



YOUR VOICE

OUR STRENGTH

Local Election Manifesto 1999

Councillors Matter

The Local Elections on June 11th are very important. For only the third time in 20 years, the Irish people will have the opportunity to elect the Councillors who govern our counties, towns and cities.

Over the next five years, the Councillors whom we elect, on June 11th, will make critical decisions, which will affect the quality of all our lives, our neighbourhoods and our environment.

Between now and 2004, Councils will decide and vote on new City and County Development Plans, new Waste Management Plans, new Road and Transport Plans, Water Quality Plans, Housing Schemes, and plans for the settlement of Travellers which will determine the shape of our localities into the next century.

- What areas will be zoned for housing?
- Where will industry be put?
- Where will commercial activity take place?
- How many houses will be permitted per acre?
- How will our neighbourhoods be planned?
- What new roads will be built, and where will they go?
- What provision will be made for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport?
- What is to happen the waste and refuse which we produce?
- Will they do anything about Recycling?
- Which of the Council's services are to get priority for resources?

Local Authorities spend £2 billion annually and employ 30,000 staff. The Councillors whom we elect will decide how the Council's budget is to be spent, what rates will be charged to commercial and industrial property and what charges, if any, are to be levied for local public services such as parking, waste disposal, and planning applications.

The Councillors have the power to make Bye Laws governing public parks, control of dogs, derelict sites, beaches, litter, parking, traffic management, road safety and a range of other matters.

They appoint the members of the Vocational Education Committees, which run schools, Adult Education and literacy programmes, and post-leaving cert courses. They appoint the local members of the Health Boards, the County Enterprise Boards, the Regional Authorities and the Harbour Boards.

Under the 1991 Local Government Act, it is the Councillors whom we elect, and not the Council Officials, who have the power to determine the policy of the Council.

The Councillors who are elected by the people, do have considerable powers and the decisions which they will make over the next five years, will determine the quality of much of our daily lives and the quality of the places in which we live.

That is why it is so important to elect Councillors who will make these decisions, for the public good. We need Councillors, who are not compromised by any vested interest, and who are not in the pocket of some developer.

Labour has a proud record in Local Government. We have made good Planning decisions which are in the public interest. We have led the campaigns to protect our environment. We have championed the provision of Social Housing and of Public Services. We have always demanded the highest standards of public service, and of openness and accountability in our public bodies.

Our Councils and their resources and services belong to the people. Labour Councillors make sure that they serve the people. That is why every vote for a Labour candidate in these local elections adds to our strength, to make sure that your voice is heard in the town and county halls.

Voting matters. The Council affects us every day. The place where we live. How our neighbourhood is planned. How near are the shops and the schools? The roads,

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A New Approach to Housing

footpaths, the pedestrian crossings and the traffic lights that take us there. The people who take away our refuse. The pipes that bring the water and that take away the sewage. The parks and playgrounds where our children play. The public library and the night classes in the VEC school. The local health services.

Local Government is personal. Labour is the Party of Local Government. Your Voice. Our Strength.

Shelter is a basic human right. The right to a home is guaranteed by law in most developed countries. Yet, here in Ireland, one of the most successful economies in the world, housing is denied to tens of thousands of families and has become the object of speculation, profiteering and greed.

The present Fianna Fail/PD Government is responsible for the worst Housing Crisis in the recent history of this country. In the two years since these two parties replaced Labour in Government house prices have increased by over 60%, rents have gone up by over 50%, 20,000 extra families have gone onto Council waiting lists and homelessness has increased by a factor of four.

For almost two years, the present government refused even to recognise that a crisis existed at all. Their only response was the limited and market-driven Bacon study, which was only partly implemented and which served only to temporarily slow down investor involvement in Housing.

The Government specifically refused to establish a Housing Commission to consider the problem in its totality. That is why Labour took the initiative to set up a Housing Commission, under Professor PJ Drudy of Trinity College. The Labour Party's Housing Commission has now completed its work and the report of the commission is the only fully considered, properly researched policy on Housing by any political party in this country. Labour's New Approach to Housing provides the answer to the Housing Crisis.

