That debate must challenge vested interests, inside and outside health and social services, and be prepared to think big.

Health can be fixed, but it requires the political will to do so .

## Care of older people

Given the option, most older people would prefer to remain in their own homes and have their care and support provided there.

That model of care is currently underdeveloped, under resourced and often misunderstood. Were it to be embraced and delivered to its full potential it would radically change the level, quality and type of care available for older people in the community.

There will however always be a need for residential and nursing care. But, nowhere is the privatisation and commodification of care more evident than in the provision of these services for older people.

Local health and social care trusts have all but withdrawn from the provision of this type of long term care and handed it over to the private sector.

It is a system developed for and driven by the need to make a profit. Should that become unviable the NHS is expected to become the safety net.

The long term care of older people is a social responsibility not a commodity.

# Mental Health Services

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

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

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

We need a minimum 30% increase in funding for Mental Health, Learning Disability and Children and Family Services and the development of service models which are considerably less dependent on hospital based delivery.



## Emergency Services & Primary Care

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

Home and community based services need to be equated to their hospital counterparts and a truly integrated culture developed. Funding, resources and the ethos of care, support and rehabilitation in the community need to be further developed and secured.

GP services play an important role in the provision of first contact primary care.

The Workers Party argues that their work would be much more effective and their role much better integrated were they to become NHS employees rather than independent contractors.

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

If we can afford to go to war in Afghanistan and Iraq then we can afford to resource and support a publicly funded, world class health service.

What is lacking is the ideological commitment to that kind of service.



Northern Ireland suicide rates more than doubled between 2005 and 2013.

The suicide rates in the most deprived areas are more than three times higher than in the least deprived areas: 24.9 per 100,000, compared to 7.6 per 100,000.

Cuts to public services, welfare reform, redundancies and a lack of opportunities will compound these problems.

Home treatment and crisis response teams need to be prioritised and resourced to maintain people in the community and support service users in their recovery. Similar services also need to be developed for pregnant women and mothers, children and young people, people with a learning disability and older people.

# Homes & Housing

It is incumbent on society to ensure access to a safe, secure, habitable, and affordable home with freedom from forced eviction.

There are serious problems in relation to the provision of public housing and levels of homelessness have remained at historically high levels in Northern Ireland since 2005/6. With mounting pressure on public housing and large scale savage attacks on benefits, there is a real danger that homelessness in Northern Ireland will rise to crisis levels.

It is already a matter of shame that in a period of a few weeks last year four people in Northern Ireland lost their lives sleeping on the streets. This is the legacy of our main political parties.



Over the years there has been a steady and gradual privatisation of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

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

It must be allowed to raise finance on an equal footing with others allowing it to build badly needed new homes and help create thousands of new jobs in the construction industry.

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

Passing responsibility for house building to private interests means poorer quality homes, increased rents and shoddy and expensive repairs.



# Workers Rights

The Workers Party rejects a system in which low-pay and precarious employment is predominant.

We oppose the economic culture in which workers are often expected to work "for free"; where hard won work-place rights are dismantled; where public assets are privatised for private profit; where the bargaining power of labour is diminished; where the gender pay gap continues and where restrictions are placed on trade union freedom.

The changing nature of the workplace from one of permanence and security to company enforced 'self employed' contracts, unpaid internships and casual hours is being delivered at the expense of workers rights.

Many agency workers for example, have no protection against unfair dismissal nor an entitlement to redundancy pay. The same is the case in the multi job 'gig' economy where workers have no rights to a living wage, pension contributions, or holiday and sick pay.

To reverse the current trends and re-secure rights in the workplace we propose

- A ban on Zero Hours contracts
- A living wage of £10 per hour
- The repeal of the Trade Union Act
- Upholding current EU-level workers' rights
- Extending workplace rights for carers
- Extending maternity pay from the current 39 weeks to a full year
- Developing dementia and disability friendly workplace strategies

# Sectarianism

The political institutions in Northern Ireland reflect and perpetuate sectarianism and segregation - the number of 'Peace Walls' has actually increased since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

Northern Ireland has no serious plans to tackle sectarianism.

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

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



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

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

These issues are far too important to be discussed behind closed doors by Sinn Fein and the DUP. The rest of Northern Ireland society must be part of the debate.



# Racism and Homophobia

## Racism

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

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

The mind-set which feeds this has to be challenged and overturned.

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

We need to have a robust public discussion about the type of society we want and the values its holds.

But in the end the principles are very clear and very simple: Racism is wrong. It will always be wrong.

## Homophobia and Transphobia

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

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

The Workers Party fully supports the extension of same sex marriage to Northern Ireland.

# The Environment

We must not only protect our environment - we must invest in it.

The Workers Party supports the development of wind generators, solar panels and other forms of renewal energy.

Co-operatives and ventures involving many stakeholders ought to be established to maximise the renewable energy potential here.

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



## Fracking

We stand firm against the use of fracking.

It is highly dangerous and we must endeavour to unite to stop the progress of fracking anywhere in Northern Ireland.

## Forestation

Northern Ireland is one of the least wooded areas in Europe. Only 7.4% of the area is under tree cover, compared to 13% of the UK as a whole.

Additional to current projects we need a re-afforestation programme to bring Northern Ireland up to current UK levels

## Rural development

The development of rural infrastructure, including public transport, is vital to sustaining rural communities, tackling poverty and isolation .



## Supporting Older People

Human rights and equality under the law should be universal guarantees and not determined by age.

However as we grow older we can begin to lose autonomy, become more vulnerable, more susceptible to pressure and more dependent on others . We can also face more obstacles to full participation in society.

