

tilt

THE IRISH LABOUR TRIBUNE

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THIS ISSUE

ELECTION 97 – THE FALLOUT

**RUAIRI QUINN, JAMES WRYNN, PAT MONTAGUE
KATHLEEN O'MEARA, EMMET STAGG AND OTHERS**

BOOK REVIEWS – THE 'CRUISER' ON BURKE WHITHER SOCIALISM?



**JIM KEMMY –
AN APPRECIATION**

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TILT is intended to provide a forum for debate and a source of information for members and supporters of the Labour Party

All articles are welcome and should be sent to the above address, typed, and submitted on disk where possible. It may be advisable to contact the editors beforehand and no guarantee of publication is given

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Editorial

WHAT HAPPENED?

John Prescott had it right at the British Labour Party Conference a couple of weeks ago. One of the reasons the British Labour Party won so well and the Tories lost so heavily was their respective unity, or in the Tory's case, the lack of it. Our own experience as a party dovetails with that of our sister party, we do best when we are united.

To cut a long story short, we all bear a collective responsibility for what happened in June. And the best way we will recover from it is together. And, in the circumstances the party has shown commendable unity since the election. But, it must continue.

This issue of TILT has been almost wholly given over to an analysis of the election. It has done so at the expense of other subjects like the Presidential election. Each individual contributor touches upon aspects of problems which when put together made up the full electoral performance. Yes, the election strategy proved disastrous, but who is to say that the alternative would have been better.

The tide was out in June. As the campaign went on it got further out. Perhaps, we should have waited until the Autumn. Those who believe that was possible seem to forget that the Fine Gael Press Office was causing election scares on an almost fortnightly basis during the spring. With so many false starts, our candidates would have been exhausted come campaign time, even if the Government managed to hang together.

And, significantly, we knew the tide was out too. Our whole electoral strategy was based on fear. A fear of standing on our own two feet because we believed that the events of 1993 would bury us. So instead of emphasising our achievements and more particularly our ambition, we emphasised our cohesiveness almost cosiness with Fine Gael and our other Government partner. They, wisely, took our ball and ran with it - like the wind.

So we were left scrapping for every vote. And, let's remember things could have been worse. The last two opinion polls before polling day showed us with considerably lower support than we ultimately achieved. Credit was due to our candidates whose hard work in many cases gave them the extra percentage point or two that made the difference between winning or losing. Others lost by the same margin.

So what are the lessons for the future? Firstly, let us be realistic. We will have bad elections again. That's the way politics is. Never again will we sacrifice our identity in the way we were forced to do on this occasion, but we, no more than anyone else, are immune from the vagaries of the public mood no matter how well we think we have performed either in Government or in opposition.

But, there is one thing we can do. If we are going to be prepare ourselves for a battle, let us do so properly. The last decade has witnessed as profound a revolution in information and communications as any other in this century. A revolution which has profound implications for how we do our business. But, arguably our organisation went backwards over the last seven years. Perhaps, not absolutely, but certainly relative to where we should be.

Tony Blair has instituted a permanent revolution within the British Labour Party. That party appears to be consuming the Government rather than the other way around. Many of us may not like where Mr Blair is leading his movement. But, the process is fundamentally important. It is now about ten years since we have taken a good look at ourselves, not as personalities but as a political movement and just as our French and British sister parties have carved out a new niche for themselves, so must we. The late eighties is not the late nineties

We have much going for us still. Fundamentally, we are honest and we are different. We are also the most modern of the three major parties. Our first task is to elect Adi Roche.

Some in the party have expressed concern that Ms Roche may not be sufficiently 'our' candidate. Opinion polls indicate underwhelming support for Adi amongst our supporters. Given her track record of anti-nuclear campaigns this is somewhat surprising. But, there also appears to be some disquiet about a woman who has made her name caring for children. In a country where a recent Health Board report has indicated alarming levels of child prostitution, this disquiet is difficult to understand.

☹️ Fine Gael

Apparently, Fine Gael were upset by the suggestion by Dick Spring some weeks ago that they should return the £180,000 they received from Ben Dunne without the knowledge or consent of the rest of the directors. The question is why? Fine Gael seem to be under the impression that the Rainbow is still alive and that Labour should be content to play what Fine Gael perceive as our traditional role as 'second fiddle' to them. To quote a phrase 'they may as well dream here as in bed'. Put simply, Fine Gael took our votes in the election. They will no doubt retort that we have nobody to blame for that fact but ourselves. Perhaps. But, even if they're right, if they think we are making the same mistake twice, they have another thing coming.

😊 Albert Reynolds

Now TILT has never been a major fan of former Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds. In fact, we are quite happy to admit that we would have enjoyed taking pot shots at him during the course of the Presidential election had Bertie not stuck the knife in and twisted it around. But, that said, we would be the first to congratulate him on the dignified manner in which he took the defeat.

Bertie has only been Taoiseach for a couple of months and already he has managed to annoy both the Haughey and Reynolds wings of the party. All very fine, as long as he stays up there but he may find himself short of friends when he gets into trouble.

When Albert has time to reflect on his fate, he may not prove to be the most loyal member of Bertie's Government. The whip may find it difficult to get Albert into vote, if he is engaged on an American lecture tour for instance.

☹️ Sinn Féin

One of the least talked about performances in the General Election was that of Sinn Féin. The election of Caoimhín Ó Caoláin could have been accompanied by the election of Martin Ferris in Kerry North and Sean Crowe in Dublin South West. Ferris's performance - he garnered 5,691 votes - in Kerry North was particularly impressive. Had Dick Spring not been the Labour candidate, it is not inconceivable that Ferris would have been elected. And all this before the second cease-fire was called. Sinn Féin now pose a considerable threat to the Left and Labour, not unlike that of the Workers Party in the 80s. And, they are ruthlessly organised, usually on a full time basis subvented by the state as Ó Caoláin's own career indicates.

☹️ Opinion Polls

The two *Irish Independent*/IMS opinion polls during the summer showed mixed fortunes for the Labour Party. Thankfully the poor result (7% in July) was surpassed by the better result in August (12%). Coming as they did during the political silly season, neither should be taken too seriously. The MRBI poll in late September confirmed the party's partial rejuvenation giving us 13% despite signs of the Roche campaign faltering. All polls reveal strong satisfaction for the Government but these figures are especially meaningless, coming as they do before the Government addressed any issue.

The second IMS poll, came poll came in two parts. The party political figures were addressed by the second half of the poll. The first half detailed the level of distrust amongst the public at large about politicians in general.

Not surprisingly, Labour, in the current climate, fared no better than any of the other parties in the poll. The irony of it is that if Fine Gael become embroiled in the planning scandals revealed in the new (third) tribunal, (and the likelihood is that they probably will) the public will once again overlook Labour's vindication on this ethical issue, and it will be a 'plague on all your houses'.

Sometimes you just cannot win.

☹️ Seanad Appointments

The appointment of the Taoiseach's nominees to the Senate passed by largely unnoticed due to the Ray Burke affair. Perhaps the only appointment of note was that of Maurice Hayes, the distinguished former Northern Ireland civil servant. TILT wishes him well. The ever-compliant PDs got their four nominations. The general consensus is that they would probably have done better by contesting the Senate election campaign. It is likely that they would have picked up two seats. Having done so, they could then have put the kosh on Bertie for three seats in his nominees. In total this would have left them with five seats overall, one more than their current total. But, that would have been rocking the FF boat. And, as we know, not rocking the boat will be the PDs major contribution to Bertie's new Model Government

Shorts 2

 **J.R. O'Rourke**

Poor old Mary O'Rourke or 'Mammy' as some of her closest friends and confidants call her. After only a wet weekend in office, J.R. O'Rourke was loudly acclaiming Ireland's first commercial oil find by Statoil off the west coast. Things were so good she claimed, that they would probably go into production by the middle of next year. But, not unlike her Government, the oil field's fortunes soon went into decline. It now looks like the move by the Fianna Fáil hillbillies to Beverly Hills has had to be suspended.

 **Mary Harney**

TILT is reluctant to embark on a policy of slagging off the PDs - it's good fun but rather easy and not necessarily electorally succesful - but some temptations cannot be resisted.

