

*Liberty Hall, 1967:*

# THE NEW REPUBLIC SPEECH

*Original text of the Labour Annual General Meeting address*



**By Brendan Corish,**  
Irish Labour Leader

Liberty Hall, 1967:

# THE NEW REPUBLIC SPEECH

Original text of the address  
to the Labour Annual General Meeting

## Introduction

The seventies will be Socialist. At the next general election Labour must for the third successive time, make a major breakthrough in seats and votes. It must demonstrate convincingly that it has the capacity to become the Government of this country.

The Labour Party can only achieve its objectives by attaining the power of government. Our present position is a mere transition phase on the road to securing the support of the majority of our people. At the next general election (the most crucial in our history) it must face the electorate with a clear-cut alternative to the conservatism of the past and present; and emerge from the election as the Party which will shape the seventies.

What I offer now is the outline of a new society, a New Republic.

## A crisis of decision

The Irish people have never made a choice of the type of society they wanted. The Taoiseach once claimed that they had, and that in supporting his party they were consciously deciding for a particular form of society. But when in the history of this State did the electorate have the chance of voting for a new departure? When did they have the opportunity to leave the old policies and practices behind for ever? Political issues have been so confused with personality and history that it has been impossible to debate alternatives in public with calm and deliberation.

The Irish people now face a crisis of decision. There is serious doubt and concern about our present rate of progress. It is widely believed that we are unable to solve any of the major problems confronting us. Disquiet and apathy, cynicism and indifference are not healthy attitudes in a democracy, but they are widely prevalent in ours.

Many people are looking for a new approach. To them, and to the coming generation, we must address ourselves in particular. Our party must speak out clearly and distinctly, and say that it will have none of what is now going on. It must prove to the public that it is in no way involved in supporting the status quo. It must stand aside from the other two parties, which compete only to see who will get the chance to keep things as they are. It must give a socialist alternative. There can be no going back from the position we have progressively taken up in the sixties.

The central issue facing the electorate at the next general election is whether it wants to maintain the status quo with its perpetual emigration, standing army of unemployed, crawling rate of economic growth, and surfeit of promises; or whether it wishes, for the first time, to tackle the massive problem of getting our economy on the move and putting our society in order.

The issue facing this party is whether it has the courage and the capacity to provide the real alternative. I believe that Labour has demonstrated the potential to become the alternative party in the country. I believe that we are so poised that with an effort of unequalled intensity we can project ourselves to the forefront of Irish politics. That is our task, to demonstrate convincingly that we have emerged from the wilderness of the past forty-five years as the only party with a social and economic message.

Only then can our people decide, only then can the electorate make up its mind for the first time. Even if it rejects our proposals, at least a genuine choice will have been made. It can never be said again that all the parties were alike and it made no difference whom one voted for. There will be a difference, and that difference will be not only obvious, but important.

We have reached a point in our history where nobody can shrug off the responsibility of thinking out the nation's problems for himself; when every individual must make an

examination of the real issues and, no matter what his past allegiance, decide for himself what he wants Irish society to be.

The crisis of decision is this: do we want to export another million people by the end of the century and fall so far behind the rest of Europe that we will never catch up, or do we want to put an end to national failure and construct a New Republic?

### Forty-five frustrated years

At the end of forty-five frustrated years, we ask: "What went wrong?" We have failed in every national objective, whether cultural, such as restoring the language; political, such as ending partition; social, such as halting rural depopulation; or economic, such as providing full employment. Our history under the conservatives has been one of stumbling blindly from one catastrophe to another, perpetually blaming everybody and everything for these failures, except those who were really responsible - ourselves.

We have sought refuge in our history, the perfidy of the British, the poverty of our natural resources, the insignificance of our size - anything but admit that we have been damned with political bankruptcy and overwhelmed with mediocrity.

We went wrong in underestimating the magnitude of the national problems facing us. We entered a period of nation-building with an imperfect social philosophy and an almost pathetic belief in the ability of the private enterprise system, which we took over complete from the British, to give us the necessary growth to fulfill our hopes of jobs, security and equality.

The wise men of our time have spent forty-five years persuading themselves and the people that the system we took over was the right one. To this day, the Government clings forlornly to the hope that the magic formulae of private enterprise will end our miseries. So it invites industrialists from all over the world, like ragmen

going to a ball, sure of a feast, but uncertain of the reception. This foreign graft has proved no better than the home-grown variety when it comes to supplying the missing ingredient in our attempts to industrialise.

