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The Workers Party

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***THE
WORKERS
PARTY***



P R E S S R E L E A S E

CONFIDENCE DEBATE IN GOVERNMENT

SPEECH BY DEPUTY PAT RABBITTE

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

17 October 1991

THE WORKERS PARTY / PAIRTÍ NA nOIBRÍ
PRESS OFFICE: LEINSTER HOUSE, DUBLIN 2

TELEPHONE: (01) 766554/789911 EXT 462 FACSIMILE: (01) 789119

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Yesterday, An Taoiseach Charles Haughey TD during the weakest, least convincing, most evasive and ambivalent speech I have heard him make in the House - decided to single me out for a vicious personal attack and to ascribe to the Workers' Party the "orchestration" of the "campaign" of scandals that now beset his Coalition Government. The Taoiseach's bizarre reasoning was followed by the spectacle of his political bully-boy Minister for Justice Mr Ray Burke TD trawling a BBC television programme to find a convenient peg on which to hang an old list of allegations against the Workers' Party. It would appear that the Government has decided that by digging up what they claim is the Workers' Party's past, we will be intimidated from exposing Fianna Fail's present. The tactics used for so long by Mr Haughey to silence his own backbenchers will not silence members of this Party.

Firstly I want to reply to Mr Haughey's charges. He says:

"Deputy Rabbitte has played a leading role in the more pernicious aspects of the campaign. He has been the RTE anchorman appearing daily with some new false allegations or innuendo".

I challenge An Taoiseach to enumerate these so called "false allegations or innuendo". I stand over every comment I have made during this political crisis and, if I had time, I would repeat every question I have posed because the Taoiseach has left the important questions unanswered. Indeed, I intend to pose a few new questions for An Taoiseach and his Government today.

Of course, Deputy Haughey does not really believe that I have been making false allegations. As Deputy Michael D. Higgins pointed out in an important contribution last night, the real message is in the sub-text. As Deputy Higgins said last night Mr Haughey is really saying to RTE: "Get Deputy Rabbitte off the airwaves because I don't like what he is saying". Not for the first time his colourful man Friday, the Government Press Secretary, will no doubt communicate his Masters wishes even more directly to RTE Management. This is the ugly authoritarian face of intolerance described so graphically by his own courageous backbencher Deputy Sean Power.

An Taoiseach goes on to say that my "political agenda seems to be one of furtive phone calls, clandestine meetings with some disaffected, disloyal employees passing over stolen documents".

How does Deputy Haughey know about my "furtive phone calls?" Is it a case of the Leopard being unable to change his spots? Are some of his old friends listening into my phone calls?

If An Taoiseach is getting an accurate transcript he must know that even in the Golden Circle in which he moves, the public spirited people who have spoken to me over recent weeks can hardly be described as "disaffected employees". Many of them are business people who are sickened by the manner in which normal business and commerce has been distorted by political favouritism in this Country. It is more revealing that An Taoiseach's kitchen cabinet should consider such publicly spirited people to be "disloyal". Disloyal to whom? Disloyal to the public

interest? To the taxpayer? To the image and reputation and future of our country? Or disloyal to the small elite who have made huge fortunes from inside knowledge and boast in the better restaurants of their off-shore mechanisms to avoid tax? Is the Taoiseach saying that he would prefer to leave public life - as he is now destined to do - keeping this information swept under the kind of carpets that his charming man Friday will hopefully soon revert to selling?

An Taoiseach complained that I had "put down a series of questions (to me) demanding to know if (I) have had meetings with various different people." He seemed entirely unconscious of the irony that all of my questions have been transferred to one or other Minister which defeats the very purpose of these questions. In any event at the rate that various Ministers are steering clear of any questions that lead to the Taoiseach's door, there is no prospect of answers.

An Taoiseach's speech yesterday does nothing to allay the public disgust that is so manifest about the operation of a Golden Circle where some elements of Business and some elements in politics are hand in glove. 'Tis all a pernicious rumour orchestrated by the Workers' Party according to the Taoiseach's creative scriptwriters. I was not involved in the Carysfort deal, he tells the House, and then adds: "I gave it my full support." What precisely does this mean? Who is the more grateful to the Taoiseach for his "full support" - the taxpayer or Pino Harris? The taxpayer must welcome the opportunity to learn about "mezzanine finance", "positive tax opinions" and how

to make investments without really knowing about it in the new Smurfit Business School.