Clearly, the PDs have given up the ghost, with the possible exception of Des O'Malley for whom - as his recent Prime Time performances have indicated - the whole business is rather personal. In August, the papers reported the strong support give to beleaguered Foreign Affairs Minister Ray Burke by PDs super minister Bobby Molloy. Fair play to Bobby nevertheless for turning up. The new Tánaiste wasn't even bothered returning to Ireland for the first cabinet meeting in six weeks in late August. Sure why would she. Fianna Fáil would never do anything so underhand as attempt to slip an issue through cabinet in the absence of their junior partners. Would they?

 **From zero tolerance to zero response**

Since his assumption to the high office, the Fianna Fáil Deputy for Kerry South and Minister for Justice John O'Donoghue seems to have become Ireland's first Trappist Minister.

The erstwhile "Raging Bull" from the Kingdom was never off the radio or the television when he served on the opposition benches. He claimed that the good citizens of this country were the subject of wholesale rape, pillage and criminality, not seen since the days of Brian Boru and the Vikings.

So much for Mr O'Donoghue's widely trumpeted policy of zero tolerance. He seems to have totally abandoned his pre-election commitments, in favour of a zero response policy. Has the Minister lost his tongue or has no-one told him that there has been 13 murders (at the time of writing) since he took office in June. The Governor of Mountjoy Prison has even been called before the courts to answer for the Minister's policy of early releases. Still no sound from the Minister.

We eagerly await the Minister's belated response, if and when he makes it.

 **The Estimates Campaign**

You wouldn't know it from the media but the estimates campaign waged behind closed doors in August and September. Question? How does Charlie McCreevey make the tax cuts promised in the election campaign and pay for John O'Donoghue's extra Guards and prisons. Well he either will or he won't. If he doesn't, the new Government will default on its key and election winning promise. If he does - pay for O'Donoghue's prisons etc - and finds money for tax cuts you may rest assured that the implications for the hospital waiting lists etc. will be horrendous.

 **Tribunals**

For the last five years, Fianna Fail have been bemoaning the cost of tribunals. They were certainly more interested in the cost of the Beef Tribunal Report than they were in its findings.

1997 however, is what the Chinese might call Ireland's year of tribunals. At the time of going to press, the tally is three. But, who knows. Following Government practice, the most recent revelations in relation to passports, may lead to the establishment of yet another tribunal. Sure why not says you!

 **Loose Canons**

And while we are on the subject of potential loose canons, it is difficult to begrudge Dessie O'Malley the braod grin which adorns his face these days. There is nothing so sweet as vindication even if your party is in Government with many of those whow made your life hell in the past. He has also been reported as describing himself as the only 'self-propelled' PD. Mary Harney might not like it, but Dessie appears to be in a state of partial detachment from the rest of his party - never mind the Government.

For example, during the debate on the Cabinet Confidentiality Bill, O'Malley went as far as to chastise Fine Gael for not supporting the Labour Party amendments.

'BIG JIM'

Jim Kemmy TD 1936-1997

The history of the Irish Labour Movement has had more than its share of Big Jims. The second such Big Jim, Jim Kemmy, died in hospital in Dublin on Thursday, September 25th last.

If there is such a thing in the Irish Labour Party as 'Old Labour', Jim Kemmy was it. Despite little formal education, Jim emerged himself in the history of his native city Limerick and the lives of its working classes in particular. He was a passionate trades unionist too. He joined the Labour Party in 1963 and since then spent every minute of his working life, both inside and outside the Labour Party, pursuing the principles of the tolerant and pluralist socialism he espoused.

But, Jim had none of the nostalgia for the past that sometimes overcomes even the most gifted historian. His defence of Frank McCourt's 'Angela's Ashes' from critics who suggested its depiction of working class Limerick life was too harsh, was part and parcel of his determination not to see history re-written. For Jim, there would be no 'Limerick in the Rare Old Times'.

The Limerick city that Jim was born into in 1936 was one of the most conservative, even reactionary, towns in Ireland. Jim, himself, documented the only real pogrom against the

Jewish Community which took place in Ireland despite the attempts of others to sweep it under the carpet. His service to Judaism in Ireland was quickly acknowledged by that community soon after his death. No doubt, Jim wrote of the other famous historical happening in Limerick of this century - the Limerick Soviet - with a greater deal of pleasure and pride. Jim's final testament to his native city, the Limerick Anthology, a collection of writings by various authors on Limerick old and new, shot to the top of the best-sellers list and required almost immediately, a second print run. In the last year of his life despite the political pressure he was under, Jim worked tirelessly on his second Limerick Anthology. It was hoped that he would live long enough to see it published but unfortunately, it was not to be.

If Jim's absorption in working class life in Limerick, both past and present, made him Old Labour, he was new Labour too. He was prominent in the Anti-Apartheid struggles in the sixties and seventies; his position on Northern Ireland was far removed from the labour movement's traditional republicanism, (possibly too much so) and he supported causes like gay rights vocally.

First and foremost, Jim was a man of ideas - an open mind. An openness of mind which grew as he got older. Jim didn't resent the world changing around him, he sought to change with it. But, change consistent with his principles. He enjoyed the company of younger people and had a rare ability to be paternal but not patronising. It is no-coincidence that Jim was among the first of Labour TDs to take a running mate both in 1992 when Jan O'Sullivan nearly took a seat. In 1997 he did so again when things were tougher.

Jim and the rest of the Democratic Socialist party rejoined the Labour Party in 1991. Since then as Party Chairman, Jim's contributed hugely to the party's growth and development. It cannot have been easy to go from being a party leader to an ordinary party representative and occasionally that tension showed. But Jim's motives were never in doubt. He was greatly loved and admired. His loss is deeply felt.

"It is no-coincidence that Jim was among the first of Labour TDs to take a running mate both in 1992 when Jan O'Sullivan nearly took a seat but also in 1997 when things were tougher."



The Editors

No Disaster

Emmet Stagg puts '92/'97 in context



Emmet Stagg, Labour spokesperson on public enterprise, gives TILT a potted overview of the last five years

Election '97

The results of the 1992 General Election sent shock waves through the Irish body politic. Labour had finally made the long sought, often predicted, breakthrough. Labour were as surprised as everyone else at the outcome and our unpreparedness for the level of support we received was evidenced by the fact that there were insufficient Labour candidates to maximise the number of seats on offer from the electorate. Three and possibly five further seats could have been taken if we had candidates in place. The following extract from the proceedings of a meeting of the Organisation Committee of The Labour Party held some time before the 1992 General Election further amplifies the point: The General Secretary reported to the meeting that there were two candidates seeking to go forward in Dublin North East, and that they would have an equality of support at the selection convention. I asked was there a serious chance that either would be elected. The answer was in the negative. It was then agreed, to avoid a stalemate and a possible row to run two candidates in that constituency. Both Tommy Broughan and Sean Kenny were elected. Labour were unprepared but pleasantly surprised at the result.

It is important that Labour examine and agree on what were the ingredients of that success.

The Party had been riven with a never ending debate on the coalition issue. This sometimes developed into serious public personality clashes and tandem debates about democracy in the Party. The acceptance of the report of the commission on the issue in 1986 finally ended the debate. Energies were now directed elsewhere and to huge advantage for Labour. Members of the Militant Tendency were confronted, first in Labour Youth and then in the mainstream Party, and expelled. Policy committees were set up with all sides participating. Dick Spring took over the leadership of the opposition in the Dáil

and held that position with distinction until the '92 General Election. He was now leading a party united in a way that was unique for Labour. The media, who always have their own agenda, also began to take positive notice of Spring. He was variously and regularly described as "a modern statesman" and "serious politician", the "real leader of the opposition" and enjoyed unquestioned leadership of Labour. A new constitution and image for the party was adopted. The success in the local elections had given the party a crop of young presentable candidates, and this was coupled with the success of the Presidential campaign.

The scene was now set for a successful election campaign for Labour.

Campaigns take on a life of their own and '92 was no different. One constant however in '92 was "the Spring factor". This was so apparent in the canvass results in Kildare that the Director of Elections in that area, David Moynan and an old friend of the Party Leader, pressurised the Party Head Office to provide an additional 500 posters of the Party Leader.