The plums of the economy have been reserved to private enterprise. The State has entered only such fields as the capitalists found unattractive from a profit point of view. They have fought every attempt to use the State as a real instrument of economic growth and have preserved for themselves the right to do as they like with wealth, irrespective of the nation's needs.

We have the amazing situation in which a chronically under-developed country has freely allowed its capital to be exported to the biggest money market in the world. This is a policy entirely unfavourable to home industries struggling to establish themselves. But the interest of the private investor was safe-guarded even if it meant that six hundred million pounds would be invested abroad and even if it meant that a million emigrants would be discarded as surplus labour in a land starved of employment.

Ordinary people have suffered while the gombeen man has flourished. Speculative office blocks have risen almost overnight while the housing lists have swollen. There is money to be made if you know the right people and if you can hit on the right gimmick. There are many who have hit the big time in the last forty-five years and there are many others ready and eager to join them in their exploitations.

Meanwhile, the economy has floundered and social welfare has been run on shillings and pence. Great tracts of our countryside are virtually depopulated: in whole parishes the very structure of society has collapsed. Many large towns lack even one industry. How are we to break this vicious circle in which money is not invested in the people's interests but rather in the exploitation of a quick turnover and profit?

Labour states clearly that there is only one answer. We must abandon the attitudes of the past – the license to do as one pleased, the national inferiority complex that believed our every effort doomed to inevitable failure, and the apathy that didn't even try. We must scrap the bankruptcy of the present and replace it with purposeful planning that will push us into a period of sustained economic growth.

The dynamic of the Irish economy has yet to be released. Growth rates of one, two or three per cent tell us that. We must release it by putting the common good before that of profit, by consciously directing the use of our resources in the service of the whole community. We must call on the Irish people to purge themselves of the old habits and to generate a spirit of enterprise.

Enterprise is the secret ingredient in economic growth. There is no mystery to it, no hidden formula. It is people who produce growth, and lack of resources was never a hindrance to an industrious people determined to advance in the face of any set-back. Enterprise is simply a mixture of self-confidence, knowledge, and a supreme conviction of success, no matter what the risks.

We have never had this spirit of tackling our economic problems. Instead we have suffered so much from the opposite that we have invited every nationality but our own to come in and do the job for us. Are we not doing just that today?

We must rely on ourselves to generate the effort and enthusiasm which is necessary to carry through fundamental changes. We can do this only within the framework of a socialist economy which uses the State as a powerful instrument for economic growth. It is only within the framework of socialist attitudes that answers will be found.

It is not the purpose of this address to analyse the philosophy of socialism in depth or to outline detailed policies, but I assert that



no solution exists outside socialism. Reliance on private enterprise as the major springboard for growth has given us the poorest economic record in Europe.

Do I really have to list the statistics to convince anybody of that fact? Are there those who doubt the statistics exist? In case there are any who harbour lingering doubts regarding the efficiency of private enterprise, just allow me to give you a short set of examples.

Ten years ago, the Government won a general election with the slogans: "Wives Put Your Husbands Back to Work" and "A Hundred Thousand New Jobs". It launched a first and second programme for economic expansion, begged foreigners to set up new industries, and wound up with a drop in the national work force of over twenty thousand. The wives put their husbands to work, all right, because one hundred thousand young women emigrated and many of them, no doubt, married the one hundred thousand young men who went as well. And at the end of all that, the architect of this colossal blundering asked that he be "Let Lead On"!

Of course we are better off today than we were ten years ago or forty-five years ago. But we still are the fifth poorest country in Western Europe. During these ten years, we didn't catch up with other European countries because, while our economy grew at a snail's pace, other countries grew much faster leaving us even further behind. In the "magic" five years from 1960 to 1965, we came second last among the O.E.C.D. countries in terms of economic development.

## Economic Planning

We cannot live on hopes any more. There must be real planning and the State must accept the primary responsibility for economic development.

We have been accused of uncertainty in our attitude to the role of the State in the economy and of hesitancy in outlining what we regarded as its proper function.

No such hesitancy exists. In the face of experience such as ours, the case for increased socialism is unanswerable. The profit motive has failed as an economic force in Ireland. As socialists, we are committed to the control of resources which are of critical importance to the community, and our approach to the economic role of the State is positive in contrast to the apologetic mumblings of the other parties who must placate their private vested interests.

