



Labour
Youth

Policy Paper
2010

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Introduction



Friends,

At our 2009 youth conference, Labour Youth passed a motion calling for all motions approved at conference to be collated and published for the benefit of Labour Youth members.

This document goes further than that- it outlines Labour Youth's policies in key areas, based on motions passed from the previous four youth conferences.

I hope that this document will serve as a useful reference to our members, not just in laying out Labour Youth's main policies in key areas, but also by allowing members to see where we may need to change or develop policies.

I also hope that this document will be beneficial to those who may be interested in joining Labour Youth; that they will be able to gain an understanding of what kind of organisation Labour Youth is and what it is we stand for.

Dean Duke
Policy and Education Officer

Chapter One: Education

Preamble

1. Labour Youth believe that Ireland's future prosperity is dependent on how much and how well we invest in education. Labour Youth believe that education is the great enabler, benefiting individuals, our economy and our society.

Labour's Record

2. The Labour Party has a proud track record in relation to education. The last time the Labour Party served in government:
 - the education budget was doubled;
 - third-level fees were abolished;
 - tax reliefs for part-time and distance learning were introduced;
 - the 'Back to Education' allowance was established;
 - the 'Breaking the Cycle' scheme was set up to improve the educational opportunities for children in disadvantaged areas.

Investment in Education

3. Labour Youth condemn the low proportion of money spent on education in Ireland. The Labour Party in government spent more money, as a percentage of GDP, on education than successive Fianna Fáil-led governments have- even at the height of the 'Celtic Tiger'.
4. Labour Youth oppose the cutbacks made by the Fianna Fáil-led government to education, including:
 - increasing the student-teacher ratio in schools;
 - reducing the traveller education budget;
 - cutting funding for the Leaving Certificate Applied, transition year and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme;
 - reducing funding for books in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools programme;
 - reducing the Higher Education Access Route grant.

5. Labour Youth believe that private schools should not receive state-funding.
6. Labour Youth condemn the fact that 50,000 primary school pupils attend class in pre-fabs. Labour Youth recognise that there will be a 20% increase in the number of primary school pupils over the next ten years and support calls for a national school building programme to put an end to the pre-fab culture, to facilitate the increase in pupils and to stimulate the economy.

Secularisation of Education

7. Labour Youth believe that there should be a transfer of Catholic patronage of schools to other patron bodies under the supervision of the Department of Education and Skills. Labour Youth agree with Archbishop Diarmuid Martin that the Church being the patron of 92% of our primary schools is a 'historical hangover'.
8. Labour Youth believe in the secularisation of those schools that receive state funding. We condemn the fact that 99% of our primary schools have a religious ethos. We believe that this disadvantages those parents who would prefer that their children not be educated in a religious environment.

Early School Leavers

9. 9,000 students a year leave secondary school before completing a Leaving Certificate. Labour Youth believe that there needs to be a renewed focus on literacy and numeracy in schools, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

Third-Level Education

10. Labour Youth and the Labour Party remain fully opposed to the return of third-level fees in any form. We believe in universality of access and we believe that there should be no barriers to learning.
11. Labour Youth is opposed to any further increases in the registration fee for third-level students.

12. Labour Youth believe that the grants system for third-level students should be reformed and centralised. We believe that the provision of grants should not be linked to either the income of one's parents or one's income from the previous year.

Post-Graduate Education

13. Labour Youth is in favour of free post-graduate education.

Part-Time Education

14. Labour Youth support the abolition of fees on part-time courses.

Chapter Two: Employment and the Economy

Labour's Record

1. The Labour Party when last in government began the remarkable phase of economic growth between 1995 and 2001:
 - Ruairi Quinn, as Minister for Finance, delivered the first current budget surplus in Ireland's history;
 - Oversaw the creation of 200,000 jobs;
 - Put an end to net emigration;
 - Established the County and City Enterprise Boards;
 - Improved protection for workers from unfair dismissals;
 - Reduced Ireland's rate of corporation tax to attract foreign direct investment and to create jobs.

