

Economic and Social Programme of the Labour Party

Labour puts people first. The provision of productive employment is the central point of Labour's policy.

The results of the recent census dramatically show the need for change. Our population stands now at only 2,815,000. The decline in our population in the five years since 1956 has been greater than that recorded in the thirty years up to 1956. Net emigration over the last five years has amounted to the startling figure of 216,000, the highest rate recorded since the State was established.

A declining population means that an increasing proportion of the people are aged or infirm, it means a smaller home market for the products of our farms and factories, less demand for transport and other services, fewer shops. It means stagnation and decay.

That is why the Labour Party emphasises the need for change and lays stress in its economic policy on measures that will bring about an increase in employment in order to arrest and reverse the decline in population.

ECONOMIC POLICY

The basic need today is to develop our economy so as to raise living standards, expand employment and so stem the ruinous drain of emigration. Economic expansion must have top priority.

The aims of Labour's economic policy are (a) the utilisation of all the resources of the nation, (b) full employment and (c) fair shares for all in the nation's wealth.

Our economy must be planned so that none of our resources - physical or human - are left idle or wasted. Economic planning can ensure that by a combination of public enterprise, co-operative effort and private initiative, all our productive potentialities are fully developed.

Labour stands for public ownership and public control so far as it is necessary to safeguard or promote important community interests and will urge the establishment of new enterprises under public ownership or control. Labour recognises however, that private enterprise should be assisted in those fields in which it proves able to combine efficiency and the will to expand with responsibility towards the consumers, the employees and the community.

ECONOMIC PLANNING

Whether economic activities are based upon private enterprise or various forms of public ownership, they must be co-ordinated in a planned economy in order to prevent any of our resources being wasted or lying idle. Co-ordination and planning must be under public direction but the various

economic groups and trade organisations such as the trade unions should be consulted where decisions concerning the broad lines of economic policy are involved.

To assist the Government and the Oireachtas in carrying out their functions of directing the economy and planning the full utilisation of all our resources there should be a planning body of independent experts. The functions of this body would include -

- (a) the preparation of a programme for an increased rate of investment in productive projects so as to provide more productive employment.
- (b) the co-ordination of the level of public and private investment, so as to maintain a steady rate of increase in overall investment.
- (c) the co-ordination of the work of the various State bodies and Government Departments concerned with productive projects particularly with a view to the working out of new projects which could be undertaken by a pooling of resources.
- (d) to co-ordinate the programme for economic growth with the educational programme.
- (e) the provision of a channel whereby information available to the various industries concerning future developments could be given to the planning body so that necessary steps could be taken in time to meet new developments.

The planning body would assist the Government in working out a flexible over-all national economic plan and an annual economic budget which the Government would implement through its control of investment, credit and taxation policies.

The body would also assist private industry in working out expansion plans after consultation with both sides of industry through Development Councils for the different industries, the Government providing such assistance as might be necessary to carry through the plans for expansion.

The planning body would report to a Minister for Economic Affairs who would be the Government Minister responsible for economic affairs generally and for the co-ordination of the economic policies and activities of our Departments such as Finance, Industry and Commerce, Agriculture, Transport and Power.

FINANCIAL POLICY

Financial policy should be directed towards raising national production and living standards and facilitating necessary economic and social reforms. Its aims should be to provide the financial means necessary to fulfil the tasks of economic policy set by the Government and to exert a stabilising influence on economic activity.

Money and credit must be subordinated to the public interest and in particular credit policy must be so directed as to provide the capital needed for the development of the economy and the rate of interest kept as low as possible.

National savings must be invested in our own country and the capital resources available from such savings augmented by the repatriation for productive development purposes of some of the hundreds of millions of pounds worth of assets held abroad.

Changes are necessary in our central banking system. In particular the funds at the disposal of the Central Bank including those of the Legal Tender Note Fund must be made available to whatever extent is necessary for national development purposes.

TAXATION

The basis of taxation policy must be to secure a fair distribution of the burden of taxation according to ability to pay. The growth of indirect taxation imposed on the mass of the people must be curbed.

The introduction of a tax on certain types of capital gains which at the moment are free of tax should be considered and steps taken to ensure that tax evasion by any section of the community is ended. An easing of the burden of tax on the lower and middle income group is also warranted.

PUBLIC ENTERPRISES

Existing State and semi-state bodies must be encouraged to raise their productive efficiency and to extend their fields of operation. In particular there must be full development of the bogs, the extension of electrification, the further development of a co-ordinated public transport system, an increase in our national merchant shipping fleet particularly for coastal and cross-channel trade, and a further expansion of food-processing industries under State auspices.