In short the winning ingredients were:

- ◆ A popular Party Leader with a young dynamic image;
- ◆ Clear independent policies on a range of issues from Agriculture to Poverty;
- ◆ A string of young, hungry candidates that were already well established;
- ◆ An election manifesto that caught the public imagination.

So what was so different in 1997? We had emerged from two governments that all commentators said were successful and the economy had developed to an unexpected and unpredicted level. More people were better off than ever before.

On entering government with Fianna Fáil, *The Irish Times* and Independent Group led a campaign of vilification of Spring and Labour

Ministers. Labour were to be punished for putting Fianna Fáil back in office. This media campaign was reflected in a hostility on the ground amongst our "new supporters". On the change in government in '94 the remaining "friendlies" amongst our new supporters were outraged that we put Fine Gael and John Bruton back in office. The hostility from Fianna Fáil supporters was palpable while Fine Gael never became "friendly". The media campaign against Spring and Labour continued and most viciously pursued by the Independent Group.

Labour Ministers were always seen as hard-working and successful but as some sort of technocrats rather than as passionately implementing policies in the common good. We were so presented and did nothing effective to counter that negative image.

The party leader was no longer described as a "senior statesman" or "leading politician" but rather as someone not trusted (by Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael), as being "dour" without "humour" - an entirely negative image. Even Ruairi Quinn, who handled his Department of Finance in a classic conservative mode, to the delight of the mandarins in Finance, gained no credit for so doing. But the real spleen was reserved for Michael D. Higgins who commanded six separate articles attacking him in one issue of the *Sunday Independent*. The description of Labour Party members as "a bunch of anti-Irish bastards" in the *Sunday Independent* was a condensation of all that campaign.

While this campaign succeeded in neutralising the positive "Spring factor", Labour should also recognise that our various actions were unpopular with different sections of our supporters. Some wished that we would stay in opposition and be an even more effective opposition than before, while two other separate groups did not support our entering into Government with Fianna Fáil or with Fine Gael.

However, it was not recognised by any of these "support groups" that our very success reduced our options dramatically. We however failed to effectively communicate this to our electors and they were left with the hostile opinions of the commentators. The damage was inevitable but the damage limitation efforts were a failure.

The decision by Conference '97 proposed by the Party Leader, and supported by the present writer and all the Parliamentary Party, to campaign in the general election as part of the outgoing government and excluding any possible post-election deal with Fianna Fáil can now be seen, with the benefit of hindsight as a tactical error.

This decision excluded the possibility of campaigning directly on the policies of the party and its success and often left party

workers with the unenviable task of defending John Bruton and Fine Gael or Proinsias de Rossa and Democratic Left. The "soft" Fianna Fáil vote was no longer a possibility. In my own experience I found that Fianna Fáil supporters for whom I had worked would previously have given me a No. 1 vote before voting for "the Party" - but not any longer - they felt that we had insulted them by our decision.

How had Labour's crop of new parliamentary representatives from the '92 election fared. The majority who were very comfortable with the type of rigorous campaigning that brought them to prominence found they were now on the Government back benches where their role was to support the Government of the day rather than a campaigning role. They were effectively muzzled and while this transformation was difficult for the new TDs it was inexplicable and unexplained to their supporters. There was a heavy toll amongst their number. The balance of the new crop were appointed to Ministerial Office on their first day. They all lost their seats!

So the difference in the winning formula of '92 and the less successful one in '97 is apparent-

◆ In '92 we were carried along by the "Spring tide". In '97 the "campaign" ensured that the tide had turned.

◆ Our new candidates of '92 were punished in '97 for not being a campaigning opposition. The absence of clear and independent Labour policies in '97 marked the biggest single difference between the '92 and '97 campaigns.

◆ Our election manifesto likewise was totally overshadowed by the Programme for Government.

However the result was far from a disaster for Labour. We held 16 seats and gained one. We have four Senate places. We have a large group of young energetic, former parliamentarians who are anxious to re-enter the fray. Two of them should get their first opportunity in the by-elections. The general election could also be at a very early date. In the mean time we must make good use of the time available to us to re-group and re-establish our independence. We must clearly state our reason for existence and convince others of our case.

Emmet Stagg is the new Labour Party spokesperson on Public Enterprise and the TD for Kildare North

"On entering Government with Fianna Fáil, The Irish Times and Independent Group led a campaign of vilification of Spring and Labour Ministers. Labour were to be punished for putting Fianna Fáil back in office. This media campaign was reflected in a hostility on the ground amongst our "new supporters"."



"... like any losing team, we have to sit down and very carefully study the video of the losing game, come to some conclusions and vow - we won't make those mistakes next time!"

Election '97

Setting Goals

SENATOR KATHLEEN O'MEARA

Have you noticed the psychospeak which has crept into the GAA. These days its all positive, upbeat, winning language. It's all about being pro-active and focussed. Liam Griffin is a case in point. His almost guru-like status emanated from his ability to instil a measure of self-belief not only in the team, but in the whole county. No negative speak. Positive all the way. Losing was not a word which entered his vocabulary. He combined it with serious mental and physical preparation, and build a strategy based only on winning. It didn't happen overnight. It took a year, a year which started with no one, except a small few, believing that Wexford could win an All Ireland.

A successful strategy begins with a picture. A clear, high-definition mental picture. A vision if you like. That's the aim, the target, the objective. The All-Ireland Final. The winning speech. Ta áthas orm an corn seo o glacadh, the roar of the crowd, the smiling President, etc. The why - well, winning obviously. The pride of the country. The need to succeed. The hunger for the trophy so sharp its painful.

The how comes next. The planning. The team. The training. Getting fitter. Getting better. Studying the form of the opposition. Building support. Putting out the word. Winning is the message, winning is the aim.

The Editor doesn't want an analysis of why we lost the Big Game in June 6th - he wants a view on where we go from here. And of course he is right. The past is the past, and the future is what counts. Let's put it behind us and move on. and the very last thing we need is to sink into a mire of recrimination which would only be of benefit to our enemies.

But like any losing team, we have to sit down and very carefully study the video of the losing game, come to some conclusions and vow - we won't make those mistakes the next time! Like any winning, or near-winning team, the campaign to defend or regain the title begins the day after the Big Match. So

now we must devise our strategy to win our next big match, or at least be ready when it comes along, especially if it's unexpected.

Let's begin with the WHY (our vision, stupid). Everything goes from here. This is our high-definition picture of our future Ireland. I would have thought that's the easy bit. We do all have a shared vision, although it might need updating as the country changes, and as we achieve in government the changes we set out to make, like divorce, freedom of information, equal opportunity, of status for all, independent of birth or circumstances or gender; of a just society; of a thriving economy where wealth is shared and invested for the good of all and the future generation; where arts and heritage are not confined to the enjoyment of just a few, and where our democracy is cherished and protected and strengthened.

And there couldn't be a better time to be flogging a vision. Let's face it, there's very little of it around. Without relying on cliches, there is no doubt in my mind that Ireland stands at a crossroads in our development. We are rapidly moving from a society based on tribal models of loyalty and a Catholic church-driven set of values into a model which looks more like the classic modern European model.

We have a choice about the Ireland we want to construct. A vacuum has been created by the decline of the Church and the tribal model and the lack of a handy replacement. That's our opportunity - or part of it - to present a vision of a civic society, or a new citizenship, and a society based on real democracy.

If we take it up, that is.

Our vision is our space on the political landscape. Our vision is our identity, our USP in marketing terms, and in electoral terms, it is the reason people vote for us. And it can't be taken for granted - we didn't define our territory well in June. We tried to tell people what we did in Government (and the list was very long) but we didn't tell them why we did it.

We didn't tell them about the vision which informed our decisions. Maybe we assumed they knew, or we felt we had to fight on other fronts.

So the picture was out of focus. We didn't market a clear vision of our Ireland. It was woolly and vague and when defined, was usually in relation to someone else's vision, not our own. Thus we abandoned our own space on the field and went and fought on someone else's pitch - the PDs. We became reactive, and in process left our own space undefended. Should we be surprised that it was taken from us?

