

Leadership



Progressive
Democrats

AN PÁIRTÍ DAONLATHACH

The Progressive Democrats

Getting the Nation Working



'The crucial question facing you on November 25th is: what kind of Government do you want for this country?'

The Progressive Democrats have proved we can make a valuable contribution to Government. We are now putting many fresh and challenging plans before the people in this campaign.

We want more deputies in the next Dail, to achieve even more in the interests of the people. What follows is a summary of some of our main proposals. With your support, we can continue to change the face of Irish politics for the better.'



DES O'MALLEY

GETTING THE NATION WORKING

In 1987 the major problem facing this country was the imminent threat of national bankruptcy. The public finances were running out of control and economic chaos was looming. That crisis was affectively tackled through the implementation of strong and decisive Progressive Democrat policies, most notably during our participation in Government over the last three-and-a-half years.

Now our country is confronted by a new crisis — the urgent need to protect and create jobs. The sharp downturn in the international economy has hit all countries hard. For Ireland the situation has been compounded by the recent collapse in the value of Sterling.

We in the Progressive Democrats believe that the jobs crisis can be resolved through a combination of immediate measures to aid job creation, combined with the continuation of our programme of tax reform and fresh initiatives to boost enterprise.

JOB CREATION

In the short term, strong and decisive action is urgently needed to confront the jobs crisis. We in the Progressive Democrats are proposing a series of imaginative measures to restore confidence, protect existing jobs, boost employment, and prevent the country from sliding further into recession.

1 In order to ensure a speedy reduction in interest rates, and reduce the crippling burden currently affecting householders with mortgages, and businesses, we will:

- (a) Maintain a firm commitment to the fiscal disciplines required for immediate participation in Monetary Union (EMU).
- (b) Replace high interest rate Irish borrowings with low interest rates overseas borrowings.

This will inject liquidity into the Irish money market, bringing down interest rates. This would also act as a strong signal to overseas investors that the Irish Pound will not be devalued, and that in turn will further help the interest rate situation in Ireland.

2 Further action to aid exporters affected by the fall in sterling. The £50m. Market Development Fund introduced by Des O'Malley has provided immediate support

for 50,000 jobs in firms heavily reliant on the British market. Where necessary, this will be reinforced by tax changes, including a possible cut in Employers' PRSI, or other special measures to ensure the longer-term competitiveness of Irish business.

3 A sustained five-year programme to create employment; this will involve priority use of the substantial EC funds which will flow into Ireland as part of the Maastricht process, as well as further tax reform and fresh job creation initiatives.

4 A major programme of infrastructural development, with immediate moves to activate a strong and efficient National Roads Authority, with significant private sector representation. The aim will be to substantially boost spending on national roads by attracting in private sector financing and securing a consequent increase in the funding available from the EC.

With these measures, we believe that people can be put back to work in substantial numbers and that confidence can be restored to the Irish economy.

TAX REFORM

Ireland continues to have the most penal anti-work tax system in the Western world. This puts us as a nation at a severe disadvantage in competing with other countries for projects with a major employment content. The Progressive Democrats remain committed to a substantial programme of pro-jobs tax reform, to be worked towards over a five-year period, and bearing in mind overall budgetary circumstances.

The main features of our tax reform proposals are:

- a standard tax rate of 25%
- a widening of the standard rate band up to the average industrial wage
- an upper tax rate of 40%
- a reform and simplification of the PRSI system.

These measures will, over a five-year period, result in a tax system that favours work and enterprise. This radical overhaul will be funded in part by improved efficiencies in the tax collection system to effectively tackle the black economy, and by reform of the current system. We are firmly committed to the retention of mortgage interest relief. The general thrust of our policies will be to focus tax-breaks on those with the lowest incomes.

* The Irish tax system is now strongly biased in favour of bank deposits, and against job-creating investment. We will undertake an urgent review of the tax treatment of investment products, and the capital taxes regime in particular. Our objective is the elimination of the current disincentives to investment.

LONG TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

No matter how successful these initiatives prove in generating new employment in sustaining existing jobs, the sad reality is that the underlying scale of unemployment, along with the fact that up to 25,000 additional people join the workforce every year, means that for many years to come we will have a major unemployment crisis in Ireland.