New state-sponsored bodies to develop new enterprises, particularly in the field of chemicals and plastics, should be established.

Greater opportunities for Dail Eireann to maintain contact with and to review the policies and activities of State bodies are necessary.

With a view to the development and expansion of the forestry programme responsibility for afforestation should be taken away from the Department of Lands and put under a National Forestry Authority which would undertake the planting programme and be responsible for the setting up under State auspices of industries using forestry products.

An Bord Iascaigh Mhara should be re-organised and made the instrument for a progressive fisheries policy aimed at the full development of our fisheries on a national basis and geared to home and export markets by the establishment of a substantial fishing fleet into which the inshore fishermen would be integrated.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

The development of existing industries and the establishment of new industries must be pressed forward vigourously. New industries should be set up under State auspices. Efforts should be made to get State enterprises in other European countries to co-operate in establishing large-scale new industries here producing for export markets.

In cases where substantial capital grants are made available by An Foras Tionscal to new industries, there should be provision for public participation in some form or other in the enterprise.

~~The distinction in the making of grants between the undeveloped areas and other areas should be ended.~~

In view of its structure and the domination by a couple of concerns, the flour-milling industry should be taken into public ownership.

DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS

Where external trading conditions make it necessary, the rationalisation and reorganisation of particular branches of industry should be assisted by generous State grants on certain conditions. Such reorganisation should be carried through by Development Councils on which trade unions would be represented, with due regard to the protection of the workers' rights and of the consumer's interest.

Labour will strive for the extension of the right of workers in industrial enterprises and their trade unions to be fully consulted on all matters concerning their security and livelihood.

An extension of State assistance through Coras Trachtala for export marketing and the encouragement of co-operative marketing abroad should have a very high priority.

AGRICULTURE

Labour's farm policy is based on the interests of the small and medium-size farms and not one which favours the minority of big farmers. It aims at higher production from the land as well as more efficient production.

Assistance to agriculture should be primarily directed towards providing improved marketing arrangements, the increased use of fertilisers, cheap credit facilities and a comprehensive technical advisory service.

A primary aim should be the encouragement of co-operation among farmers and to this end the State should lend generous support to all efforts to extend the application of co-operative principles in rural areas and, where possible, should channel State assistance to an increasing extent through co-operative organisations.

Labour will urge the fixing of prices for farm products at a level which will guarantee efficient farmers a fair return for their labour.

In view of its key position in the agricultural economy, Labour believes that there is need for special assistance for the dairying industry. This assistance should be directed towards improving the quality of stock and raising milk yields and facilitating the marketing abroad of dairy produce.

A number of pilot and demonstration farms should be established in each country.

A special State agency should make available farms purchased on the open market for renting to farmer's sons and farm workers.

There should be rigidly enforced restrictions on the purchase of farm land by foreigners.

Action should be taken to ensure that large holdings are worked efficiently and that our most important natural resource is not wasted. (About one-third of the total area of all agricultural holdings is on holdings of over £50 valuation).

TRANSPORT

The efficiency of the transport services is vital to both industry and agriculture and to meet the needs of the travelling public. Careful planning and the use of the most modern and efficient systems is essential if transport costs are to be kept low and the wage standards of transport workers improved. Labour proposes the establishment of a Transport Research Unit which would undertake the scientific study of traffic and transport problems. Such a study would yield returns and savings far in excess of the cost of the study as well as contributing towards a reduction in the appalling toll of road accidents.

Labour also proposes restrictions on the resale of defective vehicles, a reduction in the statutory limit on the hours of driving of all drivers of commercial vehicles and the continuing review of traffic regulations by a representative committee.

TOURISM

Tourism, as one of our main income-earners, must be developed far beyond its present level. Labour believes that the emphasis in tourist promotion should be on attracting the ordinary tourist and holiday-maker to spend their holidays in Ireland.

The provision of grants for hotel accommodation must extend to small hotel and guest-house owners.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government is in theory democratic in that the people of a particular locality direct its affairs through their elected local representatives. In fact the theory has very little to do with practice. Many local matters are now a managerial function and managerial accountability to the public and its representatives is limited. In no field of government is there more bureaucratic control yet the matters dealt with, health services, housing, roads, etc., touch every citizen.

Labour proposes that, in general the principle of public accountability and responsibility for the conduct of all public services should be re-introduced and that the whole administration of local affairs should be reorganised in accordance with this principle.

