Materials

1991-05-01

Tomorrow's People : May 1st. 1991. No.1

Workers Party of Ireland

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Hello and welcome to Tomorrow's People. It's a radical, anti-sectarian publication, and it's about freedom — freedom from want, freedom from control and the freedom to express ideas.

Our heart is with the Workers' Party, but there'll be no hackery here: that never did anyone any good.

We hope Tomorrow's People will become an open door for everyone who wants real change in Ireland, and that means peaceful change.

We hope to grow with the Workers’ Party as it takes its place at the heart of the struggle for freedom and openness in Ireland.

That struggle takes place from the street or townland where you live right up to the European Parliament in Brussels.

It is good that things like newspapers are not the monopoly of one publisher. But a worker, with the support of his colleagues and the community, can publish a newspaper and reach a large audience. He can then have a powerful influence in the fight for freedom.

To page 2
Fighting fit women put O’Hanlon on the spot

Members of the Bray WP women’s group (right) - fighting a hill despite appearances - put the skids under Rory O’Hanlon for a new health centre with a Dail protest.

It pays to protest, members of the Bray Workers’ Party Women’s Group have found. A lively and eye-catching demonstration outside the Dail and a question from Eamon Gilmore TD inside the Dail drew a response from Health Minister Rory O’Hanlon.

The Co. Wicklow women were highlighting the “sick” condition of the three buildings which house the town’s health facilities.

The women, who were joined by Workers’ Party Councillor Liz McManus, told arriving Ministers and TDs that the buildings were dilapidated, unsanitary and too small.

The chairperson of the Bray group, Anne Ferris, told Tomorrow’s People: “We’ve been waiting years for our promised new health centre and we don’t intend to wait any longer. The existing buildings can only be described as ‘sick’. Women and children are mainly affected. We’re speaking on behalf of hundreds of families and on behalf of the people who have to work in a slum.”

Ferris continued: “On their behalf, we’re looking for the capital allocation promised under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress and we’re looking for it now.”

Just this week Ferris received a letter from Health Minister Rory O’Hanlon saying that he was making inquiries regarding a new Bray health centre and promising to keep the group informed. “We’re encouraged, even quietly optimistic, but we’re aware that there’s an election next month. We intend to keep the pressure on until we end the present situation,” because “it’s a disgrace,” said Ferris.

Core of corruption in rezoning scandal?

Free education as promised in the Constitution has become a sour joke to the parents of Cherry Orchard.

There isn’t any realistic way to get their children to school except by private bus. For those whose kids are lucky enough to be enrolled in the nearest school — about a mile away — the charge is £1.75 a week; it goes up after that according to distance.

For those with kids in school in Inchicore, about two-and-a-half miles away, it’s £3.50 a week. Multiply that by two or three school-going children per family — and in some cases more — and you have a sum that amounts to a steady drain on scarce resources.

This would be a serious problem if it is concerned only a few families whose homes for one reason or another weren’t located near a school. But, in fact, we’re talking about the population of the three last Corporation estates built before the Minister for the Environment stopped local authority house-building in Dublin in 1987. There are a total of 1,200 school-going children from Crosswood, Gallantstown and Elmwood estates — more than in many rural towns — who have no school of their own to go to.

The original plans for Cherry Orchard called for five estates with a church, shops and a school. When the building stopped, three-fifths of the homes and the church were finished. The Minister for Education, in her wisdom, decided there were enough schools in the area to cater for the children. They were dispersed, to the six nearest schools.

It was a care decision from her point of view, since the schools she had in mind were all less than three miles from Cherry Orchard.

Over that distance, the Minister would have had to provide free transport as she must for children in the country.

In theory, kids are supposed to be well able for a trek of up to three miles to school. In practice, this means navigating the hazards of heavy traffic over main roads. Few parents are willing to risk that, and the only alternative to private transport is to walk them — no easy proposition if they are heading for different schools, and many children from the same families.