But that does not mean that it can't be taken back! It must be taken back, but to do so, we must be - wait for the psychospeak - focused and disciplined. We must pro-actively identify our space, go out there and mark it out, define it clearly and then defend it aggressively. We must not take it for granted or simply assume

that it will be there when we need it. We must work on our own identity, carve it out, make it ours. Was I the only one who got a sinking feeling when I heard John Bruton, two days before the Election, talking about the caring Ireland he wants to cultivate?

But the great thing is, we have the ability, the talent, the ideas, the vision - to make that happen! One of the worrying things I heard said in the aftermath of the Election is that it's like 1989 all over again and all we have to do is to wait for Fianna Fáil to fall on its sword. That's like saying that you can win an All Ireland by waiting for everyone else to get salmonella the day before the match and your team gets it by default.

We might be lucky, but can we afford to leave so much to chance? Is our vision not precious? Does it not need to be protected? And does it not deserve better? If we don't believe in it, no one else will.

We didn't tell them about the vision which informed our decisions. Maybe we assumed they knew, or we felt we had to fight on other fronts.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

PAT MONTAGUE

The results of the recent general election were to say the least a huge disappointment to all of us who are members or supporters of the Labour Party. Many hard-working, conscientious and creative candidates lost their seats or failed to make the breakthrough for which they had hoped and the Party, after its best ever electoral performance in 1992, suffered an enormous setback.

There's no doubt that the outcome of the election was a type of collective nightmare from which many in the Party have clearly not yet recovered. However if we're serious about playing a central role in Irish politics we must dust ourselves off and get down to business.

Careful Analysis Required

The point of departure for any route map forward is to analyse where we've come from and identify where we've gone right and where we've gone wrong. It is important that the hard questions are asked and dealt with - responding defensively or refusing to face up will not be good enough.

However, I sense within some elements of the Party a desire for show trials, where the 'guilty' are hunted down and made confess before being publicly executed. This type of recrimination would achieve absolutely nothing and might set up the type of internecine warfare and bloodletting which we went through in the 1980's. Mistakes have undoubtedly been made, but it is important to bear in mind that they were made while genuinely trying to advance the Party's cause - it is vital that our attempts to analyse the election and what went before it should not be turned into a fatwah.

Still in a Strong Position

In taking stock of our current position it is important to bear in mind that we are in a far stronger position than we have almost ever been coming out of Government. For starters, the sense of unity of purpose which we have developed since the late 1980s is almost unprecedented in the Party's history. We must guard it with our lives. From the early

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"It was only when we united that we really began to grow - it would be political insanity of the highest order to throw that unity away."

'80s through to the early '90s we supped on a thin gruel of internal bickering. It was only when we united that we really began to grow - it would be political insanity of the highest order to throw that unity away.

It's also important to remember that despite having lost so many seats we actually have more Dail seats and many more potential seat holders than we had in 1989, and indeed most of our possible seatholders are local authority members and have a good base from which to work. If we could win 33 seats in 1992, there is no reason why we can't achieve that figure again and even exceed it.

No Place for False Optimism

However, there is nothing to be gained either by overstating the strength of our position and I would counsel caution to those who believe that we all we have to do is to repeat what we did in the period 1989-1992 and a new 'Spring tide' will come in. In this regard, it is important to analyse clinically what happened in 1992.

There is no doubt that the tremendous work carried out by the Party Leader in the Dail and the efforts of the rest of the Party to re-organise itself and put credible candidates in place meant that the Party was undoubtedly going to do well in 1992. However, without in any way seeking to diminish the achievements of 1992, I am in no doubt that the extent of our victory was determined to a large extent by the circumstances in which that election took place. The public at that time did not like or trust Albert Reynolds nor did they have much regard for John Bruton and the issue which led to the election taking place, the row between Des O'Malley and Albert Reynolds over the Beef Tribunal, played into our hands. There is no guarantee that the cards will fall for us as well when the next election is called. Bertie Ahern is a much shrewder politician than Albert Reynolds and is unlikely to allow his government to implode in the way that Albert did. Likewise, we are dealing with a renewed John Bruton who is now seeking to occupy the social democratic political space.

In essence, I'm saying that success will not inevitably fall into our laps. We cannot simply rely on history repeating itself - we will have to roll up our sleeves and work hard again.

Focus on Campaigning

There are reasons however to be hopeful. The recent parliamentary party meeting in Mullingar agreed that the party would have to become a more campaigning party - this is to be welcomed. As I've said before in these pages, the Party needs to get into the business

of agenda setting, determining the terms of the debate upon which the next election is going to be fought. Because if we don't set our own agenda, we'll end up reacting to someone else's and we'll lose out again - this is why effective campaigning is so important.

The presidential election campaign provides an ideal opportunity to begin this process and the nomination of Adi Roche is certainly highly imaginative and hugely symbolic. However, we must not allow it deflect us from the careful analysis and planning which is urgently required if we are to become a campaigning party. Indeed, there is a danger that a good result in the presidential election will lead people to mistakenly feel that everything is all right. We must realise that while election campaigns



are hugely important they are only staging posts in the process through which we build a new political constituency for ourselves and create a new agenda. It is the work we do in between elections that is critical, that is when we sow the seeds, elections are when we reap the harvest.

Pat Montague is a PR Specialist. He was formerly National Youth Development Officer of Labour Youth

THE ECONOMY, STUPID

Flaws in the election tax strategy

The June election result was much worse than many of the commentators had predicted for the Labour Party. The opinion polls were much closer to the end figure. The first lesson must be that we need in future to have regard to real polling data and not derive some false comfort by talking to ourselves, to commentators and ... misleading conclusions in the media.

The election campaign identified the Progressive Democrats as the target and we were successful in limiting their support; but at a cost. We failed to sell a positive message of what it was we ourselves wanted to do in the future after the election as the Labour Party in Government. Yes we had a good story to tell, yes we had many achievements, yes we had probably the most competent team of managing ministers, but that was not really what was concerning or impressing the electorate during the campaign.

In fact all our achievements, including the ideological leadership which we had provided with Fianna Fáil and latterly with Fine Gael and Democratic Left were comfortably and creditably appropriated by John Bruton as Taoiseach and leader of the Government. Many people who voted for what we had achieved and liked what we wanted to do, went on and voted effectively for Fine Gael in their constituencies. Sligo Leitrim, Laois Offaly and Cork South Central are three clear examples of that phenomenon.

Taxation was clearly another major issue upon which we had the right policy but an obscure message. Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats focused in on the nominal rates of tax in a straight and simple way. Indeed, for the previous three years, the PD Finance Spokesperson Michael McDowell concentrated on how "the single worker on the average industrial wage had to endure the tax system confiscating £5.70 of every £10.00 of overtime that he or she might make in a week".

This concentration on rates ignored the real amount of tax paid, or indeed issues of equity and equality. But, in fact the vast majority of people do not fully understand the operation of tax bands and allowances. They are very clear, however about nominal rates. In that regard we were not offering as much as the FF/PD package.

There is an additional factor to this economic aspect of the election which needs to be articulated. The much praised and described Celtic Tiger economy did deliver increased prosperity and 200,000 extra jobs in just under five years. But for many people *already in work* their wages did not seem to rise as quickly as the economy had grown. Notwithstanding increases in car sales, house construction and commercial durable sales, a lot of people believed that they were not as well off as they thought they should be within the Celtic Tiger. It is not fashionable to be dissatisfied if one is already at work, so a large silent vote plumped decidedly for a real tax cut that they saw on offer from Fianna Fáil.

The timing of the *Irish Independent* editorial 'It's pay back time' merely consolidated this view as distinct from creating it, in my opinion.

Finally, our campaign was competent but boring. There was no bounce, and it was hard to get a media sense of excitement into it. We did not catch the enthusiasm of the voter, particularly among our own voters, many of whom drifted, not to Fianna Fáil, but to independents and the Greens.

In conclusion, hindsight is a wonderful science. I was fully involved in the campaign preparations and so I am responsible for my own role. We do need, all of us, to look now at what happened and see what lessons are apparent now that we can apply for the future. After all, we could be facing an election sooner than we think!