The Labour Party is calling for:

- 10,000 Social and Public Housing Units per year to reduce the Council waiting lists.

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Planning for our Communities

- The introduction of Price Control on new houses and Rent Control, through a system of Fair Price Certification.
- A Licencing system for the private rented sector to ensure fair rents and good conditions.
- A minimum of 20% Social housing to be provided in all new residential development.
- The right to Housing to be enshrined in the constitution.
- A strategy to encourage the sale, rent or design of dwellings which are currently under-occupied.
- Legislation to ensure security of tenure and rent certainty for tenants.
- Encouragement of long-term and institutional investors in rented property to increase supply.
- Support for the non-profit and voluntary housing sector.
- An independent Advice Service for tenants.
- Rationalisation of statutory housing services, to create a one-stop shop system to make it easier for the public.

Over the past three decades, Ireland has become a modern European State. In the past decade alone, we have also become a rich country. Labour has played a key role in these developments by leading the drive to liberalise our laws, and by insisting on a Social Partnership approach to the development of our economy.

Labour now intends to provide the vision and leadership for the next phase in this country's history. If we are to maintain and build on our current prosperity and economic growth, we must physically plan this island as never before, and we must make the next 10 years a *Decade of Infrastructural Investment* in Ireland.

Our population is growing at an unprecedented rate. Our people are becoming generally more prosperous. Economic activity is accelerating. Huge changes are taking place in communications, information and lifestyle. This means we will have to build more houses for the extra people, massively improve our transport infrastructure and services and gear up for life and work in the Digital Age of the early 21st Century.

All this means we must take a new approach to Planning. For too long Planning in Ireland has been driven by the economic interests of developers and speculators. That is why massive single-class housing suburbs were built without adequate social or recreational amenities; why so much of the spec-built housing is sub-standard; why traffic is clogging up around our towns and cities; why rural areas and villages are being depopulated and run down; why huge social problems such as drug abuse are to be found in badly planned neighbourhoods, and why even the planning process itself, was sometimes abused and subverted, as the Flood Tribunal is now finding out.

Labour is calling for a new *National Planning Strategy*, which will set out how the country as a whole is to develop. Where are the Centres of Growth? How will housing need be planned? How will we connect the Growth Centres with each other and how will the hinterland, including small towns, villages and rural areas be connected to the Growth Centres? How will we conserve our natural and built heritage and how will we protect our environment in a growing country with an expanding economy and population.

The *National Plan* will identify the Growth Centres and will emphasise the need for good modern road and rail and air connections between these centres. We will stress the need for a good efficient public transport system throughout the country, in both urban and rural areas.

At Local and Regional level we will take a new approach to the making of *development plans*. Many plans tend to be static, control-oriented documents, rather than blueprints for the development of communities and the protection of the Environment. Our new approach to Development Plans will include:

- Information papers in non-technical language, which will be shared with community and other interests.
- Mandatory consultation with all relevant interest groups including residents associations, chambers of commerce, and other economic and voluntary bodies.
- Draft Plans to be presented in the form of options and alternatives.
- Oral Hearings to be chaired by an independent person.

- Development Plans to include social and community objectives, as well as the physical plan.
- Proactive promotion of the making of the plan, during the public display periods.

We will make the fullest use of modern communication technology to involve the public in a new way in this process.

We will pay particular attention to the integration of land use, economic, social environmental and transport policies in the making of Development Plans. Our whole approach to Planning is based on the principle of *Sustainable Development*. This promotes development, to ensure that our economy continues to prosper, but does so in a way which ensures that the needs of people are met, and that the environment is not compromised or sacrificed.

One of the biggest difficulties in Planning at local level is the failure by some Councils to effectively *enforce planning permissions and planning conditions*. We will insist the the planning laws, regulations and conditions are enforced and that complaints from the public on these matters are speedily addressed.

Waste ... What a Waste!

As a society, we are producing too much waste. This results in increased amounts of litter, extra damage to the environment, increased demands on local authorities to collect and dispose of waste, and increased cost to the Councils and to the public.

This cannot continue. The more waste we produce, the more we use up scarce resources and cause pollution. We increase the cost of waste management. Most Councils are now spending 50% more on waste management than they were 5 years ago. This is money which might otherwise be available for other uses by the Council.