There also may be smaller ones to mind at home.

Last month the council owners announced an increase of 25p a week on one run. This is an unbearable burden on families who in many cases already have to stretch finances to put food on the table, and the people of the area have come together to demand either free transport or the school they should have had in the first place.

The Minister’s reaction? When Tomás Mac Giolla of the Workers’ Party said in the Dail, Mrs. O’Rourke said cheerfully that it wasn’t her responsibility at all. “Hold your whist, boy,” she told Mr Mac Giolla. It was the previous Minister’s responsibility, she said. “It wasn’t the Minister involved.”

She did not deny the fact that she has been Minister since 1987, when Mac Giolla pointed that out. Nor did she deny some of his other points — that the Government has saved £5 to £6 million by rezonings and that the potential profit from the rezonings is £150 million is a cautious one.

A motion by Councillor Pat Rabbitte TD of the Workers’ Party, which called on the council to support a judicial inquiry into planning corruption claims, fell when 35 Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael councillors, in a strange show of unity, abstained.

Eamon Gilmore is adamant that a sworn public inquiry into the rezoning process is needed. “My feeling is that the corruption is not rampant. We are not alleging widespread crookery. But I feel that the people are certainly being sold out on an organised basis and if we don’t want the whole system demeaned, we’ll have to do something about it a hurry.”

A long-time and non-political observer of Dublin County Council told Tomorrow’s People: “What’s been going on seriously calls into question whose interest some councillors are working in, and why. I don’t know why some of them aren’t in Mountjoy. There is no other explanation for what’s been going on than corruption.”

Councillors talk sewage in Meath

Here’s a rezoning story with a twist. The people want the rezoning. Local business doesn’t. So guess who the local councillors needed?

The Garden City Residents and Crestwood Residents’ Association in the fast-growing area of Ashbourne, Co Meath, were strongly behind the plans of a developer, Luke Moriarty, for a scheme involving a shopping centre, two cinemas, a bowling alley and 60 houses.

Unusually, the developer consulted the residents’ groups about his plans, which he publicly displayed and explained. This bit of democracy is rare in such rezoning matters.

Locals were particularly looking forward to a shopping centre.

John King, local Workers’ Party representative and candidate for the Dunshaughlin area of Meath County Council in the coming local elections, says: “Shopping facilities are ridiculously inadequate. There’s about 7,000 people living in the Ashbourne area now. We have one very small shopping centre in one estate, another small shopping centre being developed, and a few shops scattered around. People were looking forward to the whole development.”
I met Kathleen Lynch, councillor, in her house in The Lough, a suburb of Cork City, on a rare sunny day last week.

It was a day made for idleness, but that’s something Councillor Lynch can’t afford any more. The house was full of life as well as light. It was a busy luncheon for a home-maker. The four children (aged 12 to 18) of Bernard and Kathleen Lynch came from school to eat and talk. They were fed and heard, with care.

The Lynch house is also more of less temporary Workers’ Party headquarters in Cork City. People come and go. And she remarked that I was lucky her phone was broken; otherwise she’d be hard put to talk to me without persistent breaks to take calls.

She has been a Corporation councillor for the party since 1985. Why, I asked routinely, had she run.

"Because they guaranteed me I wouldn’t get a seat."

Now, as someone used to knitting parties and politics and among politicians I began to form the impression that I was dealing with someone and something a little different in Councillor Lynch.

"Yes, I said, it certainly looked like that."

"That was partly due to the fact that work and into her personal time.

Councillor Lynch: "What was one of these personal errands?"

She got 412 votes in 1985 and took a seat on the 15th count. These were non-political errands - she was an assistant - "I’m no good on the system and transfers and all that, and on numbers generally," she says casually.

Four years later, in the Dáil election for Cork South Central, Lynch drew a very powerful block of four-and-a-half thousand votes.