Tackling Unemployment

2. Labour Youth is highly concerned about the level of unemployment, especially youth unemployment, in Ireland and is equally concerned with the lack of measures being implemented by the Fianna Fáil-led government to tackle this problem.
3. Labour Youth support the FÁS work placement programme for graduates, but believe it to be inadequate. A majority of places in the programme have not been filled. Labour Youth support a vast expansion in the number of places available under the programme and call for these places to be filled as quickly as possible.
4. Labour Youth support calls for a stimulus package in Ireland to generate employment. Labour Youth agree with international analysis that Ireland's recession has been made worse, and that more people are unemployed, because of the government's failure to invest in a stimulus package. Labour Youth agree that the National Development Plan should be re-drawn, with emphasis placed on
 - labour-intensive projects;
 - improving the provision of broadband in Ireland;
 - the construction and renovation of schools, hospitals and social housing units.

5. Labour Youth support the creation of a Strategic Investment Bank (SIB) that would lend to small and medium-sized businesses and invest in innovative companies. Such institutions have been created in other countries, including Germany, and the SIB would be broadly similar to the ACC and ICC previously operated in Ireland.
6. Labour Youth support the PRSI exemption scheme that allows for employers to be fully exempted from paying PRSI for new jobs created that are filled by people that have been unemployed for at least six months.

Banking Policy

7. Labour Youth support greater scrutiny and regulation of the banking sector.
8. Labour Youth opposed the introduction of the banking guarantee and support the nationalisation of Irish banks as the best method to clean up the banks.

Workers' Rights

9. Labour Youth support the rights of workers to organise and to bargain collectively.
10. Labour Youth support proposals for the introduction of a law that would make recognition of trade unions by employers mandatory.
11. Labour Youth condemn the sub-minimum wages that can be offered to workers under the age of 18 and to those over 18 in their first two years of employment.

Taxation Policy

12. Labour Youth support the introduction of three income tax bands setting the standard rate of tax at 20%, a new middle rate of 35% and the increase of the top rate of tax at 50%, chargeable to incomes over €125,000.
13. Labour Youth support the restoration of capital gains tax to 40%.
14. Labour Youth condemn Ireland's tax exiles and support the closure of all tax loopholes.

Privatisation of State Assets

15. Labour Youth oppose the privatisation of any more public services due to the relatively small size of the Irish market.

Chapter Three: Health

Labour's Record

1. The Labour Party:
 - Championed the liberalisation of laws regarding contraception;
 - Invested significant sums in cutting hospital waiting lists and in building new hospitals;
 - Invested record sums in providing mental health services;
 - Was the first party in Ireland to advocate a policy of universal healthcare.

Universal Healthcare

2. Labour Youth affirm that healthcare is a human right and endorses the concept of universal healthcare.
3. Labour Youth do not support the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) as it undermines the concept of universal healthcare and commits public money and patients to the private sector. Labour Youth therefore support the phasing out of the NTPF.
4. Labour Youth oppose the spending of public money on subsidising the building and maintenance of private hospitals, believing that this money should be spent on public healthcare.
5. Labour Youth believe that healthcare should be provided on clinical needs, rather than on the ability to pay.

Contraception, Abortion and Sexual Health

6. Labour Youth believe that the morning-after pill should be available over the counter, without the need for a prescription.
7. Labour Youth condemn and campaign against rogue crisis pregnancy agencies that offer false information to women.
8. Labour Youth believe that abortion should be legal in Ireland to:
 - put an end to unsafe abortions being performed in Ireland;
 - put an end to the economic discrimination that prohibits women who cannot afford to travel to the UK from having an abortion;
 - give women control over their own fertility.

9. Labour Youth believe that value added tax should not be charged on contraception.
10. Labour Youth believe that sexual education should be provided in secondary schools to educate young people about sexual health, contraception and crisis pregnancies.
11. Labour Youth call for the expansion of STI screening and treatment facilities in Ireland, particularly in rural areas.

Mental Health

12. Labour Youth recognise that Ireland has high rates of suicides, particularly among young people, and therefore call for an increase in the support services made available in Ireland.
13. Labour Youth believe that free mental health services must be easily available and accessible to everyone, as per the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which has been ratified by Ireland.

Drug Treatment

14. Labour Youth call for greater provision of drug treatment services in Ireland.
15. Labour Youth support the introduction of a progressive heroin treatment programme including confidential needle exchanges to help heroin users to combat their addiction.

Scientific Research

16. Labour Youth support the funding of embryonic stem cell research through the Science Foundation of Ireland.
17. Labour Youth condemn the commoditisation of scientific advances in the health sector, believing that this is incompatible with achieving the widest possible distribution of medication.