The State must plan the economy by working towards objectives and priorities. It must extend the range of its activities, by setting up new industries, by co-operating with the existing pattern of agriculture and industry. It must plan by controlling the use of capital so that investment goes into the industries and types of agriculture which are the most important and most beneficial to the community.

Under the other two parties which operate under fear of upsetting economic interests, the State has kept out of new ventures which could have given us a powerful industrial base using our own resources. The opportunity to invest was restricted to private individuals and firms who operated only on the profit motive and who took no social considerations into account. The range of ideas for investment must be expanded to include social objectives as well as financial ones. Then there will be no shortage of ventures for using our home and foreign savings.

In a national plan which has for its purpose a thriving expanding economy, a wide range of social services and a high level of welfare, profit cannot be used as the sole determinant of investment. If anybody wants to know the difference between us and the other two parties, there it is in a nutshell. Socialism means putting the community before selfish individualism and planning under a Labour Government would ensure that community needs get first priority.

In particular, the control of the use of capital would be under governmental authority. We cannot tolerate a situation in which private

interests alone determine the volume and quantity of investment in our economy or, indeed, decide whether it will be invested here at all.

The N.I.E.C. Report on Full Employment showed that, if we were to have everybody at work within fifteen years, the level of investment would have to rise from £200 million in 1965 to a colossal £600 million in 1980. In one year, we would have to invest at home what we have to date invested abroad in our external assets.

The banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions cannot be left as the preserve of private enterprise. Those who questioned our credentials as socialists have forgotten that Labour has based its economic programme since the nineteen-thirties on the necessity to bring capital within the control of the central authority. Capital is too important, too crucial, to be left to the calculations of profit and loss. No other party has the courage and foresight to say that.

It goes without question that planning would be a democratic process, dependent upon the participation of the whole community. We share our problems in common. We can solve them together by using our collective intelligence; by deciding together what the most important things are and by giving them priority treatment. We are democrats, not bureaucrats.

The process would be backed by a determination to get the job done and, most important, a conviction that it can be done: we call for nothing less than an end to the national inferiority complex. Confidence in our own ability will not provide the answers on its own, but without it the most elegant economic programme is doomed to failure, as indeed, without it, the Second Programme was thrown into the waste basket a mere three years after its publication, its target a hundred per cent unfulfilled, its reputation in shreds, and the Government that sponsored it in disarray.

## The Structure of Government

Many of the faults associated with so-called economic programming lie in the very structure of government itself. If a Government is to be involved every day in planning as a continuous activity, then obviously it must be geared to dealing with a huge range of problems efficiently.

As a member of Dáil Éireann for some twenty-six years, I have sufficient experience of the system to question its suitability for the task of planning and running the economy. Our system of the Dáil, the Government and the Civil Service was inherited from the British all in one piece without question or examination.

It makes no allowance for introducing into the public service the best brains available except in a few isolated instances. Surely the most important job in a society, which is the management of the economy, should be able to draw on the nation's top men, even for specific periods or specific tasks. There should be more interchange between industry and public life and it should become commonplace for people to spend some years in the public service. Perhaps we could even question the advisability of drawing Government members from the Oireachtas alone.

In any event, it is obvious that economic planning is impossible if one Department of State is not made fully responsible for all economic affairs. In particular, the State enterprises should be under central management so that the utmost co-operation between them can be assured and so that they are integrated into a national plan.

The present position of State bodies is confused. Responsibility for different State bodies is shared out among a bewildering number of Ministers, many of whom are quick to deny real responsibility for them. Certainly there is no overriding consideration for growth and efficiency.

Planning will demand efficiency and a Labour Government will see to it that the public

service will itself be efficient. Unless the role of Government is seen in the first place as being that of stimulating growth, every attempt at innovation will be resisted.

The problems are complex but the electorate can rest assured that we will allow nothing to stand between us and growth.

The Labour Party commits itself to using the State itself as the instrument for growth, drawing up a national plan, extending its activities, co-operating with existing firms and farms, guiding and controlling investment. It offers a different motive than that offered by the Government. They believe that profit can produce growth – we say it gives us stagnation. Labour relies on our people's sense of community, not on any selfish speculation.

The issue is clear and the alternatives leave no room for compromise. It is time to reject the old and to embark on a new era under a Labour Government.