How did she react to that? "I got a fright," she says. Why didn’t so many people vote for her? "Because I talk straight. If I don’t have an answer to a question, I’ll say so. I’m also perceived as being honest. There’s an old analogy between politicians and bananas. They start off green, soon turn yellow and before long get bent. People know I’m not like that and the Workers’ Party is not like that."

I discovered in myself a growing sense of gratitude that Kathleen Lynch was on my side.

"That’s a start," she responded sardonically.

She cites an experience on Cork Corporation. "Quite properly, there was a move to dish some footpaths in a gesture to the disabled. It was, of course a civilised thing, and beloved as well. But it took myself and the other handful of members who were fighting with undishonest people. That’s a start."

It was an old analogy between politicians and bananas. "They don’t have an answer to a question, they’re all practical men and women. That’s a start." She has been fighting with undishonest people since 1985. Why, I asked routinely, had she run.

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"The party is in a state of transition. We have work to do. We were so quick to denouncing ourselves that we sometimes find it difficult to think. The leadership has been through these phases before, I think they see what’s going on now as a challenge. But people on the ground are worried that all they believed in will be somehow swept away."

What were the party’s assets?

"The dedication of the members and their willingness for change. I’m talking about people who’ve been slogging away for 30 years. You can’t overlook Proinsias De Rossa as an asset. And, of course, the bravery of Mac Giolla’s willingness to let De Rossa go ahead is undeniable."

"People also see us as honest. It was the Workers’ Party that made the point that working-class people deserve the very best representation. The Labour Party has been presenting an impressive image lately, but people know in the back of their minds that when it came down to it, Labour always flanked it, every time."

"And I hope we’ll be in the party in a year’s time."

"Well, firstly, with more councillors."
New plan aims to wipe out bias against women

A new plan for women's equality aims to abolish discrimination against women in every area of Irish life.

The Workers’ Party report to the Commission on the Status of Women has been described as the best policy statement on women's issues produced by any Irish political party.

The 66-page document, "Equal to the Best", sets out to change the attitudes and the laws that hold women back.

The report advocates:
• A constitutional guarantee on equality, a ban on all forms of discrimination and proper funding for combating legal action in equality claims;
• Reform of job equality laws;
• Reform of social welfare laws to end all provisions which discriminate against women and adequate income support to all women not in paid employment;
• A minimum income system for every individual, irrespective of sex, marital status or occupation, along with minimum wage laws, which would ensure full economic and social equality for all women, wherever they work;
• A Ministry for Women's Affairs with real power;
• A system of community-based childcare and workplace creches;
• No state contracts for firms that discriminate;
• “Positive action”, such as set quotas for women, in all areas, to redress the effects of past discrimination;
• A law requiring companies employing 10 or more to include "equality information" (a report on whether fairness is being practised).

Tomorrow’s People spoke to the chairperson of the Workers’ Party Women’s Committee, Deirdre O’Connell, about “Equal to the Best”.

Tomorrow’s People: Everyone is issuing policy documents on women after the Robinson win. What makes yours different?

O’Connell: Our document is different because it challenges fundamental assumptions about how society is organised. At the same time, it demands change in the Constitution, in legislation, in the social welfare system, in education — as do many other submissions to the Commission. The difference is that we see the achievement of equality for women as part of our commitment to building a democratic, socialist society and this is why we say we want women to be “equal to the best”, not the worst, and why we want women to be equally and actively involved in defining what is the best.

TP: Which is more important, changing attitudes or changing laws?

O’Connell: I think both changes are needed. And there is a connection. It is undoubtedly necessary to change laws to make a statement that society considers something to be wrong, whether it’s job discrimination or rape. Changing laws is in itself a start towards changing attitudes. But it’s also necessary to work at changing attitudes, especially through education, and also through eliminating sexism in the media, at work, in politics and indeed in personal life.

TP: Do you favour “positive action” in the Workers’ Party itself?