Ruairi Quinn,
Deputy Leader
of the Party
discusses the tax
and economic
element of
Labour's election
campaign.

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IN RETROSPECT

JAMES WRYNN

In the first of two articles, James Wrynn, International Secretary, reviews our involvement in government and its electoral consequences. In our next issue he will set out some views on where the party goes from here.

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The period since the General Election has been characterised by a strange mood of quietness in the Labour Party. While the loss of seats is the dominating perspective from the election, the election also sent quite conflicting messages to the party. It was an election that halved our number of seats and yet still left us with more seats than we have ever had in recent times with the exception of '92.

It was an election that seemed to reinforce a historical pattern of cyclicity where electoral success is followed by participation in government and then electoral setback on a significant scale. After previous periods of participation in government, many party activists could fairly argue that a person would be hard pressed to identify significant achievements.

Yet this time the achievements were impressive on a grand scale; Northern Ireland, ODA, tax reform, change in education, social legislation and a revolution in the arts. Ethics in Government legislation, chided for its severity and righteousness, and vigorously opposed by most other politicians or at best reluctantly supported as a price for being in Government, is now regarded as lacking robustness. History will surely judge these achievements as mould-breaking, and yet electoral rebuff was the reward. To what purpose a place in political history matched by electoral disaster?

We lost 16 seats and yet the man subject to sustained snide remarks about the extent of his foreign travel as Foreign Minister, put in a stunning electoral performance of 10,000 votes in spite of a remarkable 5,000 votes by a Sinn Féin candidate in his front garden. The performance of Brendan Howlin, Willie Penrose and new candidates such as Kathleen O'Meara contrasted with the demise of others. How does one explain a vote of eight per cent for a national figure such as Niamh Breathnach after four years of Ministerial Office, a constituency staff of five full-time people, and an incredible record of change in

education and a vote of eight per cent for an unknown, penniless neophyte working just eight weeks in his constituency - Colm Keaveney? Why such diversity?

It is conventional wisdom in Ireland that the 1960s was a key decade in the modernisation of Ireland. While undoubtedly certain modernisation trends commenced during that decade, much in the society remained unaffected. In fact it can be argued that the 1990s has been the transforming decade in Irish society. The Labour Party both recognised the profound implications of the modernisation process which commenced in the 60s and fully crystallised in the 90s and we led the fight for the institutional change to give full effect to the modernisation process. These changes included the transformation of the Presidency, the implementation of social legislation, an insistence on freedom of information legislation and many other initiatives. The Labour Party provided leadership of an outstanding nature. Its political touch was surefooted and ambitious. Our task facing into the next period is to analyse the dynamics of Irish society and politics at the close of the decade and to map out an ambitious programme for the people of Ireland.

But if we were so surefooted why did the electorate wreak such vengeance? We need to seriously debate the electoral result of last June.

What debate has taken place at constituency council level or general council level has in many cases been lethargic, and the physical exhaustion of the campaign makes this partially understandable. Where debate has taken place it is often prefixed by remarks about 'no recrimination' - perhaps sometimes a codeword for avoiding honest if hurtful analysis.

ELECTION 1992

It is important in analysis to be factually correct where possible, even though of course there will be significant areas where the

analysis will be a matter of strongly held judgement and consequent disagreement. In the aftermath of the election of '92, Fine Gael sought to form a government with Labour and the PDs. The superior demeanour of Fine Gael even in the light of the election result, the philosophical perspective of the PDs and the dismissal by both of them of the possibility of Democratic Left involvement, meant a workable rainbow was impossible. We subsequently decided to form a government with Fiann Fáil. This decision was unanimous, not opposed by a single TD or delegate to the deciding conference in the Concert Hall. Therefore it has been disingenuous in the intervening period of some party members to suggest that this was a wrong decision and by clever use of words to imply they disagreed with this decision. I never once heard the subsequent critics of this decision use the inclusive phrase "We were wrong". The basis of this decision, apart from the Fine Gael attitude in particular was the programme for government. If you still have a copy, keep it. It is a most remarkable document. It is remarkable for the range of detailed policy commitments and for the fact that it reflected long-cherished policy positions of The Labour Party to an extraordinary degree. In every single section there were very specific commitments and almost every single commitment resonated with Labour Party values. As we departed from the Concert Hall on 8 January 1993, the senior political correspondent of a national daily newspaper remarked to me, that even if half of the commitments were fulfilled, it would be a remarkable government. There is no doubt that some former FG supporters, disenchanted by their own leadership, who had voted for us in the election, regarded this agreement with FF, as a profound breach of trust. But this alleged breach of trust is not as significant as some argue, and may in my judgement only have accounted for two or three per cent of our support that subsequently deserted us.

RELATIVES AND PROGRAMME MANAGERS

And so a novel government was formed and then all hell broke loose. There was a terrible wobble with relations and programme managers. But the ship quickly steadied. It is difficult to accept the bone fides of a former programme manager arguing the case for programme managers. But I am nevertheless of the view that the programme manager system was a profound innovation in the interaction of public administration and politics and of course ultimately democracy. I also believe that it is impossible to give effect to a radical political programme without such an equivalent system.

The first budget was difficult. The economic growth of the last few years may obscure the fact that in early 1993, the Celtic Tiger wasn't yet born, and the currency crisis had just ended with a devaluation. However ministers got down to work and new initiatives were the order of the day. There was a distinctiveness about Labour ministers and the work rate was impressive. The relationship with FF was good at a personal level, but there was always a slight edginess. This had its positive side, Labour were keen to retain their distinctiveness when harnessed to a slightly difficult political commodity.

Apart from our policy implementation successes and the IRA ceasefire, the four defining events of our period in government, in terms of our relationship with FF and the public perception of us in this situation, were the tax amnesty, the passports for sale controversy, the Beef Tribunal Report and The Brendan Smyth/Harry Whelehan affair. It is important to understand the context of the tax amnesty, although this is only a slightly ameliorating argument. The budgetary position was extremely tight unlike the situation in recent years. The prospect of a windfall income for the exchequer coupled with a greater flow of taxes in subsequent years from newly captured miscreant taxpayers who would not escape their tax liabilities any longer seemed a worthwhile trade-off against some tax evasion by the about to be captured culprits. We were wrong and I was wrong in supporting it. The electorate were not interested in a scheme to give high income tax evaders a greatly reduced tax bill, even if we were guaranteeing they would pay their way from then on. But they were most grievously upset that the Labour Party were supporting this measure. This was a breach of trust. The 'passports for sale' controversy was less damaging but added to the loss of trust. It is unlikely that a Labour walkout on this issue would have had great appeal. The shenanigans over The Beef Tribunal Report were extremely damaging to the internal cohesion of the Government but were not damaging to Labour in the public mind. Only the delicacies of the peace process prevented a break-up of the government at this stage. The Brendan Smyth/ Harry Whelehan debacle is well documented, and even those who for a long time after these events regretted the break-up, must surely have banished their residual hankering in the light of some of the sordid details which emerged in Smyth's eventual trial in this state.

The silence which descended in pubs, places of work and anywhere with a screen as Dick Spring stood up in the Dáil to articulate where the Labour Party stood in relation to the Brendan Smyth/ Harry Whelehan affair

"As we departed from The Concert Hall on 8 January 1993, the senior political correspondent of a national daily newspaper remarked to me, that even if half of the commitments were fulfilled, it would be a remarkable government."

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was a measure of what the public expected of us and of the regard in which they hold us when we are true to our values. It is also one of the dilemmas for Labour. Are we best liked in opposition? Our stock was at a new high, 22 per cent just two and a half years before June '97. There are those who will argue this was a blip. The outer fringes of it may have been so, but the bulk of that arose in my view from appreciation of a party behaving consistently with its values.

"Constituencies with newly elected TDs or senators were left to flounder to their own devices in building a constituency organisation and electoral machine. It is ironic that a party which believes in active intervention in the market place where that market place fails to provide appropriate necessary services to a society, should leave the building of its organisational capacity to the laws of chance and luck."

THE RAINBOW GOVERNMENT

In the dying months of Government with FF there was talk of reviewing and updating the Government programme. This was a reflection that a certain staleness had crept into our participation in Government, that the political climate and dynamic had moved on and that Labour needed to argue a fresh programme to assert its values two years on.