For many older people abuse of their rights is a reality - particularly in a profit motivated society where older people's 'economic value' can often be questioned.

As the number of older people in society increases so does the risk of issues around access to health and social care, employment education, information . For many older people levels of vulnerability at home, in care settings and as carers themselves are daily issues.

Safeguarding and supporting people with degenerative illness such as dementia requires additional and empowering responses from society.

There are a number of immediate practical measures which we believe will contribute to older people's wellbeing , participation and involvement in society.

- Legal guarantees securing the right to access to health, care and other public services
- Retaining free travel , winter fuel payments and TV licences as universal benefits
- Securing the pension rights of women born in the 1950s



## A woman's right to choose

It is quite clear that Northern Ireland is still dominated by socially conservative voices and that these are having an adverse and traumatising effect on local women.

The Assembly does not trust women to make choices about their own bodies and their own fertility.

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

This is fundamental to any reasonable concept of gender equality in order to achieve full political, social, and economic equality with men.

We also oppose the paternalistic attitude that regards women as second class citizens incapable of making their own decisions and strongly condemn those who engage in anti-choice harassment and abuse.

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

The Workers Party believes in a woman's right to choose and supports the provision of free safe and accessible abortion in her own country which will include practical facilities to support women seeking an abortion and quality post-abortion care. We seek immediate legislation to ensure free, safe and accessible abortion in Northern Ireland".

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

## Animal Welfare

The Workers' Party has opposed the cruelty and suffering of animals bred in so called puppy and kitten farms and calls for an end to this outrageous practice.

We want tighter regulation and registration of breeding establishments, rigorous enforcement procedures and tougher sentences for those who abuse and neglect animals.

We also condemn the barbaric practices of "badger baiting" and hunting with dogs, the commercial mass production of animals in a manner which causes suffering and the abuse of animals by large commercial companies which put profits before animal welfare .

The Workers Party supports the promotion of the *Five Freedoms* adopted by the World Organisation for Animal Health and national societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

## Votes @ 16

Sixteen year olds in Northern Ireland can leave school, work full time, leave home, pay taxes, get married and join the armed services: but they can't vote in elections.

If Northern Ireland is to be a fully participative democracy the involvement, and active participation of 16 and 17 year olds is essential to that process.

Research has shown that this age group are even more likely to vote than 18-24 year olds. At a time when voter turnout continues to fall that is an encouraging sign

16 and 17 year olds in the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey have voting rights and Scotland also extend that right during the independence referendum.

Northern Ireland can and must do the same.



## Education

Northern Ireland needs a system that educates its children and refuses to segregate them on the grounds of religion, gender, or academic ability.

But most of all we need a system that is committed to ensuring that all children fulfil their full potential and that citizenship and secularism are at the heart of the education curriculum.

The Workers Party recognises the centrality of education - how it helps determine the quality of our workforce, the abilities of our population, our levels of comprehension and understanding, our ability to communicate and greatly influences how we relate to each other individually and collectively - and is committed to ensuring opportunities for lifelong learning.

Education will face a number of crucial tests after this election.

Tuition fees for third level students will almost certainly be increased significantly.

There is no shortage of models, variations or proposals for how third level education should be funded and there is no shortage of people, many of whom benefited from a debt free education themselves, who now wish to pull the ladder up behind them and turn education into a commodity.

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

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

### Integrated Education

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

The Good Friday Agreement was very clear about the Assembly's responsibility towards Integrated Education - it was to encourage and facilitate its development.

The Sinn Fein / DUP Coalition has deliberately sought to substitute and promote a 'shared' education agenda. This is little more than a political fig leaf to justify the continued segregation of our children into religious and political tribes and offers no alternative to those parents who want more for their children.



**Shared education is not integrated education.** Section 64 of the 1989 Education Order requires the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to "*encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education*".

This position was further underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

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

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

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



## Poverty Strategy

Child poverty, fuel poverty and the poverty of the working poor all continue to increase.

More families are forced to rely on in work benefits, more homes are under heated and the dependency on food banks to feed children and families increases year on year.

It is impossible to divorce these harsh realities from Stormont's austerity agenda.

Previous piece meal, uncoordinated and ineffective initiatives have failed to address the underlying causes.

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

A positive first step would be the introduction of a realistic living wage of £10.00 per hour.

## Food Waste

Given the current dependence on food banks the Workers Party is seeking an immediate introduction of legislation to require supermarkets to donate leftover products that are still safe and useable to food banks and to charities which provide for human and animal welfare.

## Irish Language

A tremendous amount of very good work has been done by language activists to develop an awareness and acceptance of Irish in everyday life.

However, it is very important to separate out the intent of linguists and Irish language enthusiasts from the narrow and divisive agenda pursued by parties like Sinn Fein in particular and the counter measures of the parties like the DUP.

The principle of an Irish Language Act has been acknowledged in the St Andrews Agreement and the UK government has recognised the role of the Irish language by signing up to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

There is no reason why an Irish Language Act should not be introduced and every reason why it should.

We need a wider language policy to address the interests of the language and Irish speakers which is free from the taint of sectarianism and which encourages common ownership of the Irish language.

## Gender Equality

Gender equality remains a major issue in our society. Women remain under-represented in politics, the media, the senior civil service and at the highest levels in workplaces.

More women than men work part-time and there is still a very significant full time gender pay gap. The highest proportion of workers on the minimum wage are women.

The impact of austerity has disproportionately adversely affected women.

There are high levels of violence against women, including domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse.

One in every three women experience some form of violence in their lifetime according to a recent United Nations report.



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