O’Connell: Yes, personally I do. I have been convinced by the evidence from countries where quotas are standard among socialist and many “centrist” parties. The Scandinavian countries are way ahead of everyone else. In Norway the number of women in the lower houses of parliament increased by 29.8% between 1945 and 1988, and in Sweden and Denmark by 23%. The rate of increase jumped from 1975 on when quotas were introduced. By the way, the percentage increase in Ireland over the same period is 6.3%.

Melina Mercouri (a Greek socialist) said at a conference in Athens a while back that measures such as quotas are not “a paternistic solution which degrades women, but a solution which indicates the extent of the degree of sincerity in all those very important declarations about principles of equality and democracy. This debate so far has shown a heightened awareness among party members of the relevance of feminism to socialism and I expect this to develop.

TP: Do you think the Workers’ Party is a sufficiently feminist party?

O’Connell: I think that the WP is in the process of becoming a feminist party as part of its present development, but will not be sufficiently feminist until the significance of gender is addressed in party policy and organisation. The draft programme before this year’s ard-fheis is based on principles of freedom, democracy and equality. The debate so far has shown a heightened awareness among party members of the relevance of feminism to socialism and I expect this to develop.

How to get Dublin on the move again

A new transport plan to get traffic-choked Dublin on the move has been launched by the Workers’ Party.

The plan, “Get Dublin Going”, aims to make the city a city for its people — not for the motorway lobby and “developers”.

The 70-page scheme, launched by the party’s spokesperson on Transport, Councillor Eric Byrne TD, is practical, radical and detailed.

Average traffic speeds in Dublin are much lower than they were at the time of horse-drawn transport, the study found.

The plan says cheap, efficient public transport is the best and cleanest way to get around the city. Its centerpiece is a Light Rapid Rail system.

This system, which is a big success in European cities, would run on existing rural lines and also along new routes. It would link all rail stations and parts of the city.

Other highlights include:
• A diesel train service on existing lines for west Dublin;
• An integrated, or linked public transport system, allowing transfers between buses, DART, Light Rapid Rail and the diesel service;
• A fresh approach to public transport based on quality service, efficiency and “putting the customer first”, and a new involvement by transport workers in the running of their companies;
• Strict limits on all-day parking in the city centre;
• A crackdown on traffic offenders, including parking offences.

Eric Byrne says: “Our plan is detailed and costed. It sets out to put an end to clogged roads, noise, fumes, and congestion and car use on the roads. We want to improve the quality of life for Dubliners. To achieve this, we have to challenge a lot of vested interests. We don’t have a problem with that. We’ll be fighting for this plan at all levels.”

Shutting hospitals — suffer little children

About 150 yards from the front door of Temple Street is the Mater Private Clinic. There, the rich can get the best medical care going — for £150 a day.

Mike Jennings, Workers’ Party candidate in the North Inner City, says: “It says a lot about how our society is being run. The Mater is thriving and Temple Street, after fighting so well for the lives of so many local children, is fighting for its own life now.”
The yuppification of Ringsend

Tommy Crilly is generally a mild-mannered sort of a fellow, but his commitment to his community is fierce. He’s seen Ringsend in Dublin start by poverty. Now he’s afraid it’ll be hurt by wealth.

If powerful people have their way, he fears the mad rush towards the Yuppification of Ringsend will tear the heart out of his community and create two Ringsends—one for the wealthy and one for the rest.

While cars have virtually stopped the building of affordable local authority housing (“they just packed up, said nothing, and walked away from their responsibilities”), says Crilly well over 2,000 luxury housing units, including 150 penthouses costing £150,000 each, are planned for Ringsend and its locality.

“An inner city area. Unless we fight towards the Yuppification of Ringsend, Dublin. It’s a case study in how not to ‘renew’ a working-class community.”

Luxury private housing threatens to tear the heart out of Ringsend, Dublin. It’s a case study in how not to “renew” a working-class community.

It highlights not only the housing crisis, but a further steady widening of an already divided society.