The Progressive Democrats propose the establishment of a National Community Employment Scheme, modelled on the existing Social Employment Schemes, which would provide three days work each week. Initial priority would be given to the 100,000 plus long term unemployed.

There is so much work to do — community and environment projects; home help services; sporting, cultural and social organisations needing extra personnel.

The challenge for Government after this election, and one to which the Progressive Democrats are fully committed, is to put in place a National Community Employment Programme to give the unemployed the opportunity to join in the economic and social life of the country, offering them the dignity and sense of belonging which every citizen should enjoy.

There is an urgent need too to focus resources specifically on urban unemployment blackspots. These represent both in social and economic terms a real challenge to society at large.

Talk of trickle-down economics where the so-called rising tide of economic growth will lift all boats is meaningless for many of our neighbourhoods. We need to concentrate Exchequer and European Social Fund resources on urban disadvantage. This should be based on the concept of bottom-up development with strong community involvement.

The approach should be multi-disciplinary and should concentrate on resources from pre-school level upwards, and extend to wider issues in education and resource centres.

We propose to develop partnerships between community, statutory and voluntary agencies in the target areas. These can draw heavily on the existing experience of community development on the EC Poverty III Programme and others which have pioneered the concept of community development, based on partnership in recent years.

CARING FOR ALL

There are now 715,000 social welfare beneficiaries who have a further 600,000 dependants. The number of people therefore on social welfare exceeds the workforce of 1.1 million by over 200,000.

While the central thrust of the Progressive Democrats policies for the next Government is to generate greater employment, it is also essential that our major social services are delivered efficiently, to meet the needs of all our people.

The Progressive Democrats therefore propose:

- The incomes of people on social welfare must be fully protected.
- Develop the Family Income Supplement (FIS) into a universal low income employment support scheme to encourage people to take all available employment opportunities. At present it is restricted to families with children.
- A graduated medical card entitlement system to be examined to ensure medical card-holders are not financially disadvantaged if they take up employment, resulting in the sudden loss of a range of welfare benefits.

The cost of healthcare has been rising rapidly in all countries and poses major financial difficulties for many countries, as well as in Ireland. Some easing of the financial burden can be achieved through more efficient use of the available funds and that must be a priority.

There is also an urgent need to make more effective progress in transferring resources within the Health Budget into primary community care services.

But in the longer term, a much greater contribution must come from changes in lifestyles and preventive actions which will significantly reduce the incidence of illness and the need for treatments.

For instance it is estimated that there are about 10,000 deaths in Ireland each year related to smoking, which is one of the main causes of lung cancer and heart disease.

The Progressive Democrats specific proposals include:

- A national stop-smoking campaign aimed particularly at younger people.
- Courses in healthy lifestyles to be part of all primary and secondary school programmes.
- More competition to be allowed in the provision of health insurance.
- All family planning methods should be available to all GMS patients, and in all public hospitals.
- A free national screening service for cervical cancer.

Our teachers and our education system have made an enormous contribution to the betterment of Irish society, but greater resources must be supplied at primary level, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

The Progressive Democrats support improvements in the pupil/teacher ratio and providing more remedial teachers, especially in disadvantaged areas.

In Government, the Progressive Democrats were successful in achieving limited reform of the Third Level Education Grants Scheme, to tackle inequities in the system, particularly as they relate to the PAYE sector.

We propose that this process of reform be continued to ensure a fair and transparent grants system for all students.

BEATING CRIME AND VANDALISM

There is now an epidemic of crime and vandalism in our country. Many people no longer feel safe, either in their homes or on the streets. This sense of helplessness is compounded by a feeling that the scales of justice are tipped in favour of the criminal.

This problem has several elements. Sophisticated criminals are financing crime through drug dealing and money laundering. In addition, the vast majority of accused persons obtain bail and, feeling that they have nothing to lose while on bail, use that freedom to commit further crimes.

Any reform of the criminal law must seek to address these twin problems. We propose:

- Measures to ensure more uniform sentencing policy in the courts.
- The swift introduction of legislation which would allow for the seizure of the assets of money launderers and drug dealers. This is an established feature of US anti-racketeering legislation (the so-called "RICO laws") and one which is, unfortunately, overdue in this country as a means of dealing with organised crime.
- A special Garda Task Force should be established to target the receivers of stolen goods.
- Reform of bail laws to prevent the present abuse of our generous rights to bail in order to strike a balance between the rights of the accused and the victims of crime.
- Proper system of victim compensation.

