

‘The Struggle for Socialism in Ireland Today’

Thanks to both Sinn Fein and Labour for participating with us in this event.

Although we don't choose the timing of anniversaries it is extremely fitting that this month does indeed host the 90th anniversary of the sitting of the 1st Dail and importantly of the publication of its programme for government, The Democratic Programme.

It is appropriate, not because as Brian Cowen put it, ***I am certain that, given the opportunity, the members of the First Dáil would have wished Ireland ... to join with other nations ready to share sovereignty in the common cause of peace, prosperity and freedom in Europe.*** Cowen goes on to all but say they would have voted Yes to Lisbon! But in fact for opposing reasons it is appropriate.

It is appropriate for its expression of sovereignty and control over the material wealth, resources, land, sea, wealth-producing processes and people of this island when this control is so clearly lacking. It is appropriate for its expression of public right over private right when apartheid social services that favour those with money dominate. It is appropriate for its stance on citizens having a duty to serve the nation and a right to receive from the nation when we are rocked by financial scandals of citizens serving themselves and others avoiding the most basic payments of taxes through legal loopholes and sly accountancy.

And that leads us to our topic for discussion, ‘The Struggle for Socialism in Ireland Today’.

To outline my view on this I need to start firstly with the struggle for socialism in Ireland, a struggle often left out of history books and course curriculum. When I think back to history in secondary school I strain myself to remember a mention of a struggle for socialism in Ireland, sure maybe in Russia or France, but one would swear it didn't occur on our island. But, as one Napoleon I said, ‘What is history but a fable agreed upon.’

The truth is since private property was enforced upon this island, since there were those who owned and those who were owned, there has been a struggle for equality, justice and socialism.

Why are we not told of this struggle? History is written by the victors. Within the national liberation movement in Ireland, like in every colony, there was a people's side fighting for political, economic and social freedom and there was a reactionary or conservative side fighting for enough political freedom for them to trade and make money off their international imperialist allies on the back of their fellow working class countrymen and women, in simpler terms, there was a ‘left’ and a ‘right’, of the national movement.

I could go through Irish history since the absolute victory of English rule in Ireland and we could identify this struggle at all the major moment but we don't have time here for that. But I do want to mention one example of this and that is from the time in history we are commemorating today.

Socialist and member of the Labour Party, Tom Johnson, drafted the Democratic Programme and in his original draft it contained the important sentence:

The Republic will aim at the elimination of the class in society which lives upon the wealth produced by the workers of the nation but gives no useful social service in return and in the process of accomplishment will bring freedom to all who have hitherto been caught in the toils of economic servitude.

This very definite socialist and indeed Marxist influenced sentence was deleted by Sean T. O'Kelly who represented the property owning and exploiting 'right' of the national movement. The very people socialism would do away with.

Unlike in countries like Vietnam, Cuba, South Africa and many more where the Communist movement, led the national struggle, in Ireland the 'right' one leadership at a critical moment. Again exemplifying this the very newly forming Soviet State in Russia was the first and only state to recognise the 1st Dail as the legitimate government in Ireland and yet where did our 'national leaders' go, the US. Instead of fighting, demanding and winning our own sovereignty and by necessity our own socialism our leaders went to America to beg the world for freedom.

One is often tempted to leave the narrative there as if our struggle for socialism ended then. And unfortunately some movements are still stuck in that mindset but history continued and so did the struggle for socialism.

In the 30's the communist movement was to the fore of the struggle against fascism here and abroad participating in the struggle for the Republic in Spain. I might take this chance to mark the very recent passing of a great communist and comrade to my movement and party, Bob Doyle.

In the north, communists correctly identified democracy and the extension of civil rights as the Achilles Heal of Unionism and so led the attack from this angle. This year also marks an important anniversary of that struggle.

Unfortunately we don't have time to go into any details but for today's struggle it is crucial we are aware of what has went before us and for young people to engage in agitation for socialism they first must be aware that this fight exists and has a proud history in this country. We must do the educating because the state has no interest in doing it for us.