The building of affordable local authority housing seems to have been dropped, while the luxury apartment sector proliferates—thanks to tax-breaks and other goodies for builders and corporations.

WHY IT’S HAPPENING NOW

To misquote the old song: “There’s a reason that this is the season for making yuppies…”

Luxury private housing threatens to tear the heart out of Ringsend, Dublin. It’s a case study in how not to “renew” a working-class community.

One of the keys to stopping the well-off arriving and simply pulling up the drawbridge on one of the oldest and most tightly-knit working-class communities in Dublin, says Crilly, who, along with Angie Murphy, is the Workers’ Party candidate in Pembroke in next month’s local elections, is a “social housing mix” in the new developments.

Some of these housing units have to be made affordable to local people, he says. “Otherwise, rising property prices, and rising prices for everything else, will force working-class people out of the area—Ringsenders will simply be forced out of Ringsend. If this community is to stay alive, there’ll have to be a mix of private, public and co-operative housing.”

To be blunt about it,” Crilly says angrily, “they’re going ahead and making a balls of a great opportunity.

“This could be a chance to bring life back to the whole community of Ringsend. It could be a showcase on how to revitalise an inner city area. Unless we fight it, it looks like it’ll be a showcase on how to divide an inner city area.

“I’m a socialist, not a begrudger—it’s good to see people with a high standard of living and a nice lifestyle. And in the long-term, that’s what my party, the Workers’ Party, wants for everyone.

“Bord Gais is making vague noises about setting aside a percentage of the scheme for affordable housing. But what do they mean by affordable? A hundred-and-fifty of the apartments will cost £150,000 each. What will be affordable beside them?” says Crilly.

Angie Murphy says: “And they’re talking about virtually a new town on the Basin site. What will the traffic from this do to the surrounding community?”

“I’m very careful about using the word ‘apartheid,’” says Crilly. “Strictly speaking, it’s about vicious oppression in South Africa. But when I see one part of a community locking itself away from another part of the community with elaborate security, I wonder if we’ve caught a mild form of it here in Ringsend.”

The sales pitch to lure yuppies to Ringsend can be hilarious.

A brochure for the “Camden Lock” scheme (“Galleon duplex can be had here for a mere £90,000”) beside the Grand Canal Basin begins: “The lapsing, unlooted, whispering sea. But I’d prefer if you stood and fought for your community.”

The Grand Canal Basin plan involves a staggering 1,400 housing units, a £100 million luxury leisure hotel, and offices.

At the same time, about 1,000 applicants are looking for local authority housing in the area.

“It’s got to the stage now that people are reading the deaths in the papers and making inquiries about such and such a flat or house. It’s turning into a bit of a ‘Lord of the Flies’ situation. People are desperate.”

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Angie Murphy adds: “But I personally know of two cases where people from Ringsend, with decent jobs, earning the industrial wage, were refused mortgages to buy apartments in Fisherman’s Wharf. I don’t want to see the community I’ve lived in all my life split like that.”

A Workers’ Party survey has found that the average price of one and two-bedroomed apartments in the south city area is now between £75,000 and £85,000.

The building of affordable local authority housing seems to have been dropped, while the luxury apartment sector proliferates—thanks to tax-breaks and other goodies for builders and corporations.

A plan by Bord Gais for a vast luxury development on its land around Grand Canal Basin came about primarily because of the Government’s Section 23 tax benefit law, which, among other things, encourages companies to build buy apartments and re-market them for big profits—it is, in other words, a speculators’ charter.

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It must be a great comfort that, for too long, unemployed, unhoused and disadvantaged of Ringsend.

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Ih.
**Trees in bloom**

There's something "brilliant" happening on the north side of Dublin all right. It's a five-piece band from Finglas, formed in August '89, and called "Brilliant Trees".

Since their formation, they have been attracting more and more attention as one of the most promising bands on the Dublin scene.

**PUBLIC RECORDS**

By PAUL KERWICK

They're a band with a political conscience. They don't turn away from such issues as AIDS, international politics and euthanasia.