The negotiations with FG and DL provided an opportunity for this. But instead a lacklustre programme was agreed, greatly diminished on specifics. The invisible caution of the civil service mindset and some semi-institutionalised Ministers (programme managers and advisers) provided uninspirational reading.

And so followed two and a half years of gradual decline. FG grew in confidence, the government was cohesive. Labour slept soundly at night, reasonably sure that no skeleton would fall out of any of their partners in government cupboards in the middle of the night, a mistaken belief. Ministers worked seriously on their agendas – a Waste Bill, a Universities Bill, new budgetary procedures and the mantra of EMU. The technocrats had achieved power. In a buoyant tax revenue environment we were still subjected to dire warnings on budget overruns, resulting in petty cutbacks

such as a reduction in the allocation to the free books scheme for disadvantaged children. These unfounded warnings, while delighting minimalist mandarins, were only as implausible as the budgetary assumptions which have led to the subsequent unbudgeted surpluses, now to be distributed as largesse by FF/PD.

An election loomed. Surely the public would vote for the party managing the Celtic Tiger. A manifesto (contributed to by this writer), dripping with more caution than an interdepartmental committee report looked vaguely worthy. One of its most original ideas, The Social Guarantee, had the same lift off as the infamous aeroplane advertising in the 1985 local elections.

The election took place. The strategy in relation to no coalition with FF had a 50 per cent success rate. It forced FF and the PDs together, damaging both, the latter probably irretrievably. But we were nearly invisible under the Rainbow umbrella. The support provided centrally to constituencies during the campaign was unmatched in any previous election. But there was a fatal problem.

ORGANISATION

A party with 19 per cent of the vote in 1992 continued to behave organisationally between 1992 and 1997 as if it were an 6–8 per cent party. Constituencies with newly elected TDs or senators were left to flounder to their own devices in building a constituency organisation and electoral machine. It is ironic that a party which believes in active intervention in the market place where that market place fails to provide appropriate necessary services to a society, should leave the building of its organisational capacity to the laws of chance and luck. I will give three examples.

During the campaign I had occasion to visit some constituencies with a view to helping

them in their election preparations. In some cases I left meetings of some of the best people any party could have in relation to commitment and belief in our values, but who had been left unaided to the four winds of political buffeting for four years. Some of course relished the challenge and succeeded handsomely, but the majority, through absolutely no fault of their own, fought a lonesome unaided battle for four years without basic organisational or electoral technology. Several pieces of political research have consistently indicated that the first determinant of voting behaviour by almost 40 per cent of voters is local service by their TD. Obviously every party gets a share of this because of their local work, but to obtain an appropriate share, requires organisational capacity.

At the last party conference, the constituency of one of our newly elected TDs, did not have a single delegate at conference. This was not just some temporary aberration. It had been very clear that this reflected the organisational state for a considerable time. Yet no active planned programme of intervention was ever offered to this constituency.

During the election, the election committee sought to use the best computerised technological support in helping candidates. However despite some feats of ingenuity, the efforts were greatly hampered by any level of database or other related preparation. The quill rules.

Not all the losses were due to this, but it was neglect on a grand scale, and it was a significant contributing factor.

THE MEDIA AND THE PARTY

And finally what about the media, the party and the campaign about arrogance? The role of Independent Newspapers with their continuous drip, perhaps more often a torrent, of abuse, played a role. Those who dismiss Labour's arguments on this issue by saying other parties have been severely criticised in the past and Labour has been mute, miss the point. Of course the media has been severely critical of other parties, but when criticisms have been levelled at other parties, such criticisms have generally emanated from a diversity of media ownership and types. In the case of Independent Newspapers, they have engaged in vitriolic abuse of a kind unknown in other media and they have engaged in what can only be argued is concerted abuse, *ie* a single edition containing eleven differing pieces attacking Labour on issues not being treated in any other media.

The arrogance issue is a more diffuse issue. There are three elements to it. Firstly, some mini: ers displayed a demeanour that might

be genuinely construed as vaguely arrogant. However this was aided and abetted by FF who coached candidates in the run-up period to the election in crystallising this attribute as a defining characteristic of Dick Spring and utilising his occasionally severe demeanour, as the manifestation of this. Dick Spring is not Billy Connolly (although those of us who have seen him at local party functions or other social events can attest to the fact he could act as a very good warm-up act). He is simply very serious about politics and he shows it. What was most disturbing about the arrogance issue, was the adoption of this stricture and the public articulation of this stricture by some of our own members. An organisation where leading members buy into a critical agenda, either in relation to arrogance, foreign travel by a foreign minister or any other near bogus issue, largely constructed by our opponents, political or media, does not deserve success. Finally in relation to arrogance, it is important to remember that there are certain sections of the establishment who resent Labour having real power and regard them as arrogant to even aspire to a real say in shaping our society, who latched on to the arrogance theme. None of us should subscribe to their agenda either.

THE FUTURE

While the election result was greatly disheartening, there are very good possibilities and omens. This election was a complete failure for FF. They stalled at 39 per cent, after almost three years in opposition and the majority of their gains were achieved by sucking reluctant PD No. 2s into their net – an unlikely repeat prospect. The new government is lacklustre in the extreme and semi-paralysed by the fallout of Haughey and what may follow. FG made modest gains: 2 per cent, and this was just recovering some of the catastrophic lost ground of '92. No new wave emerged that crystallised around any other serious player. And Labour has the most outstanding leader in Dáil Éireann, 17 TDs, four very good senators and a half a dozen other candidates well placed to recover their seats.

This electoral base does not mean that we can complacently wait for the reins of government to gently fall into our lap simply with the passage of three or four years. It is not sufficient to just await the resumption of power to continue the efficient management of key departments..

This electoral base matched to serious organisational planning, development and implementation by people capable of this task, and driven by a serious commitment to values, provides genuine real opportunity of taking up the reins of continuing to reshape Irish society.

"It is ironic that a party which believes in active intervention in the market place where that market place fails to provide appropriate necessary services to a society, should leave the building of its organisational capacity to the laws of chance and luck."

Socialism: A New Phase?

CHRIS O'MALLEY

Chris O'Malley begins a debate by assessing where socialism stands, what sets it apart, and suggest how it is more relevant than ever

Political Theory

It is often said in the Labour Party today that "We're not Socialists anymore, we're Social Democrats" What people are getting at when they say this is that socialism has been going through a period of crisis across Europe since the late 1970s. Something fundamental in the philosophy of traditional socialism has been found wanting, and this has led to electoral disaster for those parties which have persisted in their old ways. The Irish Labour Party has not been immune from the effect of this general trend. The great rise in support for Labour in 1992 was based not on support for traditional socialist or social democratic objectives, but rather on a general feeling about the need for cleaner politics in Ireland - plus some significant support for the so-called "liberal agenda", and these factors in themselves do not guarantee a prosperous future for a party of the Left, or Left of Centre.

The Socialist/Social Democratic identity crisis has not yet been resolved in any real sense. Certainly we know what makes us different from the British Tories and American Republicans (which is enough for "New Labour" in Britain), but beyond that the certainty peters out. For example, do Social Democrats in Europe today have a clear view any more of what makes us different from Christian Democrats? Clarifying this issue is, I suggest, key to the health of all Socialist parties, without it we will have no sense of mission and no drive.

FLAWS IN THINKING

It is easier to begin with what went wrong. The Socialist movement which ran into crisis from the late 1970s suffered from two major defects in its thinking. The first, most obvious one, was the failure to think internationally. It was assumed for too long that national governments had it within their power to shape their economies and societies as they wished, without reference to what was happening in the rest of the world. To the intense frustration of many Socialist parties in power, this proved to no longer be the case by 1980. The French

Socialists, for example, discovered that they could not simply reflate their economy without reference to the other major economies. Governments who taxed business excessively saw international investment dry up, and those who imposed barriers to trade in order to protect local industry saw their economies stagnate.

