



## **New Year's Message from Workers Party President Michael Donnelly**

On behalf of the CEC/Ard Comhairle I would like to extend New Year's greetings to all Party members and their families and to our, friends and supporters both at home and abroad.

I would like also to take this opportunity offer my condolences and sympathies to the families and friends of Comrades who died in the year gone by, as well as to all our Comrades and friends who lost loved ones.

As always, this is a time both to reflect on events and occurrences of the year gone by and to anticipate the year that lies ahead. In that regard it is worth noting that the Party Ard Fheis this year was generally regarded as a successful one in that it laid out a clear path of work to be done along with a coherent and unambiguous commitment to basic socialist principles.

It was an Ard Fheis when the Party not only re-committed itself to the achievement of a secular, socialist, republic for the workers of Ireland, but did so with a certainty and confidence that was both clear and palpable. No one who attended would have been left in in any doubt whatsoever about who it is the Party represents, or where it is we intend to go in the future.

But there is still a lot more that needs to be done and the year that lies ahead will bring with it ever greater challenges to the Party as it seeks to give guidance and clear leadership to the ordinary working people, the very ones who have suffered the most hardship under the reign of the current Fine Gael-Fianna Fail coalition (in all but name!) government in the Republic and the complete failure of both Sinn Fein and the DUP to offer anything in the way of either credible government or credible policies in Northern Ireland.

And while there are apparently 'high hopes' of some sort of brokered deal in the immediate future, it is highly unlikely that whatever government is formed will be one that will have any major impact on the crises that beset ordinary workers and their families at this time.

Crumbling social services, a health system that is being relentlessly ground down in preparation for possible privatisation etc. Nor indeed will it do anything about the low-wage economy which formed the basis of what passed for an economic strategy by the previous SF-DUP administration. All of this must be fought against relentlessly, and the Party must play a leading role in that resistance.

Both in Northern Ireland or in the Republic we have consistently argued that any government that commits itself to relentlessly pursuing an unashamed pro-private capital- financial speculator agenda and presides over the mismanagement of health, education and public welfare, does not deserve to either continue in office or be returned office.

We need to remember also that, in both parts of this island, despite the claims of the big system parties, there remains deep and persistent poverty and inequality, both of which are deeply imbedded and form an integral part of the island's socio-economic reality. More than ever before, wealth is concentrated overwhelmingly in the secure vaults and accounts of the already wealthy elite, the privileged ones in whose interests their governments rule.

Whether it is homelessness, poverty, excessively high rents, low wages or poorly funded health and social services, the cause is not 'individual irresponsibility' but the direct consequence of the deep structural factors that are part and parcel of a system that privileges private capital over the public good.

Yet, despite these profound and growing levels of poverty and inequality, the year just ending was not a particularly good one for the Party in electoral terms. Nor, indeed, was it a good one for the left in general.

And while it is too early yet to offer definitive analyses as to why that is so, we do know that an important element of any analysis must focus on the overwhelming right-wing bias of all forms of the news media. A news media that is as hostile today as it ever was towards any form of progressive, socialist policies and parties. This too, is an important area that we must focus on in the year coming.

The environment too has finally become a major issue for our powerholders to respond to beyond mere rhetoric. But just as in relation to all else over which they wield power, they view it through the same prism as they view the social and the economic: how to minimise the cost to capital and shift the bulk of the same onto the shoulders of workers and their families.

Here too we must lead the challenge to that pro-capital response to the very grave environmental crisis that we face. And in doing that we must consistently and relentlessly highlight that the crisis is not one created or caused by the working class but one that is the direct consequence of the capitalist system itself as profit is prioritised over all other considerations.

But as we do that we must also confront the reality that the parties of the right and the so-called centre, along with their allies and toadies in the media have now increased their powerful grip on the government and administration of both the Republic and Northern Ireland. In recognising that we must plan and implement a realistic strategy that challenges that hegemony and seek to exploit the contradictions that will inevitably manifest themselves and to do that in the interests of working and poor people.

We must also take a hard look at the fact that by the end of the next calendar year a completely new, if as yet uncertain set of economic and political realities will present fresh challenges in the form of the so-called 'Brexit' finally happening. What this will actually mean in real terms is of course still the subject of intense speculation and we cannot at this point predict with certainty all that might happen. But it will have major implications for both north-south and east-west relationships both in economic and political terms and we must develop a clear and unambiguously class-based strategy to deal with whatever scenario arises.

And we must also be acutely aware that the forces of divisive sectarianism will be ever present, ever anxious to exploit whatever happens in ways that will be dangerous as well as political expedient. In responding to whatever arises as a consequence of the new situation we must remain consistently faithful to our long-standing commitment of basing all of our policies on pro-working class and anti-sectarian bases.

It is also vital too, at this critical point that left-wing politics is not left to the right-wing media to be defined – and vilified! – but that we ourselves take responsibility by putting forward credible policies and proposals, and, more importantly offering real and credible leadership to workers and working class communities in resistance to the inequalities being inflicted upon them.

We will only be capable of doing that in an effective way by re-doubling our efforts in being active on the ground amongst the people we represent and seek to lead. And we will only be ever be effective when we do that in a coordinated, collective and unified fashion.

We have the policies and the political resources. What we now need to do is to direct those energies and those resources in a singular, concentrated and disciplined collective fashion. It will only be through united and disciplined collective actions that we will be successful.

The year that lies ahead then will, undoubtedly, be an important one both for the Party and for the people we represent. There may yet be an election in Northern Ireland and a definite one in the Republic. In this regard we must re-double our efforts to present a real and radical alternative view to workers both north and south.

Our central and historically defined task remains as it always was – to lead a unified Irish working class to victory in the class struggle.

Let us recommit to that task, Comrades.

**Michael Donnelly**

President

Workers Party of Ireland

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