But the biggest problem now facing Councils is where to put the waste. Most Land fill dumps are now either full or will not qualify for licences under the new Waste Management Act. Local communities are understandably opposed the creation of new Super Dumps in their area.

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Labour was the first to identify the Waste Crisis. In

Government, Labour was responsible for the enactment of *The Waste Management Act 1996* and the *Litter Pollution Act 1997*. The problem now is that the Fianna Fail/PD Government has not followed through on this legislation and most local authorities are either not implementing these Acts at all or are doing so inadequately.

Labour Councillors will insist on the full implementation of both the Waste Management Act and of the Litter Pollution Act.

We will ensure that the Councils adopt *Waste Management Plans*. These plans will emphasise the need for waste reduction, in the first instance. We will ensure that there are extensive facilities for the separation of organic from non organic wastes, and for the *Recycling* of wastes. We will insist on the removal from the waste stream of certain materials and of their *Reuse* where possible. For example, approximately 50% of materials going into land fill is builders' rubble and other building waste. This should clearly be recovered and reused in the construction industry. Similarly, bottles and other containers should be reused rather than dumped.

We will insist that Councils comply with their obligations under the Litter Pollution Act and that litter bugs are prosecuted. We will pursue a strategy of naming and shaming those committing offences under the Litter Pollution Act.

Traffic and Road Safety

Since the last Local Elections, over 3000 people have been killed and almost 100,000 injured in accidents on Irish roads. That is more carnage than in the entire Northern Ireland conflict!

Speed, carelessness and drink are among the main reasons for the killing on the roads. But also to blame, is the poor condition of many roads, poor road design, inadequate road markings and signage and the fact that 20% of those driving on our roads have not passed a driving test or hold a full driving licence.

Road safety is a top priority for Labour in local government. Our Councillors will make the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, children and the elderly our main concern in the planning and maintenance of Roads. We will insist on the provision of safe pedestrian crossings, well maintained footpaths and

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Traffic and Public Transport

properly designed cycleways.

Labour has consistently made the case for Public Transport. We believe that the key to solving the traffic gridlock is an efficient, reliable and economic public transport system.

This means that there must be a massive investment in the bus fleet to ensure that services are available to the public. The times of availability of public transport must also be extended to reflect the demand from the public. And fares must be reasonable. We believe that public transport fares should be subsidised to make this a more attractive option.

In Dublin, the Recommendations of the Dublin Transport Office should be implemented at an accelerated pace. In particular, the LUAS project should be advanced more urgently, following the decision of Minister Mary O'Rourke to delay it.

Local Authorities have a particular role in the solution and management of the traffic problem. Labour Councillors will be seeking

- The development of Quality Bus Corridors and liaison with bus operators to ensure that bus corridors are used.
- The licencing of taxis and hackneys to ensure that the widest range of transport options are available to the public and that low frequency routes, especially in rural areas and in disadvantaged urban areas have adequate public transport.
- The protection of residential areas from extraneous traffic.
- The development of cycleways .
- The opening of *safe routes* for school children and for elderly pedestrians.

A key aspect to resolving the traffic problem, is to modernise our road and rail infrastructure. As part of Labour's Strategy for a Decade of Investment, we want to provide motorways and high quality roads connecting the

Protecting the Environment

major urban centres. We also want to upgrade the rail network and the regional airports. Travel is now taking far too long and has become unacceptably unpredictable. Additional resources which are available to the Government, either from buoyant tax returns or from the sale of State assets should be used to fund the major Infrastructure Investment.

Local Authorities have special responsibilities for the protection of the environment. The local councils perform the monitoring on water and air quality; manage sewage and waste systems; control development through the planning process and are responsible for the implementation of most of the country's environment protection legislation. The Council is in the front line in the battle to save the environment. Some times it does the job very badly.