One of their songs is about Government attempts to "re-settle" the Sheriff Street community so as to make way for the Custom House Docks Development.

They were asked to write the song "Home" by some of their mates from the area.

To date they've recorded three demo tapes, one of which was paid for by U2's record company "Mudstone".

The band consists of singer — Alan Hory; guitarist — Tony Barrett; bassist — Stephen Parnell; acoustic guitarist — Paul Mitchell and drummer Dave Farrell.

Their many influences include such bands as Germany's "Kraftwerk".

On the north side of Dublin and Finglas in particular seemed such a hive of musical activity, said Barrett: "There's a lot of musical talent in working-class suburbs where there's nothing to do but go on the dole and go to the pub or join a band and learn an instrument."

Their next gig will be in Charlie's, Aungier Street, Dublin, on 25th. It may well be another brilliant occasion.

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**To be housed, fed and heard**

Children have a right to be warm and to be fed well. The Government should give money and pay more attention towards children who live in poverty. If all children are lucky enough to be housed, which they should be, they should have the right to go to school.

Children should be cared for and as I mentioned before, they should be fed well. Children are dying from starvation all over the world and this should not be happening. The Governments from all the countries involved in the Gulf war can spend so much money on arms, yet they still cannot spend half as much to feed starving children.

Children should be entitled to health care when they need it. It is important that every child has equal access to health care because the children who live in a rich society should not be the only people entitled to health care.

It is also important that all children have a right to education because without education you cannot get a very good job, most times you cannot get a job. If children start school they should not be expected to leave too soon in order to find work. They should be encouraged to stay on in school, not to be encouraged to leave school as soon as possible.

If a child is first in a queue, he/she should be served first because they look as if they are in a hurry. Maybe they are, I am not saying that they are not, but the point is that if a child is first in a queue, they should be served first. The child could be in a hurry as easily as the adult could be, but the shopkeeper just does not notice that.

For instance, one day a girl I know said to the shopkeeper "These two packets of crisps please," and she handed over the money. The shopkeeper snapped and she said "Wait!" and she went to serve an adult, when my friend was first in the queue. Then the shopkeeper eventually served my friend. The shopkeeper said with fury "Next time have patience!"

Children have rights and they should be respected.

Children do have a right to be heard. Adults or their elders seem to dismiss children. They do not always give children a chance. I do not think it is fair if a child asks an adult what something means and the adult reply is "You would not understand it!"

Do you think that is giving a child a chance?
Army bridges Roche's gap

Fianna Fail and Fine Gael Dublin County Councillors jeopardised the lives of Tallaght children by looking after the commercial interests of their friends, according to Workers' Party Councillor Don Tipping.

Tipping had to propose a Section 4 motion instructing the County Manager to put up pedestrian bridges over a section of the Western Parkway, a highway that many children have to cross to get to school.

Tipping said he warned the council last December that the owner of the West Link Bridge, Tom Roche, would not provide the pedestrian bridges that were needed by the end of January, as the millionaire builder had agreed.

The single temporary pedestrian bridge currently in use had to be done away with.

"I believe that this section of the Western Parkway was opened before Christmas," Mr. Roche, said Tipping. "The safety of the children of Tymon and Kilnamaghan estates who attend schools in Greenhills and have to cross this death-trap came second to money, Tipping said.

Tipping called on the residents of Kilnamaghan and Tymon to protest to the County Manager and Tom Roche. "They say they might get around to it at Christmas," Mr. Roche said yesterday. "We want a second pedestrian bridge now before kids start getting killed."

"It's hard not to suspect that people are delaying on this in the hope that another year will pass without money to provide another bridge. That would be great news for Fianna Fail car salesman friends," Tipping said.

I am a returned Yank — very recently returned.

After almost three years beyond New York, on the plane home, I made a gin discovery. It was 3,000 feet.