Another major feature of the crime problem is gangs of youth engaged in petty crime in their own local communities. To deal with this problem, we propose:

- There needs to be a proper system of family and juvenile courts nationwide that approx. 40% of crime is carried out by juveniles.
- Legislation which would control the activities of gangs roaming local streets. The Gardai would be empowered to stop loitering and be given powers of dispersal.
- Making parents responsible in certain cases for the acts of their children where there has been negligence on their part. In other words, parents might in some cases be required to pay compensation to the victims of the crimes committed by their children.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Progressive Democrats are committed to policies which support agriculture, encourage job creation in food processing and maintain vibrant rural communities as a vital element of Irish society.

- A successful GATT Agreement is in the best interests of Irish farming and the Irish economy.
- Action is needed to stop farm incomes falling. We will press for a reversal of the temporary 4% cut in milk quotas.
- We support the continuation of MCA's on exports to Britain until the European Community's currency crisis is resolved.
- To encourage the entry of young people into farming, the burden of Capital Acquisition's Tax (CAT) must be removed from land transfers of family farms.

- In face of CAP reforms, greater emphasis on diversification into horticulture, organic farming, agri-tourism and other alternative farm enterprises must be accelerated.
- In Government over the last three years, the Progressive Democrats have ensured that export credit insurance, a vital aid to the Irish food industry, has been administered on a fair basis in the interests of all processors and producers.

THE ENVIRONMENT PARTY

The Progressive Democrats are determined to continue building on our outstanding record of achievement in protecting and enhancing our natural and built environment. In Government the Progressive Democrats would ensure that:

- All Government policies and plans would be subjected to an Environmental Impact Assessment so that the implications for the environment would be fully assessed.
- Environmental information held by State and Local Authorities would be made available to the public except in cases where there are security or trade related risks.
- The coal ban which works so successfully in Dublin will be extended to all major urban areas over five years.
- The Environmental Protection Agency will be fully resourced and staffed during 1993.
- The Environmental functions of the Office of Public Works will be transferred to the Office for the Protection of the Environment and the roads responsibilities of the Department of the Environment will be transferred to the Department of Transport.
- All state bodies (with the exception of Gardai and Defence Forces) would come under the scope of the Planning Acts. Local Authority developments would be referred to Bord Pleanala for approval.
- State funding for environmental organisations i.e. An Taisce, ECO and Earthwatch.
- The establishment of a Cleaner Ireland Task Force which would organise and implement a national crackdown on litter.
- Comprehensive new waste legislation would be introduced which will place the emphasis on waste prevention and minimisation. A new national waste strategy will set recycling and re-use targets both on a national and regional basis. Industry will be given financial incentives to minimise waste.
- The handling of waste will be rationalised and reorganised on a regional basis which will result in fewer landfill sites, operated to higher standards.
- All waste handlers and facilities will be licensed and monitored by the Environmental Protection Agency.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

It is now just twenty-five years since the All-Party Committee on the Constitution reported in 1967. Much has changed since that date and yet there has been no systematic examination by the Dail of the workings of the Constitution. The Progressive Democrats performed that task in January 1988 with our "Constitution for a New Republic", but it is a task which urgently needs to be performed by the in-coming Dail, on an agreed All-Party basis.

Among the matters in our present Constitution requiring re-consideration are:

- Articles 2 & 3.
- The absolute prohibition contained in Article 41 on the enactment of divorce legislation.
- The role of the Seanad.
- Cabinet confidentiality: Is the new absolute ban on the disclosure of any Cabinet discussions compatible with open government?
- The role of the President: Should she be given wider powers, such as a role in appointing the members of an Independent Boundary Commission?
- The law of bail: Is it acceptable as our society endures an upsurge of violent criminal activity that accused persons cannot be denied bail even where there is a likelihood that they will commit crimes while on bail?

In our view, the prevalence of serious crimes committed by persons released on bail means that the present law is something of a luxury in our present crime-ridden society.