The Taoiseach notes that "In the last few days we have much play being made of what was on the face of it an extraordinary letter written by Mr Desmond to Chairman of Pernod-Ricard. The claims it seemed to make are patently absurd".

It is gratifying from a man who apparently never admits anything that An Taoiseach agrees that the letter is "extraordinary" but on what basis can he conclude in his next sentence that "the claims it seemed to make are patently absurd"? How can Deputy Haughey tell this House with a straight face that if there was any impropriety it "would have become evident in the court proceedings"? The Court reached its findings on the facts before it and Mr Desmond's letter was not before the Court so we cannot say what the Court would have found.

An Taoiseach avoids the earlier confusion about whether he considers Mr Desmond a "personal" or a "business" friend and chooses to put on the record of the House his full support for what he describes as "a great national enterprise involving thousands of fine people and was up-front open and above board". This reference to the Whitbread Round the World yacht race is a curious insertion in the Taoiseach's speech. Nobody has asked the Taoiseach to make any "apologies for fully supporting it". However since he raises the matter and since he is so adamant on his lack of contact with the commercial State Companies, may I ask him to tell the House what precisely his full support for

this great "national enterprise" entailed? Did he bring pressure to bear, or have representations made on his behalf to the state Companies to support this "great national enterprise?" In particular I invite the Taoiseach to deny that he personally canvassed Irish Life for a donation of £100,000 to this proud endeavour?

Continuing on what the Taoiseach and his Ministers would have us believe is the Doctrine of Separation of State from Semi-states, I would like to ask the Taoiseach to reconcile the statement by Mr Smurfit that he was requested to bring in Consultants to prepare Telecom for privatisation with the Government's own statement that no such request had been made? I put it to the Taoiseach that Mr Smurfit indicated he was prepared to take a further term as Chairman only if Telecom would be privatised. Deputy Haughey personally assured him that such authorization would be forthcoming. Hence Mr Smurfit's action in getting on with the job and hence Mr Brennan's inability to disclaim Government involvement. Mr Smurfit's personal interest in the design of a new Headquarters for Telecom at Ballsbridge was not because of any short term profit that might accrue with or without his knowledge to any of his investment companies but because of his intention to take a significant if not a controlling interest in a privatised Telecom.

Before publication of the Desmond/Pernod Ricard letter by Deputy de Rossa the single most disturbing allegation of an extraordinary series of allegations was the revelation by Deputy Bruton that sensitive financial data secured in confidence about

the commercial affairs of a subsidiary of Aer Lingus was transmitted to a rival company in the private sector of which the Taoiseach's son is a principal. The Taoiseach made no reference to this matter which has so disturbed some of his own backbenchers. He has transferred my questions to the Minister for Communications, Seamus Brennan who has distinguished himself so far in this controversy by managing to avoid saying what he believes happened. May I now put it to the Taoiseach that no "postal misdelivery" ever occurred. May I put it to him that the financial and related data did actually reach Celtic Helicopters. May I ask him to explain to the House why we are now getting a different version of events than the version given to the Aer Lingus Board at the time? May I invite him to explain to the House the significance of last Sunday's Business Post claim that Mr Ciaran Haughey was also a consultant at that time to Ryan Air?

An Taoiseach insinuated yesterday that I and Deputy de Rossa met with the Chief of Staff of the IRA apparently to secure information to discredit the Government. It is a base lie and Mr Haughey and his bully-boy Minister for Justice knows it is a lie. It is a lie that stands excised from the record of the House but has been widely broadcast since.

I share the same county and similarly humble origins with the Taoiseach. Otherwise more than a generation divides us. An Taoiseach has carved out more than a number of distinctions that have so far eluded me. I have missed out on the great wealth that has somehow fallen into Deputy Haughey's lap during his time in public life. Deputy Haughey's career has also been marked by

the distinction of having been charged with the illegal importation of arms; it is not a distinction that I covet.

May I also take the opportunity to ask the Taoiseach to deny that in the summer of 1990 he summoned Mr Bernie Cahill to his Island Retreat and instructed him to dispense with the services of Goodbody Stockbrokers in favour of Mr Dermot Desmond's NCB for the then forthcoming Irish Sugar Company Flotation.

THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE

In an outrageous attempt to divert attention the Minister for Justice Mr Ray Burke T.D. has sought to rely on the contents of a television programme against which libel actions have been initiated and in respect of which the principal source of allegations against the Workers' Party has since been remanded and charged with conspiracy to murder members of the security forces in the name of the Provisional Movement. These facts did not suit the purpose of the Minister in his frenzied scavenging to intimidate Workers' Party deputies.

There is no secret about the origins of the Workers' Party. One dimension of our history is rooted in the militant nationalist tradition. More than twenty years ago our antecedents recognised the futility of physical force. The progenitors of the Workers' Party did make mistakes in the circumstances then prevailing in Northern Ireland. What seems to be upsetting Minister Burke and some of his backwoodsmen is that these mistakes have been acknowledged and the Workers' Party has left behind the blind

alley of militant nationalism and entered the arena of democratic politics. Unlike Fianna Fail, which has its own origins, Workers' Party deputies didn't enter this house with revolvers in their pockets. Of course it would better suit the purposes of FF if Workers' Party supporters were still painting letter boxes green or shooting at members of the security forces rather than making such a political nuisance of themselves.

The viciousness and sheer malice of the attacks on the Workers' Party by An Taoiseach and his Minister for Justice must be some kind of barometer of the impact we are making on this Government. Neither Deputy Haughey nor Deputy Burke like being pursued for answers. I can scarcely think of two members of this House less suited to engaging in a witch-hunt against anybody.

What can the house expect from a Minister for Justice whose previous role has been to act as the protector, enforcer and provider of, and for, the Speculators? With unconscious irony Minister Burke tells the House that he has "initiated the first comprehensive review in recent years of the operation of the Garda Fraud Squad". Minister Burke is uniquely qualified to know how badly such a review of the Fraud Squad is needed. He has an extent of personal experience of the Fraud Squad which none of his predecessors can claim. Having secured his Auctioneers license almost contemporaneous with his election to Dublin County Council, Mr Burke's subsequent activities are to some extent a matter of public record and eventually became the subject of a Fraud Squad investigation.

One wonders if the country would have been so fortunate in its Minister for Justice if the system of appointment was similar, say, to the U.S. system, of Senate Hearings for Senior Government appointments? The prospect of being able to question Deputy Burke, for example, on the contents of Frank McDonald's book 'Saving The City' and 'The Destruction of Dublin' is certainly an appealing one. The Minister untruthfully claimed last night that the Workers' Party never answered the allegations contained in the Spotlight programme. I notice the Minister Burke never answered the assertions contained in Frank McDonald's respected book nor did he initiate legal action in respect of these assertions.

It is a bit hard to take a lecture on morality from minister Burke who for much of his political career acted as the enforcer, protector and provider for land speculators.

The fact that Deputy Burke was appointed Minister for Justice says a lot about Deputy Haughey's choice of friends and assessment of character. Gasps of disbelief went around the Fraud Squad in Harcourt Square when the cabinet was announced in 1989 and they discovered that their new political master was to be a man who himself had been the subject of an intensive Garda Fraud Squad inquiry arising from his activities as an auctioneer and politician in North County Dublin.

Deputy Burke clearly believes that events that happened in 1971 and 1972 are legitimate matters to raise in this debate. If he can case his mind back that far, perhaps he could also go one

year earlier. He demanded answers from the Workers' Party. Perhaps he should also ask some questions relating to Deputy Haughey's involvement in the illegal plot to import arms in 1970? It is true that it is a condition for any journalist seeking an interview with the Taoiseach that no questions relating to the arms plot will be raised? Why has the Taoiseach never commented upon the suggestions made by Mr Justice Henchy in his summing up at the arms trial that either Deputy Haughey or Deputy Gibbons has committed perjury? Who did Mr Haughey meet at that time? Did he meet with people who were then leading members of the IRA? What was his knowledge of the circumstances of the establishment of the Provisional IRA? Why has the Taoiseach never commented upon the statement made in the Dail on December 1st 1972 by his former cabinet colleague, Deputy Blaney who said: 'Not only did circumstances bring the freedom fighters into existence, but so did the promised support of help, not just be me but by a lot of other people as well. The blame lies on me and a whole lot of others, who helped to bring into existence shortly after those who are now condemned as terrorists, murderers - the gunmen of the Provisional IRA.

(Col 668 Official Report, Dec 1st 1972)