Crucially to note is that every gain for democracy, freedom, workers rights and socialism has come from struggle. It is never granted, it is won. The lesson being, we do not beg for justice, like Bono and Bob Geldof, we demand, we fight and we win it. Recognising, that not everyone has a self interest in democracy or socialism and so it is not about persuading them of the long terms benefits of such a society. Only those exploited, those denied control and power over their own lives have an interest in socialism – that is working people.

This is very much a lesson learned from history and from those who progressed socialist thought and action, like Marx, Engles, Lenin. As Connolly rightly put it:

Without this key to the meaning of events, this clue to unravel the affections of 'great men', Irish history is but a welter of unrelated facts, a hopeless chaos of sporadic outbreaks, treacheries, intrigues, massacres, murders, and purposeless warfare. With this key all things become understandable and traceable to their primary origin; without this key the lost opportunities of Ireland seem such as to bring a blush to the cheek of the Irish worker; with this key Irish history is a lamp to his feet in the stormy paths of today. – James Connolly

Socialism is not a dreamt up future paradise or something that exists in ones mind. Socialism is the form and structure society takes when the contradictions from within capitalism are too much and the struggle for democracy and justice overcome and replace capitalism. It will not be perfect. It will not solve everything. It will take time to develop and it will develop in a hostile world as peoples turn to socialism at different times around the globe.

While the crisis and structures within capitalism do make socialism possible no longer can we be sure socialism will follow capitalism nor can we make the fatal mistake of waiting. With the advent of nuclear weapons – enough to destroy humanity several times over – and the environmental devastation capitalism has brought their exists an extremely real possibility that the bosses will destroy all of us in their struggle to hold onto power.

That is why we must act, we must act fast and we must act with passion and commitment and to do that we must be positive. Che Guevara said:

...at the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. – Che Guevara

It is the love or solidarity with people that keeps us active and keeps us going.

People today talk a lot about 21st century socialism and I must admit I find it troublesome for two reasons.

Firstly, what other socialism could be built today? 19th century?

But more worrying is that the implied meaning is a rejection of 20th century socialism – that is socialism that led the fight against fascism, won national liberation for many colonies, won improved working conditions and rights for people across the western world, developed and implemented mass education, health and employment campaigns across Eastern Europe, Russia and the Far East. I do not reject this struggle or this socialism.

And more to the point for today the contradictions and class forces that gave rise to socialism last century are still relevant today and are the same forces that will give rise to socialism today.

For the CYM Socialism means:

1. Collective freedom as the condition for individual freedom
2. Participatory democracy not representative democracy
3. A planned democratic and responsive economy
4. Working peoples rule over all other existing classes in the form of the state
5. And the continued struggle against all other exploitative classes and their ideologies

As you can see this is not a few reforms to capitalism or a social charter here and there because if we want to truly liberate people, empower people, turn back the tide on environmental disaster, end war – significant and fundamental transformation is needed, and people need to lead it and force it.

The problems we are facing today in Ireland and indeed around the world are not the end of capitalism as some people have said. They are a crisis, something capitalism is structurally tied to. Crisis present opportunities but opportunities are not always taken or more accurately forces are not always strong enough to exploit opportunities.

Our task in Ireland today is to build the force for socialism through achievable aims and aims that fundamentally expose the great contradiction between capitalism and democracy. Capitalism in its currently monopoly or Imperialist stage is anathema to democracy. By agitating and building people based movements that expose this we are, consciously or unconsciously, empowering working people and therefore strengthening the struggle for socialism.

To this end the CYM in our document commemorating the Democratic Programme put forward an number of demands for today, namely:

1. the building of a state development bank
2. the nationalisation of resources and key infrastructure
3. regulation and monitoring of MNC's
4. development of sustainable energy

While these in themselves are not Socialism they do open up the space for socialism in peoples consciousness and in campaigning for them we organise

workers and we expose the frailties and limitations of capitalism.

The CYM firmly believe people in Ireland want rid of this government but equally they do not want a FG led coalition, they also want control, control over their own lives and country. This is the fight we must fight and the CYM, not alone, will contribute to building socialism in Ireland.

Thank you.