## Welfare

The crisis of decision which is facing us as a people goes further than the problem of economic growth. Growth is not an end in itself, but must be used to raise the welfare of the whole community. The fundamental decision we have yet to make relates to the type of society we want – an individualist one which reluctantly and inadequately discharges its social responsibility, or a society which is based on the concept of welfare.

What are we to do with increased wealth? How are we to share it within society? Are we to leave things as they are or are we going to root out social injustice wherever it appears?

There is an uneasy truce at present in our society because equality is not really accepted as a social objective. We may have political equality but this is not enough, since real equality can only be achieved by ensuring social and economic equality as well. In many ways this is the central problem of democracy.

Under our present system there is no equality of opportunity, no equal rights, no cherishing of

all the children of the nation equally. Labour unreservedly commits itself to the concept of a classless society in which each child will have the same educational facilities, in which each sick person will receive the same expert treatment, and in which each young couple will have an equal chance of securing a home.

Labour commits itself to a society which permits no class differences, in which great disparities in wealth are eliminated, and in which the resources of the nation are devoted in the first place to the needs of all the people. If a society publicly proclaims the equality of each individual as basic to its political philosophy – as does ours in the Constitution – while doing little or nothing to offset the consequences of unequal wealth and opportunity, then it is perpetuating a contradiction. This must cease.

A paper constitutional equality can mask the starkest inequalities, whether in getting a house, going to university, earning a living, treating a sick child or spending the last years of one's life in a county home. Labour sees in modern Ireland a society in which these things happen every day, and, in seeking to eliminate such injustices, puts a definite choice before the electorate based on two completely different approaches to welfare. The choice lies between individualism and socialism.

There are deep-rooted injustices in our society, ignored by those who like to classify Ireland as belonging to the affluent society. There are the aged, living below the subsistence level on 52/6d. per week, hungry, cold, neglected and ignored, valued by the State at £130.13s.0d. per annum. There are the physically and mentally handicapped, living on sufferance from the proceeds of charitable organisations. There are tens of thousands of unfortunate people not caught in our unwieldly, and often unworkable, social services: in particular widows and orphans, the children of large families with low incomes, the disabled and sick, including their dependants, the itinerants and the deserted.

In an Ireland which proclaims its belief in equality, a survey of old age pensioners in Limerick discovered that some were dying of starvation. In Sligo, an itinerant family was wiped out by a fire while living under the most appalling conditions.

A true sense of social responsibility is missing in this country. In a competitive society which glorifies the pursuit of profit, our social needs come a very bad second to those of the individual. As a result our rulers see nothing wrong in giving a widow with two children 81/- per week, a disabled man 92/6 per week to look after himself and his wife, an unemployed man £5.12s.6d. per week to care for a wife and four children, and a youth just out of school with no job nothing at all.

Irish society today does not appear to believe in equality. The Democratic Programme of the First Dáil, which was largely socialist inspired, has been ignored for fear of upsetting the status quo. If we want to rectify the grave defects in our community we must change our inherited attitudes. We must not be afraid of making fundamental changes, otherwise we shall merely continue with the national hypocrisy of the last forty-five years.

The philosophy of our social services is based on the 19th century notion that it is a crime to be poor. This attitude expresses itself in giving the recipients the barest minimum calculated to sustain them.

As a nation we express a belief in equal opportunity. We love to quote the words of the Proclamation to prove it. But in the field of education, where equality could really begin, the system has been geared to deny the great majority of our children any opportunity to compete with the better-off on equal terms. Compulsory education ends at the ridiculous age of fourteen and, despite recent and welcome concessions, a child's participation in secondary school still depends on family income and attitude. At university level, it is almost entirely

dependent on the parents' ability to pay; universities in Ireland are the prerogative of the upper middle-class. Our society is geared to the continuation of these attitudes, values and prejudices.

Either we can continue as we are and leave old-age pensioners to starve on 52/6d. per week, or we can accept responsibility for their well-being and provide them with incomes, shelter and a sense of dignity. We can carry on with housing shortages, or we can decide that housing is a social need to be provided by the State, local authorities and co-operatives. We can relate medical treatment to the income of the patient, or we can decide that everybody is entitled to the same care and attention.

It is the principle that is important here, not the detailed policies. Any politician knows that policies apply principles and that if you start from the wrong beliefs, then no matter what you do, your policies will be defective.

In this area of social services, including education, housing, health and social security, it has yet to be made a general principle of Government policy that the State accepts responsibility for providing these services to every citizen without exception.