Labour has an *Environment Protection Checklist* which every Labour Councillor will use to ensure that the Council is performing to the highest standards. The checklist includes:

- Does this Council have a Water Quality Management Plan and a strategy to tackle water pollution.?
- How frequently does the Council monitor water quality and are the results easily available to the public.?
- What monitoring is carried out on Air Quality? Are the results available to the public? Can the Council identify specific incidents of air pollution?
- How bad is Noise, especially near major roads or industries. Does the Council monitor and does it take any action when reasonable noise levels are exceeded?
- Does the Council have a Register of Derelict sites and has it imposed a Levy on the owners?
- How good is the Council's enforcement of the planning laws?
- Has the Council a comprehensive list of buildings and structures for conservation purposes?
- What action is the Council taking to protect areas of natural beauty, and flora and fauna?

Community and Recreation

- Has the Council any plans to seek Special Area Amenity Orders for outstanding locations?
- Is the Council implementing the Litter Pollution Act?
- How good is the Council's own street cleaning service?
- How often are the public litter bins emptied? How many litter wardens does the Council employ?
- What has the Council done to make recycling facilities available?

Councils have a responsibility to provide facilities which encourage the development of real communities. People need places to meet, places for both outdoor and indoor recreation, libraries, cultural and Arts Centres, Theatres, Leisure Centres. While some of these facilities are provided by the private sector, they tend to be expensive and exclusive. The provision of public amenities by Local Authorities ensures that everybody has access, irrespective of income.

Labour Councillors will work for:

- More and properly resourced public libraries.
- Adequate provision of playing pitches and public parks, serviced with modern changing rooms and pavilions.
- Increased provision of Sports facilities for girls and women.
- A programme of investment in Swimming Pools and Leisure Centres.
- The development in each local authority of an Arts Programme to include Theatre, Music and Dance; the Visual Arts and the provision of facilities for new and young artists.

We will ensure that the Arts are fully included in the Strategic Policy Committee structures.

Safe Communities

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The individual citizen has the right to be safe, at home and in the neighbourhood. Unfortunately, many are denied this basic right. Burglaries, anti-social behaviour, threatening activity, drug abuse and various forms of crime make many areas unsafe and unwelcoming.

Reform of Local Government

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The maintenance of law and order is of course, the primary responsibility of the Gardai. Labour, however, believes that the Council has an important role to play in working with the gardai, to make our neighbourhoods safe for all our people. Labour Councillors will press for:

- The establishment of Policing Liaison Committees in the Councils which will bring together representatives of the Council, Gardai, Neighbourhood and Community Watch groups and other interested bodies to review the local levels of crime and to plan strategies for the prevention of crime.
- The extension of Estate management schemes to involve the local community.
- The provision of adequate public lighting to make our streets safer.
- A new approach to Estate and Area design with personal safety in mind.
- The elimination of dangerous places like inaccessible corners, disused lanes etc to ensure that the locality is more open and safe.
- Working with local communities for the provision of drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes as part of the battle against drug abuse.
- The provision of Youth services and facilities .

Local Government in Ireland is 100 years old this year, and it is showing its age! For most people, the Council is out of touch and out of date.

The entire system needs to be urgently reformed. Labour in Government had begun the process of reform. We had changed the method of funding local authorities and Labour minister Brendan Howlin had produced a blueprint for the modernisation of the Councils.

Unfortunately, the Fianna Fail/ PD Government did not follow through on our reforms.

- These local elections have been postponed for three years to allow for the reform of local government. But now the Government has decided not to produce the new Local government Bill until **after** the elections.
- They have also postponed the publication of the bill to give teachers and parents statutory representation on the Vocational Education Committees, so the Councils elected on June 11th will proceed to appoint VECs under the old unreformed system.
- The Bill to amend the planning system has also been delayed, so the public will not know the full extent of the power and responsibility which councillors will have for planning after the local elections.
- The Government has made a mess of the Regionalisation plans and greatly embarrassed the country by its clumsy attempt to base its regionalisation strategy on its own political needs for a Dail majority
- The new Local Elections legislation provides for no limit on the amount which a candidate may spend in these local elections. Has Fianna Fail learned nothing from the Tribunals?

Meanwhile the Minister for the Environment is addressing conferences on his plans for full time council chairpersons and increased powers for elected members. However, he is doing nothing to put any of this into effect. If Minister Dempsey were serious about reforming Local Government, he would produce the legislation before the local elections.