LAW REFORM

At present, the courts are creaking under the burden of litigation and there is a pressing need for urgent legislative action in a host of areas. These include:

- Joint Ownership of the Family Home. In the light of a Supreme Court decision last December (which confirmed that wives who have made no financial contributions to the family income have no ownership rights in the family home), legislative change along these lines is urgently necessary.
- The law of occupiers' liability. The operation of this law is causing great concern to farmers, voluntary groups, schools and others. In practice, the situation now appears to be that owners and occupiers of land are responsible for all accidents suffered by others while on their land and this must be changed.

- The high cost of personal injury awards. The cost of such awards renders car insurance premia for young drivers prohibitively expensive and forces many of them off the roads. We need new forms of arbitration to ensure that these cases are heard speedily and with less cost.
- Reform of the libel laws. As the Law Reform Commission report demonstrated, we need to move away from damages as an exclusive means of compensating the libel victim and explore other possibilities of setting the matter straight! As the Law Reform Commission pointed out, the present law of libel seriously inhibits the press and a new balance must be struck which would give greater weight to the public interest in an uninhibited and free press.
- Abolition of Ground Rents. We have already published detailed proposals for the phased abolition of all remaining ground rents over a five year period, and a Bill to do this was part of the Revised Programme for Government.
- Converting the Land Registry and Registry of Deeds into commercial semi-state bodies. If this was done, it would extend the system of land registration which is also vital if conveyancing costs are to be brought down.

IRISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The Irish language is a unique and distinct feature of our cultural heritage. The Progressive Democrats are committed to the preservation, development and extension of the language and see the immediate establishment of *Telefís na Gealtachta* as essential to protecting and developing the language.

Teachers of Irish must have access to in-service training and refresher courses. The Progressive Democrats strongly support the establishment all-Irish schools where the demand for such facilities exists.

The Progressive Democrats believe there is significant scope for job creation in the areas of arts, crafts, culture and heritage. We acknowledge the need for proper public funding and a coherent development plan in these areas.

WORKING FOR PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Progressive Democrats are fully committed to working for peace and reconciliation between the divided communities of Northern Ireland, and greater understanding and a better relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

The Progressive Democrats are committed to the current round of Northern Talks, and have participated fully at Government level in helping to achieve a level of mutual understanding and trust that will enable a new political settlement to be agreed which in turn would begin to overcome the appalling cycle of murder and violence there.

Should the current talks, presided over by Sir Ninian Stephen, reach the stage where a comprehensive agreement embracing the three strands of relationships - between the two communities within Northern Ireland; between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and between the Republic and Britain - is fully agreed, and which would transcend the Anglo-Irish Agreement signed at Hillsborough in 1985, then the Progressive Democrats in Government would support placing such an agreement before the Irish people for ratification, along with any consequential modifications of Articles 2 & 3 to express them as an aspiration of the majority of Irish people to unity.

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

In addition to the foregoing, the Progressive Democrats remain committed to the implementation of the policies we included in the Revised Programme for Government of October 1991.

- to maintain strict control on public spending;
- to achieve continuing pro-jobs tax reform that would promote employment;
- to act on a comprehensive review of our industrial policy;
- to develop vigorously our natural resource industries;
- to undertake major institutional reform effecting how our democracy is run;
- to modernise our whole legal code;
- to ensure proper accountability by the State and business at every level;
- to afford every citizen greater access and openness concerning Government and State affairs;
- to further develop and improve our social services in the field of healthcare, social welfare, the penal system and caring for children at risk, and
- to institute the reform of our education system through a comprehensive Education Act.

PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS
ACHIEVEMENTS IN GOVERNMENT, 1989-1992

- Income tax - standard rate down to 27% with just one other rate, 48%
- Culliton Initiative to transform employment policy and create one-stop shop agency for industrialists.
- Competition Act introduced to overcome monopolistic and cartel arrangements in Irish business, so as to give greater consumer choice and reduce prices.
- Environmental Protection Agency established.
- Dublin's smog eliminated.
- Abuse of Section 4 and planning compensation abolished.
- Appeals Board for farmers in disadvantaged areas.
- Local Government Reform - eight regional authorities to be established and Dublin County Council broken into three authorities.
- Oireachtas Reform - shorter holidays, register of members interests.
- Legislation to outlaw illegal telephone tapping.
- Legislation to reform anomolous ministerial pensions system.
- White paper on marital breakdown published and commitment to further divorce referendum.
- National lottery grants abuse ended.
- Financial assistance for emigrant welfare agencies in the United States.