Chapter Four: Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Labour's Record

1. The Labour Party:

- Was the first party to introduce a civil partnership bill in Ireland;
- Was the first party to support the legalisation of divorce;
- In government, oversaw the decriminalisation of homosexuality;
- Established the Combat Poverty Agency and re-established it in after Fianna Fáil closed it down the first time;
- Outlawed discrimination against people with disabilities, gay and lesbians, travellers, ethnic minorities and other minorities;
- Introduced legislation to cap spending at elections, control political donations and require politicians to reveal their interests;
- Introduced the Freedom of Information Act in Ireland.

Alcohol and Drugs

2. Labour Youth oppose the restrictions placed on the opening hours of off-licences, pubs and clubs. Labour Youth believe that government policy should not be aimed at restricting the rights of people and businesses in this area, but should focus on providing support to those affected by alcohol abuse.
3. Labour Youth believe that personal use of cannabis should be legalised to:
 - prevent criminal drug dealers from pushing cannabis as a gateway drug to harder drugs;
 - benefit from tax on the sale of cannabis;
 - allow regulation of the quality of cannabis.

Labour Youth is not in favour of legalising cannabis use for those under the age of eighteen.

Prostitution

4. Labour Youth is in favour of the decriminalisation of prostitution so as to protect prostitutes, but not their clients or employers. Labour Youth believe that support services should be put in place to help prostitutes leave their industry. This model has been adopted in Sweden, Norway and Iceland and has seen a radical reduction in the number of women who are engaged in prostitution.

Human Trafficking

5. Labour Youth consider human trafficking to be abhorrent and the supports in place in Ireland for the victims of human trafficking to be insufficient. Labour Youth believe that:
 - a special unit of the Gardaí Síochána should be established to combat human trafficking;
 - victims of human trafficking should be entitled to the right to seek asylum, housing and work;
 - victims of human trafficking should be entitled to immunity from crimes such as entering the country illegally so as to encourage victims to come forward.

Asylum Seekers

6. Labour Youth believe that the processing of applications for refugee status in Ireland is too lengthy and that asylum seekers in Ireland do not have a sufficient standard of living. Therefore, Labour Youth believe that:
 - The Office of the Refugee Application Commissioner should be replaced by an independent human rights body that shall ensure that individuals are assessed on the grounds of the international human rights laws that have been ratified by Ireland;
 - Asylum seekers should be entitled to more than the measly sum of €19.10 a week in the case of adults and €9.60 a week in the case of children;
 - Adequate accommodation facilities should be put in place for asylum seekers so as to ease overcrowding;
 - Asylum seekers suffering from mental health issues should be entitled to adequate treatment.

Same-Sex Marriage

7. Labour Youth is strongly in favour of the introduction of same-sex marriages in Ireland.

Constitutional and Political Reform

8. Labour Youth is in favour of having a referendum that would propose removing all religious and chauvinistic references from Bunreacht na hÉireann.
9. Labour Youth is in favour of having the Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann to be elected under the PR-STV voting system and under a secret ballot.
10. Labour Youth is in favour of retaining Seanad Éireann but reforming the body so as to make it an efficient and effective second chamber.
11. Labour Youth is in favour of banning all corporate political donations.

Chapter Five: The Environment and Natural Resources

Labour's Record

1. The Labour Party was the first party in Ireland to concern itself with green issues and was the only party to call for a minister with responsibility for climate change at the last election.

Energy, Climate Change and Waste

2. Labour Youth oppose the building of a nuclear power station in Ireland due to the environmental risks and the issue of dealing with nuclear waste.
3. Labour Youth is in favour of reducing Ireland's dependence on fossil fuels for environmental, economical and security reasons. We favour the development of a diverse range of renewable energy sources. We also favour locally based energy projects, such as those developed in Denmark that see communities and households produce energy.
4. Labour Youth is in favour of a national waiver scheme for low-income families to ease the burden of bin charges.
5. Labour Youth is opposed to incineration for environmental reasons.
6. Labour Youth believe that environmental levies should be charged to businesses that use excessive packaging in order to reduce waste at the source.
7. Labour Youth is opposed to the privatisation of waste collection services due to the practise of private companies 'cherry-picking' their customers. We believe that local authorities need to generate sufficient income from collecting waste so as to be able to afford to collect the waste of those on waivers.