## The Choice Is Welfare

The choice is between welfare or want, between a society which sets out to achieve social and economic equality as well as political freedom or one which grudgingly accepts a small measure of social responsibility and closes its eyes to great areas of distress.

Labour has stated the general principle governing its whole range of welfare policies. The community, through the State, local authorities and voluntary associations, must provide every person without exception with a generous measure of welfare. Wealth and income must be distributed so that everybody benefits and not only the privileged few.



Selfish individualism or social responsibility – continue as we are or engage in fundamental change. That is the choice. The choice must be welfare in the New Republic.

## The Decision

As a people we face a crisis of decision. We have never seriously made a choice of the type of society we wished to build here. We took one over without question, and have attempted to make it work, but without success.

It is necessary now to engage in deep questioning – to question what is the purpose of politics, what is the purpose of society. Are individuals to fend for themselves, each in a spirit of competitive hostility, or are we to work together so that equality and freedom may allow each man to develop as he sees fit? Do we accept man's basic dignity as the starting point of all Government policy?

As a socialist party we accept that as our starting point. In economics the purpose of our national plan will be to achieve a thriving economy; in the social services, our purpose will be to provide a high level of welfare.

Socialism is a real alternative. It puts forward the concept of a new society in contrast to the one we now have. Our purpose in politics is to see to it that the question is put, and that the decision is made.

There is urgency in our approach to the national problems because we want them to be tackled now before they go beyond the point where it would be impossible.

We put it clearly. In our circumstances there is no alternative to socialism.

In saying that the New Republic must be socialist, Labour is not merely invoking a magic word that will dispel all evil simply by being uttered. Labour believes, with Connolly, that socialism is not a set of settled doctrines to be applied dogmatically to every situation but essentially is an attitude capable of being

developed in many ways. It is, as one writer has said, a set of moral attitudes, a belief in fraternal co-operation rather than the competitive hostility of capitalism.

## Socialism

No rigid definition can be applied to socialism since there have been many people who called themselves socialists but yet differed on what they meant by that word. There are differences within our own Party as to what socialism means. I suppose that it is a common enough experience to find that no matter how far left you stand in a Labour Party you will always find yourself to the right of somebody.

For all that, socialists are agreed on the broad objectives which they want to achieve. They have an ideal of the type of society they want to create, one which is built on co-operation rather than competition, one which does not tolerate injustice and one which ensures real equality for all. They reject modern society.

It gave me no pleasure to read out that litany of injustices. I derived no satisfaction from listing the areas of suffering. As a man who believes in equality, I do not outline abuses and injustices to emphasise how bad our Governments have been. I do it to emphasise that our society, which is founded on competition, is not one which any man who accepts the notion that all men are equal could tolerate for one moment. I do it to contrast our present position with the type of society socialists have in mind and which a Labour Government will build.

Our philosophy is based on a set of basic beliefs which are shared by millions of socialists throughout the world and which bind them together even when there are differences as to the best means to achieve the common objectives. In the first place, socialism is a belief in freedom and in the right of every man to develop as he wishes. It applies not just to political freedom but also to the principle of economic freedom which recognises that all men have a right to participate

in decisions affecting their livelihood, whether in the workshop, the office or the farm.

The greatest of modern Popes, Pope John, endorsed this principle by saying that enterprises should become true communities in which workers have a say in the efficient running and development of their firms. They were not to be considered as servants who were forced to keep silent in matters intimately affecting their welfare. Work should build up responsibility and develop people and, because of that, socialists have always put economic democracy on a par with political democracy when outlining their views on freedom.

Secondly, socialism is a belief in equality. This is probably the most misused word in politics because everybody believes in equality, yet people are obviously not equal. Capitalistic competition has allowed the aggressive and the strong to accumulate wealth with few rules to prevent them from going beyond the bounds of justice.

We wish people to feel part of one great community with everybody as good as everybody else, simply because we all share the same dignity of being men. If that great truth is recognised and applied it will speedily put an end to all forms of injustice.

It is in the area of the third form of equality that socialism most differs from capitalism. Is it necessary for us to spell out the obvious in relation to ownership? We know that one per cent of the population owns more than half the wealth in most competitive economies. Is that equality? It is ludicrous to think that a man with wealth is the equal of a man without it, because wealth brings power and great wealth brings great power.