This blindness is bound up with the second, even deeper flaw in traditional thinking. That flaw was the tendency to think mechanistically about government and society. Basic thinking has always been that first you capture the organs of the State and then you use these to reshape the economy and society according to the perfect model. This is a top-down, élitist approach to social change which became increasingly out of tune with a society where people were less and less inclined to be told what to do. Much of the hostility which now abounds to the notion of "political correctness" is fuelled by resistance to the prospect of being forced to fit a mould designed from on high.

Neither of the above two defects are unique to Socialism. Traditional conservatism is even more resistant to opening up to the world outside. One has only to look at the British Tories, or even Fianna Fáil, to see examples of this. Equally, back in the 1960s and 1970s a mechanistic, top-down view of economic and organisational management was just as rampant in the minds of capitalist managers with their portfolio planning models and their time and motion studies, as in the minds of socialist planners. However, Socialism was slower to see the need to abandon this mindset in the 1970s than were some of its liberal opponents who championed causes such as free trade, competition and of profit centres and corporate values, ideas which could be presented as humanising and empowering of the individual.

VALUES

But if we can recognise the defects, what are the enduring values and objectives which we all share, which now need to be given new life in a new era? Do we simply have to content

ourselves with embracing the free market agenda but "with decency"?

The first hallmark of a Socialist/Social Democratic party which sets it apart from a Christian Democratic party is that Socialists are *more ambitious* in their desire for change. Christian Democrats and Social Democrats may be able to agree for some period of time on a model of "social market economy". However, whereas the Christian Democrats are thereafter content to simply operate the system and react to problems as they arise, I believe the vocation of Social Democrats is one of proactively looking for the next stage of development, the next direction for fundamental reform. The Christian Democrats and equivalents may well even go along with such further reforms (and often have), but they seldom set the agenda for them.

This ambition for constant improvement brings me to the second major aspect of the Social Democratic identity, which is the drive to achieve a society where wealth and power are *more broadly based*, and where the form of power normally used in underpinning relations between people is increasingly *persuasive rather than coercive*. This means controlling the abuse of physical force through institutions such as the courts, legislation enshrining civil rights, and so on. It also means controlling the abuse of financial power through providing everyone with a guarantee against destitution, preventing abuse of dominant position in the market place, protection against unfair dismissal, and so on. Furthermore, and this is a large part of a possible new agenda, it means promoting a society *where the ability to persuade and influence how people think* becomes increasingly important as the determinant of how decisions get made, rather than the ability to bully or bribe the opposition.

These twin aims of broadening the power base and promoting a shift from coercion to persuasion (they are inextricably linked) are as valid today as they ever were; it is a matter of translating them into the setting of the Information Age. The role of the Labour Party remains one of pursuing these objectives, and of doing so more purposefully than any of the other parties. The space is not available here to outline a comprehensive manifesto for how this is to be done – even if I did have all the answers, so I will content myself with just two examples.

Firstly I will take the example of now recognised need for a bottom-up approach to local empowerment and tackling local marginalisation. Instead of the State having all the answers and dispensing standard schemes and programmes, the creation of a whole series of local partnership companies in the most disadvantaged parts of the country has been extensively piloted over the past five years. These

partnerships have on the whole provided effective vehicles for strengthening local leadership in these communities, and for having them set their own priorities for development. The future of this experiment nonetheless remains clouded with uncertainty, not least because of the dependence on EU funding. The Labour Party should, I believe, take the lead in pressing for this whole approach to end its pilot status, and to be taken on by the mainstream of our institutions of government. This would require a radical reshaping of local government, and a whole series of government departments and services.

Secondly, we have the topical issue of press freedom and the abuse of same. One hundred years ago Socialists called for curbs on the rights of capital in order to protect the weaker against its abuse. There is a parallel between the need to control and regulate financial power in order to promote fairness and cohesion, and the need to control power over the way people think. Just as the owners of businesses and wealth a hundred years ago were outraged at the notion of imposing limits on the rights of property as representing a fundamental threat to our traditional freedoms, those who now wield exceptional power to influence the mind of the public claim that regulating that power would *ipso facto* represent a threat to all of our democratic freedoms. Yes, private property needs to be guaranteed in a free society, but social responsibilities must also be set out in a clear and transparent manner; the same applies to the accumulation and use of intellectual power. (Incidentally, the need to put limits on the financial power to hire and fire is as acute now as it ever was.)

People compete through buying and selling, and equally they compete to influence what others think. Both forms of competition need to be recognised for what they are, and to be regulated. This is an issue which becomes more acute the further we move into the information age. For the Labour Party it is a matter of finding cases where ordinary people and businesses suffer because of their lack of access to such power, and of putting forward a strategy of promoting wider access to it. The emergence of the internet makes this issue acute, with the prospect of the Information Haves and Have-nots. There is no shortage of work for the Labour Party, or basis for a renewed identity, in the period ahead.

Finally, no Social Democratic strategy or programme will go anywhere unless it is pursued within a reasonably stable international climate. When stability is undermined, crises proliferate, coercive power comes to the fore, and everything being sought by Socialists moves further from reach. This is what happened in many respects during the 1970s and early 1980s. That is why we must strengthen the habit of thinking internationally in everything we do.

"The first hallmark of a Socialist/Social Democratic party which sets it apart from a Christian Democratic party is that Socialists are more ambitious in their desire for change. Christian Democrats and Social Democrats may be able to agree for some period of time on a model of "social market economy". However, whereas the Christian Democrats are thereafter content to simply operate the system and react to problems as they arise, I believe the vocation of Social Democrats is one of proactively looking for the next stage of development, the next direction for fundamental reform."

The 'Cruiser' on Burke - EDMUND BURKE THAT IS

Edmund Burke
Conor Cruise
O'Brien
abridged by Jim
McCue

New Island
Books, 1997
£12.99

Book Reviews

First things first. Edmund Burke is not related to Ray Burke. His is the statue which stands outside Trinity College Dublin. It is difficult to see a similar accolade being bestowed on the former Minister for Foreign Affairs.

This life of Edmund Burke is in fact an abridged version of Conor Cruise O'Brien's *The Great Melody*, published in 1992. The reason for the re-issuing is that 1997 marks the two hundredth anniversary of Burke's death.

The Great Melody is O'Brien's tribute to Burke. On the jacket, Paul Johnson describes the book as one on the 'the greatest Irishman who ever lived' by 'the greatest living Irishman'. While O'Brien's modesty might not allow him accept that the latter of these plaudits, he is surely in agreement with the first.

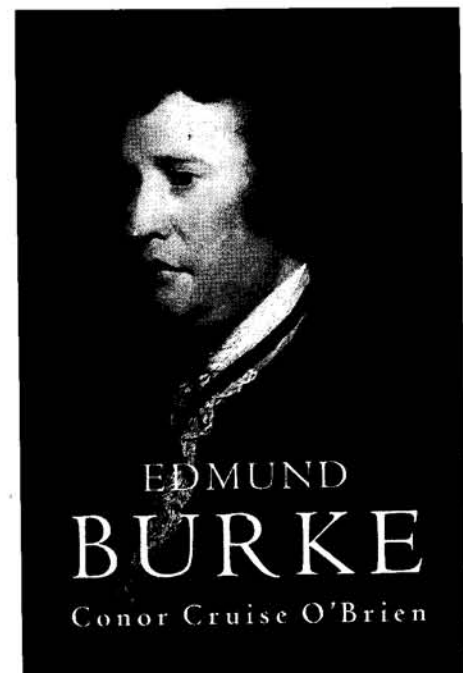
The Great Melody is O'Brien's euphemism for the guiding principles of Burke's life. That principle is his implacable opposition to tyranny and despotism be it at the hands of monarchs or the new French Republic. It explains Burke's crusade against the abuse suffered by the Indian people at the hands of the East India Company, his support for Irish Catholics in their fight against the penal laws and his opposition to British policy in America both prior to and after the War of Independence.

Of particular interest to O'Brien is Burke's relationship with the country of his birth. Burke was an Anglican but both his mother and wife were born Catholics. Perhaps more importantly, his father was a convert to Anglicanism from Catholicism. O'Brien's thesis is that consequently Burke's attitude to Ireland and Catholicism was unique amongst his political peers, even those of a radical disposition. But, that all through his career Burke was forced to underplay his connection with Irish Catholicism because of the particular odium associated with these two particular bêtes noir of the English political establishment, Irishness and popery. Other biographers have been critical of Burke on this point, but O'Brien's depiction of the trap Burke felt himself to be in is a convincing one.