A man in the seat in front was reading that day's Irish newspaper. I saw the headline over his shoulder and froze. "BISHOPS!" a said, "WARN IN CONDOM ROW!"

The refusal point blank to turn the plane around.

They wouldn't even open a door to let me jump.

And no, they said, there was no chance that they'd drop me off and fly there and then around Newfoundland, where I'd rather take my chances with the polar bears than with flying away to say. His Eminence, Jeremiah Newman of Limerick, talking about young people and their propensity to "sin."

As a result, although generally opposed to privatisation, I am open to special pleas on the immediate privatisation of Aer Lingus. In fact, I think they should give it to free to Larry Goodman.

With the idea of a organisation tasked with serving the travelling public would force a man back to the Carmel Schaile that has somehow thought we'd outgrown.

Kurds begging for bread distributed by Turkish soldiers at a refugee camp

De Rossa query on Kurd plight

Johnnies go causing rows again, hurroo

De Rossa wants to know how it is that virtually limitless planes, helicopters, personnel and money were available to launch the Gulf War, while only a fraction of these are available to deal with this appalling human disaster? How is it that it was possible to feed and provide shelter for half-a-million troops in the Saudi Arabian desert without undue difficulty, yet it is beyond the capacity of the same countries to mount anything more than a token effort for those dying of hunger on the side of a Turkish mountain?

A mathematical and a moral problem for our times:

At the height of the Conderendum, while up in the Dial seeing some of our elected RISE-A-ROW

By Noel McFarlane

Workers' Party members, I saw what I first thought was a just-burst balloon — it was some object, anyway, ricocheting off the walls and emitting an angry hiss.

I slowed down on one occasion just long enough for it to be identified as this Fianna Fail gentleman from Thurlies, Co. Tipperary, Senator Des Hanafin (elected on the 7th count, Labour Panel).

He was the head contra, it seems, against Charlie Haughey's Rubber Revolution.

His bribe, I noted, looked nine months' pregnant. I wondered just whose brief, or briefs, he was carrying. Was it the brief of the Men's Sodality — sorry, Family Solidarity — our new neighbours (there goes the neighbourhood) in Gardiner Place?

Of course Charlie changed his mind on change after his great mind on change after his great

Rise-a-row
All-Ireland poll "deal reached"

TOMORROW'S PEOPLE REPORTER

"Grand committee on Northern Ireland" was held in Westminster. If this falls, the SDLP will support the idea of a "voluntary coalition". The scrapping of the South's territorial claim over Northern Ireland in Articles 2 and 3 will probably get the go-ahead. Both Unionist parties and Alliance agree with such a move, while the SDLP is prepared to see the Republic's "claim" become an aspiration.

The North's political parties are treating the Brooke talks with "cautious optimism", but many say privately that this is probably the best chance for an agreed settlement. Northern Ireland Office insiders have indicated that all participants involved in the dialogue are "eager" to make it work.

Belfast's decent skins

The image of skinheads as the shock troops of neo-Nazi groups like the National Front is taking a beating in Belfast. A group of young skins have set up a group against racism.

Still sporting their DMs, denim and shaven heads, the Belfast boys aim to challenge the racist stereotype attached to skins and bring it back to its roots in racial harmony when black and white stomped across the dance floor together in the Sixties.

Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice (SHARP) have recently formed a branch in Belfast and a founding member, Cormac O'Hanlon, outlined its aims.

"Everyone thinks that skinheads are racist but the real skins who love the original music, which is black in origin, are not racists. The aim of SHARP is to challenge this image and fight against racism."

"The vast majority of so-called skinheads, six or seven years ago, were racist or might have followed the National Front, but now I think the majority are anti-racism going back to the roots of the cult."

The manipulation of skinheads in the early 1980s by the NF and other right wing British Movement groups. For the same period, the SDLP is prepared to see the Republic's "claim" become an aspiration.

