



Comrade Tom French – A Tribute

It was with a profound sense of loss and sadness that we learned of the passing of our comrade, friend, and former President of the Workers Party, Tom French – a loyal comrade, good friend and a true gentleman in the best sense of the word. On behalf of our current Party President, Ted Tynan, and the Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party, I wish to express our sincere condolences to Tom's family, to his wife Frances, his children and grandchildren and to the wider family circle.

All of us who have had the great privilege of knowing Tom are deeply saddened by his passing. He was a committed socialist, a man of principle who lived a life dedicated to working for the good of his class and with a vision for a future free from the poison of sectarianism which divided our people.

He was a husband and a father; a grandfather and a great-grandfather; a teacher; a trade unionist, a member of NASUWT and Craigavon Trades Council; a civil rights activist and hardworking member of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association; a poet; a Councillor for our Party; a man of great wit and charm; a source of wisdom and guidance.

Since Tom's death, our Party has had messages of sympathy from across the island of Ireland and beyond. That is an indication of the high esteem in which Tom French was held. Many expressed their disappointment at being unable to be here today for reasons of ill-health or work commitments – his old friends Francie and Marian Donnelly and Will Gribben in south Derry, Pat Quearney, a former Party General Secretary from Dublin, and Ted Tynan, our Party President. These were but a few of the messages we received.

All those to whom I spoke, expressed their high regard for Tom, a man "motivated by a profound humanity". They spoke of their fond memories of a comrade who was deeply committed to the struggle for peace, justice and equality and who was not afraid, even in the darkest and most dangerous days of our history, to make a stand for what he believed.

Tom represented the Republican Clubs, the forerunner of the Workers Party, and then the Workers Party in many elections under the banner of "Peace, Work and Class Politics". He remained a member of the Workers Party until the end. Despite his ill health in recent years, Tom's dedication and commitment to his socialist principles and to his comrades in the Workers Party never wavered. He stayed the course when others abandoned our anti-sectarian, socialist ideology for personal gain, the false promises of social democracy, or the siren call of nationalism.

For Tom there could be no liberation, no freedom, without the emancipation of the working-class, both at home and across the world.

Tom worked unceasingly with his late friend and comrade, Malachy McGurran, until Malachy's untimely death in 1978. Tom won the local by-election to fill Malachy's seat on Craigavon Borough Council and he remained a dedicated councillor in Craigavon until 1993. He flew the flag for the Party in many other elections, including, Assembly and Parliamentary elections, polling 19% in one election in 1986. Tom won wide respect across the community. It was in the nature of the man.

Tom was a member of the Ard Comhairle / Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party for many years. In 1992, he was elected Chairman of the Workers Party in Northern and in 1996 he was elected to the position of Party President, replacing, Marian Donnelly, who was herself the first female leader of a political party in Ireland. He retired from that position in 2000 and was replaced by our late comrade, Seán Garland. Tom continued to serve the Party as a member of its Central Executive Committee for many years.

Tom was also a leading, and founding, member of the Peace Train, a campaign group set up in 1989 across the island in response to the repeated bombing of the Dublin to Belfast railway line by the Provisionals. He was, like his late comrades, Tomas MacGiolla and Des O'Hagan, a long-time proponent of the need for a Bill of Rights, which he maintained was a necessary foundation for building real peace and political progress.

Throughout the ages, working people have dreamed of a world of peace, freedom and equality, an end to exploitation and oppression, a society free from misery and suffering. Tom, together with his comrades, envisioned the fulfilment of that dream in the building of a socialist society based on the power of a united working class.

Tom French was a leading member of our Party, the Workers Party of Ireland. He served the Party with distinction throughout his life.

We thank his family today for the privilege of being able to pay tribute to the life and work of our lifelong friend and comrade, comrade Tom French.

Gerry Grainger
Central Executive Committee
Workers Party
14th March 2023