The hallmark of our own economy is exploitation, with profit considered as the key motive for economic progress. If competition is put on a pedestal how are people expected to change their attitudes and co-operate on ventures which demand co-operation, such as

the social necessities of health and education? It has been rightly said that competition breeds cruelty and indifference. It diminishes social responsibility because it puts a premium on the aggressive individual. It stresses the money value of everything to the detriment of things that are incapable of being expressed in £. S. D.

All our policies, whether on health, education, housing, social welfare or whatever, are based on the idea of community, another of the basic socialist principles. The concept of the Welfare State acknowledges that an individual cannot always provide for himself in every eventuality and that we should provide for ourselves together as a community. Selfish speculation has no place in this idea; exploitation is the opposite to what we want and to what we intend to achieve.

Finally, if we were to say what was the last common belief shared by socialists, I would suggest that it was efficiency, a recognition that people have so many needs to be satisfied that our economic system must be efficient in satisfying them. It is madness that in a world of want in which we have the knowledge and skills, men should be unemployed and wasted. The competitive system boasts of being super-efficient but it frequently does not produce what we need as a community. It wastes resources. It never seems capable of putting an end to the greatest waste of all which is unemployment. On the international plane, it allows grain to be burned while millions starve.

Socialists agree on these basic beliefs of freedom, equality, co-operation, community and efficiency. Once accepted, they have profound consequences for social and economic policy and a party which accepts them is in a different category from those which accept the status quo. It is a doctrine that has often been misinterpreted but nobody can deny its idealism and its relevance to the ordinary problems of everyday living. Freedom and equality are fine for the banners of other parties but it is on their policies they have to

be judged. For us, these words mean something. They are our starting point, a foundation on which to build, a measure by which to judge all our achievements and a constant inspiration to act.

If there is one fundamental belief upon which socialism rests, then it is a passion for people. In this country, that burning concern for people has been weak. In the New Republic, the emphasis must be, not on exploitation, not on economic theories, but on people.

## The Party

Despite the significant gains of Labour during the sixties, there is still a lack of credibility at national level in the possibility of a Labour Government in the immediate future. Our Party would require another fifty seats if it were to be returned as the majority party in Dáil Éireann. Many people see this as a task that is beyond us but this attitude is based more on the situation of 1960 rather than that of today.

The gradual progress of Labour in Dublin, which exploded into public view at the 1967 local elections, has balanced the Party structure. No longer can it be said that we are a rural pressure group or a body of agricultural independents. Neither are we a tradesmen's pressure group or a suburban protest vote against economic failure. We have emerged as a balanced political force representing all sections of the community, but in particular the new impatient generation. We can no longer be ignored.

Every political Party depends upon the young; every Party is always preparing for the next election, waiting to become the government. There is no Party unwilling to proclaim itself as the Party of the future. But this is the vital issue in Irish politics because Ireland has been a country ruled by tired old men, bitter and frustrated by their failures. They have dominated it from the beginning and have imposed their conservative attitudes on everything. In the end, they sank into indifference and apathy, infused their

attitudes into public life, business, commerce, agriculture and the arts. Now they have gone and changes are taking place in people's outlook and attitudes. The new generation is different because our society, small as it is, shares in the technological advance of other economies. It is changing the outlook in industrial workers who must be better educated and more highly trained than in the past. Many young farmers are conversant with sciences and skills that were unknown even ten years ago. Agriculture is becoming a business. The young farmer belongs to a new age, less individualistic and conservative than the previous generation. These young people are questioning everything and accepting nothing without examination.

Added to this is the impact on our manners and customs by the wide-spread use of the mass media, in particular television. People have news piped into their homes as it happens. They are more aware of what is happening outside the parish boundary. They can view political discussions and events and make up their minds about what we have to say. Television has changed many attitudes to politics. The press gives political events extensive coverage and detailed commentaries on political affairs. Ireland has changed and is still changing. This is Labour's chance. We must reach out and grasp it.

As a result, our supporters are not so afraid now to admit they belong to Labour. There is still fear, particularly in rural Ireland, of the Government party and of their power to dispense patronage in the form of jobs, pensions and housing. But there is a lessening of the stigma of being Labour. The primitive belief in the infallibility of one party has died out. Some may find it hard to appreciate what these changes mean, but I can remember when it took real moral courage in this country to say «I belong to Labour; yes, I'm a socialist». Indeed, I know parts of the country today where it still takes moral courage to say so, but they are the exception. The Party must speed

up the pace of social change by involving itself in the life of each locality and by presenting to the people the alternative which Labour offers them. It must encourage debate and be ready to put forward Labour's policy on very conceivable occasion.