This would be a long-term project but progress could be made step by step towards a system, whereby certain national services, at present administered locally, were provided for each locality by the Government which would be answerable to the Dail, certain services would remain with existing local authorities but with full accountability of the manager to the elected representatives and certain other services would be administered on a truly local basis.

These changes need not involve any change in the responsibility of local administrative areas to pay for the services at present received, although any inequities in the manner in which the burden of rate charges are levied could be investigated.

The manner of tackling this whole problem would require careful and continuous planning. Labour proposes that this planning should commence without delay and that progress should be made stage by stage as quickly as possible towards the establishment of true local democracy.

RATES AND VALUATIONS

The present system of valuations is archaic, a barrier to progress, and an invitation to evasion. So long as an extension to, or improvement of property may be followed by a completely disproportionate increase in valuation there is a disincentive against investment in improvements.

Labour proposes to replace the present system of valuation by a standardised system of valuation based on rent in a notional year. Thus if an improvement is made which increases the rentable value of a property by 10 per cent., the rateable valuation would not increase by more than 10 per cent. The removal of all the inequities which have arisen under the present system will take some time to complete, but it is proposed that the introduction of the new system would have immediate application to new buildings and improvements to old buildings.

SOCIAL WELFARE

Labour's social policy aims at giving protection against poverty, distress and economic insecurity by means that

respect the personality and dignity of the individual. Everyone who is not in a position to earn his living must be assured an existence worthy of a human being.

Labour proposes that social welfare benefits and pensions should be raised according as the national income rises, that the qualifying age for old age pensions should be reduced gradually to 65 years and that a national industrial injuries scheme should replace the present Workmen's Compensation.

HEALTH

Labour proposes the establishment of a national health service that would cover all employees, farmers with holdings under £50 P.L.V. and certain other self-employed persons, together with their dependents.

Initially this service would provide free hospital and specialist services and a home and general practitioner service with choice of doctor without any direct charge. The service would gradually be extended to cover a free dental service for children and young persons and a dental service for adults with moderate charges as well as assistance in meeting the cost of medicines and drugs.

The additional cost of the proposed service over and above what is spent on the existing health services would be met from insurance contributions payable by persons insured under the new scheme and by employers.

It is proposed that the health service be administered by a National Health Board which would include representatives of insured persons, the medical and nursing profession, the Department of Health and the Local Health Authorities.

Pending the introduction of a health scheme such as is proposed, there should be a modification of the methods of administration of the existing health services particularly in regard to qualification for Medical Register cards for the Lower Income Groups and to ensure that all who are in need of medical services will receive them.

Labour also proposes that the mental health service be reorganised in conformity with the best modern practices.

Additional measures be taken for the rehabilitation of disabled persons and the blind.

HOUSING

The local authority housing programme is by no means completed. Labour will press for the speedy implementation of the programme so that all families will be properly housed and slums, overcrowding and bad housing conditions eliminated. There should be a revision of loan charges and subsidies for local authority and grant housing so as to ease the burden of high rents and loan repayments.

Labour will propose legislation to enable householders to purchase the ground rent of their houses on an equitable basis.

LABOUR CODE

The Labour Party proposes that existing code of labour legislation be extended and improved and in particular that it should include provision for a shorter working week, increased annual holidays, better shift payments, a national scheme of redundancy compensation paid for by employers with State assistance, improved health, safety and welfare regulations for workers with special protection for women and young persons, equal pay for equal work for men and women, a joint industrial council to set minimum wages and conditions for farm workers that would correspond generally with the standards of urban workers.

EDUCATION

The nation cannot afford to let talent go to waste. Labour believes that it is a matter of the highest importance that the general level of education should be continuously raised. If this objective is to be realised, our educational system must provide opportunities to every child to develop his capabilities to the fullest.

More and better schools are needed with smaller classes and adequate staffing. Syllabuses need to be adapted to modern requirements with a greater emphasis on the teaching of science and modern languages.

Education in secondary and vocational schools should be free.

There is an urgent need for nation-wide facilities for vocational and career guidance.

There is need for improved training facilities for entrants to industry.

Every young person must be given the opportunity of obtaining the education appropriate to his capacity. Entry to higher education whether at the universities or at technological institutions should be open to all students who may have the capacity to benefit from such education. To achieve this end it will be necessary to make changes in the facilities available to students prior to entry and in the requirements for entry into such institutions.