On this point, it is interesting that a man

often depicted as the founding father of modern English conservatism (this point is not made in this abridged version of the book which is surprising as it would have sat well with the overall depiction of the evolution of Burke's politics), should regard the whole period in Irish politics from 1792 with a good deal more scepticism from the Catholic point of view that it has gone down in Republican hagiography.

Despite Burke's massive influence on the politics of his day and O'Brien deals exhaustively with this relationship with the key political figures of his day including Charles James Fox and Pitt the younger, the only cabinet post he held was that of Paymaster General. A post it seems that he actively sought because it carried considerable remuneration. Burke was not a particularly wealthy man and was often sponsored by other political figures more wealthy than himself. O'Brien is at pains to point out that this did not in anyway impinge Burke's integrity and there is considerable evidence to suggest he is right on this point, in particular Burke's rejection of financial as-



sistance from the Earl of Fitzwilliam when Fitzwilliam endorsed Fox's nominal leadership of the Whigs after Burke had split with Fox (over the French Revolution). Nevertheless it is but one example of how perceptions of politics have changed.

It is impossible to avoid the temptation of a comparison between the career of Burke and his eulogising biographer. Impossible, because it is difficult to escape the feeling that it is a comparison the author would like to have made. All through the Burke's career, O'Brien is at pains to argue that Burke's actions are both coherent consistent and motivated by his over-riding principles. Where there are exceptions, and O'Brien admits there are some, these can be explained away by circumstances such as Burke's political vulnerability because of

his association with Irish Catholicism or as short-term tactical deviations necessary to secure a more significant goal. Possibly a defence O'Brien might like to see employed on his own behalf although a task beyond this reviewer.

One lasting impression of Burke is the sheer volume of work and in particular writing he got through in his 65 years. In an age when the art of letter writing is dead and the word processor rules, it is impossible not to marvel at the sheer output of a man like Burke. If there is a fault with the book is that the use of quotations is excessive. While understanding the author's intention to allow Burke speak in his own words, the language is now dated by 200 years and is difficult to read.

FALLEN IDOL?!!

If you read in history of a character who cheated death three times, by land, by sea and by air, who was one of the highest in the land but was then tried as a common criminal, acquitted, rose again to the highest office in the land, ruled by fear, survived many attempts to dethrone him, a man around whom rumour and innunendo ran rife, a man who survived seemingly impossible odds and eventually was forced into retirement where he lived a lifestyle out of all proportion to his visible means of support, you would surely assume it to be a historically dubious tale of a medieval Italian prince. Yet the truth around CJ Haughey, or what little we know, or may ever know of it, grows stranger as months go by.

Fallen Idol subtitled "Haughey's Controversial Career" is a book that was clearly published in a hurry to meet the demand in the aftermath of the McCracken Report.

The book provides an episodic account of all those events in the extraordinary political career of CJ Haughey, from his long struggle to get elected to the Dáil in the first place to the numerous heaves against him. The final chapter "Thank you, Big Fella", brings the reader up to date. Most people will find little new in this book and little is provided by way of insight but *Fallen Idol* is a useful introduction to one of the most fascinating political careers likely to be found anywhere. When the 34 episodes are put together in this fashion, an unbelievable tale unfolds, providing as it does a brief account of each of those episodes which marked Haughey's

political life, from the 'secret courts' to the Arms Trial, the long road back to the ousting of Jack Lynch, the tension with George Colley, the heaves against him, the GUBU period, the 1990 presidential election, his resignation over the bugging scandal and a brief epilogue noting the more recent (£1.3 million) developments, together with many points in between.

The biggest problem with *Fallen Idol* is that it is neither history, nor biography, nor polemic, nor apology, nor is it even a story as the chapters are not sufficiently well joined. There is nothing new in this book. Most of it will be well known, and nearly all is more thoughtfully covered in *The Boss*.

This book might best be described as a Haughey handbook but the lack of an index deprives it of much reference value.

PJ Mara once remarked that Haughey would come to be judged as one of the great Irish politicians of the 20th century, well he would ... but Haughey's much-vaunted political achievements have far faded from the public mind and his reputation is now ruined.

At the end of the day, however, it is his fellow political practitioners and those who loyally followed him who he has most grievously wronged.

Fallen Idol
T. Ryle Dwyer
Mercier Press (1997)

Educating the Celtic Tiger

Mick McLoughlin urges caution in the rush towards narrow-based vocational training and makes the case for a more liberal educational regime.

Education

The Celtic tiger shows no sign of weakening indeed if anything s/he is becoming more frisky from year to year. We never had it so good. While all readers would point to the major problems of social exclusion, even this most stubborn of problems is seeing some improvement largely through the local partnership strategy. Many people feel they have to pinch themselves as we see ourselves described as the greatest magnet for software developers, leading the field in pharmaceuticals, possessing some of the biggest food and drinks conglomerates in the world. It's as if it was all carefully planned, but lets face it, for the most part, it wasn't. The Celtic tiger is an unplanned child and these can be the most difficult to manage.

The factors behind the success of the Irish economy are well documented; responsible fiscal policy, social partnership, EU structural funding and a good education system. Fiscal parameters are well established and despite the annual sabre rattling, so too is social partnership. While 1999 will see some contraction in structural funds this has been planned for and will be tapered. Most of the funds to date have improved infrastructure which will last. So what can trip up the Celtic tiger? Only three things – education, education and education.

How can this be? Isn't the Irish system one of the best, a little overcrowded perhaps but amply compensated for by the professionals in the system and our willingness to learn and . Education is a complex phenomenon to analyse, it is located in a matrix of culture, state, family and economy. Human resources are the key variable in the modern economy. Most other factors are fairly constant and can be altered at short notice, capital can move in milliseconds across the globe, governments can compete within very small parameters with grants, lower taxes etc. and this is narrowing with EU competition law and WTO agreements. This puts much greater emphasis on education, training and human resource policies.

Changes in other factors in the economy can be implemented fairly quickly but human resources are a much longer term factor. Essentially it is more important for governments to get human resource policy right and to monitor the developments in the economy and how they may effect labour market needs. Increasingly, it is incumbent on business adopt consistent human resource policies and training which should be seen as an investment rather than a cost.

The pace of change in the economy is truly

amazing. The success of our labour market particularly in relation to foreign direct investment is as much by accident as design. Education has been culturally important to us especially the academic emphasis in the Leaving Cert. Our success in the high-tech area has led to a public policy consensus that identified vocational and technical education coupled with languages as the priorities for the economy.

This obsession is problematic to say the least. I'm not for one minute suggesting that Latin scholars will write software programs, but balance in education and human resources will be critical to continuing our economic success. Employers are already reporting evidence of skills shortage in many areas. Skills shortages have been in evidence for some time now, most employers find that many technically proficient workers are deficient in basic communications skills, reluctant to take on imaginative tasks and showing lack of innovation in their approach. Our education and training agencies are increasingly turning out competent sheep for the tiger.

Parents, the points system and short-term thinking all contribute to this situation. Is it really such a big problem? Surely as long as we have enough trained managers, employment will still grow. Unfortunately this is not the case. Firstly as we are all aware technical and IT jobs are now moving the same way as lower skills (i.e. eastwards and Asia bound). More importantly, it is the flexibility of the labour force which will determine our future economic success. Rapid changes in technology and production processes will lead to changing markets, a strait-jacketed labour force lacking in innovation and adaptability will fail these tests.

The current phase of technical support and software development is but one of many. A change of markets in one enterprise could render concentration of excellence in one language irrelevant, a more basic knowledge of a few may be more appropriate. An ability to understand the culture and traditions of different markets is another key feature which narrow and focused education is ignoring. New learning (the real key to success) will always be easier to achieve if a broad based general education is present. People need to learn how to learn and how to do it independently.

Many of our active labour market interventions at various levels are failing in these tasks. The risks to our seemingly assured economic development from complacency and lack of vision in our human resources strategies cannot be over emphasised.