I know this programme is possible because the Party itself has been undergoing a transformation so fundamental that it has largely escaped the attention of the public and even our very acute press and television. Our branches increased by 50% over the two years from 1965 to 1967. Our new membership belongs predominately to the younger generation. At the 1967 local elections, we had more young candidates standing than ever before. Nearly half the members of our Administrative Council are under the age of 35, young people predominated at the 1967 conference and they dominated the debates.

At the same time, branches are springing up in areas which traditionally have been weakest in their support for Labour.

The new suburbs in our cities, the large towns and the West are the centres of our current expansion. Our expansion in the West is of particular significance. We are now drawing support from areas which ten years ago would not have considered voting Labour, let alone joining us.

The mood of the Party rank and file has changed. It is now more radical, critical and better informed than ever before. It is more aggressive and enthusiastic about Labour's prospects.

Probably the most important characteristic of the Party membership at present is that it genuinely believes in the possibility of a Labour Government. That belief is communicating itself to the electorate, so that the credibility gap is gradually being closed and will, in a short time, be eliminated altogether.

But these new members, young people, and new vigorous attitudes will only make a real

impact on Irish society and usher in the New Republic if they are welded into a strong cohesive and purposeful organisation, constantly in touch with the problems and influencing the thinking of the people while at the same time, capable of working under great pressure against a ruthless and efficient enemy at election time.

The time has come to carry out a complete restructuring of the Party at all levels - so that we can achieve that unique blend of democracy and efficiency which characterises a social democratic party.

We must contest every election, seek out every Labour supporter, gather every penny, so that the real issues of Irish politics are put with force and with constancy before the people.

The task of the Party is to present the Labour alternative and to keep putting it before the people. We must use the modern techniques at our disposal, spread our membership into every village, and saturate politics with the crisis of decision.

Labour must proclaim change, deep and fundamental change. We must be prepared to question every aspect of our present society. Labour must be impatient for efficiency, for growth, for equality, for welfare. We must generate an emotional commitment to the Party that was never there before.

In the long run, Labour has most to gain from people engaging in deep questioning of the role of society. When they ask «what is politics all about? when they inquire if it is about the politicians» private ambitions or the good of society; when they ask what is society all about, then Labour's future is assured.

As we initiate the great debate on the future of the Labour Movement and its objectives, it is essential to look back to the historic forces that moulded us, and also to take a hard look at our movement today.

The Irish Labour Party today may be less sophisticated, less powerful than its counterpart in other countries. But we are heirs



to a tradition of brave struggle. The Defenders in the eighteenth century preceded the 1798 Rising in their violent defence of working-class rights. Tone drew his strength from “the men of no property”, and Fenianism was strongest in the areas where the workers had made the strongest fights. 1913, that magnificent demonstration of working-class solidarity, set the mood for 1916.

All of us know that Irish Labour has disappointed even its most fervent supporters. Perhaps some of the reasons for this can be found in an examination of the elements which make up our movement. The trade unions up to now have not played the role they should have in projecting socialist policies, the role that Connolly and Larkin advocated. In rural areas, our supporters have tended to be too easily satisfied with partial success. The young radicals in our cities, until recently, have criticised from outside our ranks. The Party, too, has been a victim of the cynicism which followed the failure of the political games to establish the republic of equality envisaged by Connolly and Pearse.

Strong criticism is good for this Party. It is right that we should be reminded of our faults and shortcomings. Some of us may disagree. We have every right to do so; this is a Party of dissent and the debate should reach out to every issue which affects our community. Harsh words will be said and accepted. This is not a rigid Party. No section of it has a monopoly of patriotism. And the continued repetition of the same statements, night after night, no matter from what hallowed source, is not often the best way of influencing comrades. Neither is criticism enough. Constructive and realistic alternatives to the present Conservative policies are essential.

I am convinced that from this full and free debate will develop a vital Labour movement in this island – a movement to which we all can give deep loyalty.

I am convinced that the people will accept this alternative of the New Republic. We have embarked on a noble adventure which no Irishman who feels deeply about his country can ignore.

Comrades, let us go forward together.



scáthán

[www.ScathanPress.com](http://www.ScathanPress.com)