Grants, loans and scholarships towards the maintenance of students attending institutions of higher education as well as towards the cost of fees should be available to students who qualify for such courses. To make this proposal feasible Labour proposes that accommodation in the form of student hostels should be such that these can be used for hotel purposes during the summer tourist season.

Labour also proposes that there should be a co-ordinating body to assist in the development of scientific, technical and technological education as rapidly as possible and in the manner most appropriate to national requirements. Such a body could co-ordinate the use of scarce resources of equipment and

personnel, make arrangements for the interchange of students, arrange for the undertaking of specific projects of training or research in accordance with the needs of industry or of national economic planning, advise the Government on the manner in which increased allocations for scientific and technological training might most usefully be spent, and so on.

Adult education schemes should be generously assisted by the State.

CULTURE

Direct Government help for the Arts in general should be far more generous than at present. In this field we lag behind practically every other country in Europe. Government aid to the Arts should be mainly channelled through the Arts Council which at the moment is gravely hampered by lack of funds.

IRISH LANGUAGE

Efforts to revive Irish have not had as much success as was hoped when the State was set up. Labour believes that the reason for this lies largely with the methods used to encourage use of the language. It is necessary immediately to have these methods examined closely including examination by experts from countries which have had linguistic problems of a somewhat similar nature to ours.

The aim in this field must be to have a properly educated people with a good speaking knowledge of Irish and English. It is obvious that this aim will not be realised if the methods and policies of the past forty years are continued.

GAELTACHT

If the present emigration rate from the Gaeltacht continues it will have disappeared completely within a few decades. The Department of the Gaeltacht has been ineffective. It should either be abolished or radically reorganised.

The economic problems of the Gaeltacht are the same as those of the other areas on the western seaboard and to differentiate between them economically is unrealistic. On the other hand, it is desirable nationally to expand the Gaeltacht and to make it possible for the people in these areas to remain at home.

Education is the key to this. Special secondary schools should be set up in all Gaeltacht areas and full courses given free of charge to all children living there and capable of benefiting from such education. Only in this way can the people of the Gaeltacht take their proper place in the country. If this is not done swiftly Irish speakers will disappear from the Gaeltacht and with them will disappear the last hopes of making Irish in fact as well as in theory one of the real languages of Ireland.

RADIO EIREANN

~~Labour will insist that Irish radio and television be run for the good of the people as a whole and not for the benefit~~

of advertisers, advertising agencies or commercial studios. It must be a national service in the best sense of the word. A genuine effort must be made to make it a truly publicly-controlled service and to ensure that it does not become the plaything of businessmen, advertisers or get-rich-quick operators as has happened with commercial television in Great Britain.

LAW REFORM AND LEGAL AID

The programme of law reform which successive Governments have undertaken should be pressed forward with greater speed so that all legal anachronisms and the accumulation of archaic law are removed from the statute book and a modern code of law based on real equity and true justice substituted.

Labour proposes that steps should be taken to introduce a legal aid scheme which would assist people of modest means who may find it necessary to have recourse to the legal profession or to the courts, in order that lack of means will not deny justice to any citizen.

PUBLIC SERVICE BUREAU

Labour proposes that a Public Service Bureau should be set up under the Department of the Taoiseach which would ensure that administrative justice is secured to all citizens. The Bureau would have as its main object the avoidance of administrative injustice, whether deriving from the bureaucratic failure to administer public services in the public interest, or from errors and inequities in legislation or regulations. The Bureau would also prevent injustices arising from ignorance by advising citizens and helping them to obtain the public services to which they were entitled under law.

The operation of the Bureau would not interfere with the discharge by public representatives of their responsibility to the public. Rather would it assist public representatives, trade union officials, development associations and other bodies to perform their functions.

They, and the public generally, would have available an official information service at local level. Persons seeking information as to their entitlement to benefits or grants would be advised, and enquiries forwarded to the appropriate department.

The Bureau would accept complaints from individuals concerning the action or operation of any public service, and where their grievance appeared justified, it would be investigated by inspectors directly responsible to the Bureau.

The operation of the Bureau would further assist the work of public representatives by providing them with information concerning inequities arising from the operation of existing Laws.

There would be a Controller in charge of the Bureau whose functions would include the establishment of liaison

with Government Departments, etc. to ensure that local offices were in a position to deal with enquiries, the supervision of local officers and inspectors, the preparation of an annual report, the initiation of enquiries into matters of public concern in the field of public service. The Controller would be assisted by a voluntary Advisory Committee who would review the annual report, make recommendations and prepare proposals for special enquiries.

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