Labour believes that a fundamental overhaul of local Government is required. We believe in devolving to local government, all those functions of government and administration which do not need to be performed at

national level. This devolution of powers needs to be accompanied by the transfer to local government of the resources which are associated with the devolved work. This is the Principle of Subsidiarity.

We are seeking a radical shift in government and administration from the national centre to local and regional level. This will mean major changes in nature and composition of the elected councils. In the larger centres it may be necessary to have Greater Councils with full time members.

Labour will continue to work for this major transformation of Local Government. Meanwhile we will seek to effect reform of the Councils.

- The biggest and most effective reform of our local councils is to increase the size of the Labour representation
- We will proceed with the establishment and working of Strategic Policy Committees which will formally draw into the system, representatives of the wide community.
- We will insist on the highest quality of service from the councils
- We will seek legislation to amend the City and County Management Act 1955 to increase the power of elected members of councils and to reduce the excessive currently held by county managers.
- **In the meantime** we will use the 1991 Local Government Act to its fullest extent. Under this Act, it is the elected members and not the Managers who have the power to make the policy of the Council.

Travellers

A new Traveller Accommodation Act has been enacted. Each Council is now required to adopt a 5 year plan for the settlement of the travellers in its area. Each council will have 6 months in which to adopt a plan. If a Council fails to adopt a plan, the power will automatically transfer to the County Manager.

Labour Councillors will take their responsibility to make

Councils in the Digital Age

plans for the settlement of travellers. We will not leave it to the County Manager.

In drawing up the plan we will consult with representatives of the Travelling Community and with representatives of the settled community, including Residents' and Community Associations. We will insist that all sites are properly managed and maintained and that the establishment of new sites is coupled with a ban on illegal encampment.

By the time the next local elections are held, 5 years from now, almost every home in the country will have a computer, be linked to the Internet, and have a choice of over 100 options on Digital television. Normal activities like shopping, banking and many aspects of working will be as normal on the Net as using the phone is today.

Our Local Government simply can not continue as it is, in the Information Age. A citizen who can get virtually instant information and service from commercial bodies will not tolerate having to wait for weeks for an evasive answer from their council.

Labour will lead the modernisation of Council services and practices.

We will ensure that each council has an interactive web-site which will present a single face of the council for the public. People will be able to use the site to access information, to seek services, to identify the appropriate officials dealing with particular services and to transact business with the Council.

To assist in the transition to the Digital Council, we will press for the setting up of Public Web Booths, probably in the public libraries to provide access for those who are not connected to the Web.

Childcare

The Labour Party believes that local authorities have an important role to play in the provision of child-care services. In our recently published discussion document on children, the Labour Party advocated the establishment of task forces on a local authority basis with a child-care officer from each local authority. This task force would co-ordinate the provision of all pre-school and child-care services in the local authority area.

Local Education

The Labour Party is also concerned about the inconsistencies in attitudes to childcare provision in the Planning process. The Labour Party believes that it should be public policy to facilitate childcare services in all local communities. The Minister for the Environment and Local Government should, accordingly, draw up national guidelines to be implemented by Local Authorities, so that day-to-day planning decisions are consistent throughout the country and, furthermore, that Local Authorities would include, in their Development Plans, positive objectives for the inclusion of childcare services in existing and developing communities.

The Councils appoint the Vocational Education Committees. Labour will propose the appointment of Parent and Teacher representatives on the VECs. We will also set objectives for the new VECs. These will include:

- Programmes to tackle illiteracy.
- A new extensive programme to ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to become computer literate.
- Concentration on the needs of young people at risk and on those who leave school early.

Local Health Services

The Councils appoint the local members of the Health Boards. Labour will appoint members of these Boards, with a mandate to ensure that local health services are developed in partnership with the communities they serve.

Labour wants an efficient and comprehensive health service for all, to include:

- The re-establishment of Local Area Health Committees, to provide for greater accountability and public involvement in the development of the local health service.
- Funding for local groups providing Family Support Services.
- Improved Dental Services
- Accessible, quality premises.
- Partnership structures between service providers, representative organisations health board management and the community.



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