As the talks get under way, deviation, security, a Bill of Rights, and Articles 2 and 3 will be high on the agenda. While all the parties concerned have different public positions, in private, agreement can be found on most subjects. All agree, with the exception of the SDLP, who have not pledged themselves one way or the other, that a Bill of Rights should underpin any agreed settlement.

This was discussed at a significant conference run by the author Padraig O'Malley in the United States, which was attended by both the SDLP and the DUP.

The seminar, under the heading "The Protection of Minority Rights in Northern Ireland", had DUP deputy leader Peter Robinson and as former DUP Lord Mayor of Belfast, Nigel Dodds, along with SDLP chairperson, Mark Durcan, on its platform. All agreed that such legislation on a Bill of Rights should be enshrined and unchangeable.

However, the main question remains what type of government institutions can be agreed. Here, the Official Unionist Party seem to be the stumbling block.

While the other three parties agree on some form of devolution, the DUP line is strongly anti-devolution — at leadership level at least.

In negotiating teams at the Brooke talks will be trying to steer them in the direction of the "Order-in-Council system and a "grand committee on Northern Ireland" at Westminster. If this fails, the Official Unionists will support the idea of a "voluntary coalition".

The scrapping of the South's territorial claim over Northern Ireland in Articles 2 and 3 will probably get the go-ahead. Both Unionist parties and Alliance agree with such a move, while the SDLP is prepared to see the Republic's "claim" become an aspiration.

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North's parties unite - on condoms!

Former Taoiseach Jack Lynch once said: "I would not like to leave contraception on the long finger." The North's major political parties seem to agree. They support the promised liberalisation of laws concerning the sale of condoms in the South.

While no one had a policy on the matter, with the exception of the Workers' Party, all agreed that condoms should be freely available to all who wished to buy them.

That all the parties agreed on something is a major breakthrough. But it was condom which achieved what the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Peter Brooke, has yet to secure.

The SDLP admitted that the subject had never been discussed, but their press officer said they were supportive of availability.

"We don't get involved in the internal affairs of another country," was the initial response from the Official Unionist Party. But the party's Health spokesperson, the Rev. Martin Smyth, former Grand Master of the Orange Order, added: "Having said that, we would be supportive of their sale."

David Ford of the Alliance Party said they had not formulated any position on the matter but they were taking a "liberal" stance. The Workers' Party was fully behind those progressive groups in the Republic which were attempting to bring legislation through the 20th century, said Dunmanus Councillor Gerry Curley.

Unfortunately, the best efforts of Tomorrow's People failed to get a print run of the Rev. Ian Paisley's DUP. Neither the "delicate" nor the "joy" wings of the SDLP were available.

SIDELINES

A merger between the Official Unionists and the DUP is likely if informal talks between influential figures in both parties succeed.

It is believed that the retirement of both of the present leaders - Ian Paisley (DUP) and Jim Molyneaux (UDP) - may be necessary before any possible merger between the two parties is headed for the House of Lords and that younger DUP politicians linked to the party's "non-clerical" section see a single Unionist party as a good career development.

Senior and middle-ranking figures in both parties are convinced that their grass roots are behind the idea of a merger, which would make major change in Northern politics.

The sum of £121,925 was made available by the Department of Health for "family planning" last year. Of this, £93,325 (77%) was given to a combination of the Catholic Marriage Advice Centre, a Family Life Centre (Cork) and the Roe and Owen clinic in the Ovation Method in Ireland. Only 20% was given to other groups.

For the same period, the Irish Family Planning Association has received no money at all to provide services for its clients.

A bag in your ear...

Sénator, noble Senator Cathal Ó'Shíneach (chair), has written to the Dáil Committee on Procedure and Privilege proposing a memorial in Leinster House to Charles Stewart Parnell. But he adds, as an afterthought, his Senate committee "also proposes that the acquisition of portraits/pictures of the more recent holders of the offices of Cathal Ó'Shíneach and Ceannt Comhairle for display in Leinster House could also be considered..."

I look toiacán's cut to hang himself again.

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