Natural Resources

8. Labour Youth believe that the Irish people are entitled to a fair share of their natural resources. We believe that oil and gas should either be extracted by a state-owned company or by private companies operating under strict licenses that would ensure that such companies pay windfall taxes on discoveries of oil and gas.

Chapter Six: International Affairs and Defence

Labour's Record

1. The Labour Party:
 - Was the first political party to commit Ireland, in word and deed, to achieving the United Nations target of aid to the developing world;
 - Laid the foundations for the Good Friday Agreement and secured financial support from the United States and the European Union for Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland

2. Labour Youth is in favour of a united Ireland brought about by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island.
3. Labour Youth believe that the Northern Ireland Assembly should continue to exist as a regional assembly as part of a united Ireland and that the Northern Ireland Executive should also continue to exist.
4. Labour Youth support and endorse the Good Friday Agreement.

The European Union

5. Labour Youth is committed to the European project, but opposes the liberal agenda to privatise public services in the EU.

Human Rights

6. Labour Youth condemn human right violations, no matter where they occur, and reject the notion that trade policy should not be linked to the development and improvement of human rights.

Israel/Palestine

7. Labour Youth condemn the violence perpetrated by both Israel and Palestine.
8. Labour Youth condemn the illegal building of settlements in the Palestinian territories by Israel.
9. Labour Youth believe that the European Union should impose sanctions on Israel for Israel's violations of international law.

Blockade of Cuba

10. Labour Youth condemn the United States blockade of Cuba and is concerned by the adverse economic and social effects the blockade has on the Cuban people. Labour Youth support the immediate lifting of the blockade on Cuba, in line with United Nations recommendations.

United States Military in Irish Airports

11. Labour Youth condemn the continued use of Shannon Airport by the United States military and call for this practise to be brought to an end.

Chapter Seven: Housing and Transport

Labour's Record

1. The Labour Party:

- Has been responsible for major building programmes for social and affordable housing;
- Was the first party whose Councillors fought against planning corruption;
- Introduced a purchase scheme for council tenants;
- Oversaw the acquisition and spending of significant amounts of European Union structural funds on transport infrastructure.

Housing

2. Labour Youth consider housing to be a right and not a privilege. Labour Youth support a social housing programme that would see the stock of social housing in Ireland increased.
3. Labour Youth support the removal of restrictions that allow for tenants benefitting from rent allowance to be denied housing on that ground.
4. Labour Youth believe in the need for proper planning regulations in Ireland that provide for the social and developmental needs of local residents.

Transport

5. Labour Youth support the development of a reliable and affordable public transport system in Ireland.
6. Labour Youth believe that all of Ireland's major cities should be serviced by a light rail / tram system.
7. Labour Youth believe that all public transport should be accessible to people with disabilities.

Chapter Eight: Arts and Culture

Labour's Record

1. The Labour Party:

- Re-established the Film Board;
- Removed restrictions on advertising income for RTÉ;
- Established TG4;
- Introduced a fund for the independent film sector;
- Placed a considerable emphasis on the development of arts, culture and our national language through the creation of the Department for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht.

Arts and Culture

2. Labour Youth support extending the artists' tax exemption to actors.
3. Labour Youth support the regeneration of the Irish language through cultural promotion.
4. Labour Youth believe that a national Independence Day should be established on the 21st of January, the date of the meeting of the First Dáil.
5. Labour Youth believe that people have the right to wear or display any items of cultural or religious importance, such as the hijab.

Chapter Nine: Rural Ireland

Labour's Record

1. The Labour Party has consistently drawn attention to the lack of balanced regional development in Ireland and the lack of investment in infrastructure in rural Ireland. The Labour Party has opposed the recent cuts to rural transport schemes.

Rural Ireland

2. Labour Youth recognise the uneven economic development in the different regions of Ireland as a problem.
3. Ireland's sparse population density necessitates a coherent spatial strategy designed to knit together rural communities with each other while tying them into modern national infrastructure.
4. Labour Youth support sustained and significant investment in regional infrastructure designed to tie into national networks including:
 - Development of the Western Rail Corridor;
 - Investment in regional airports as tourist hubs;
 - Improvements in the secondary road network.
5. Labour Youth call for a junior minister responsible for rural development to be appointed.
6. Labour Youth believe that the 'e-exclusion' of rural areas should be tackled by:
 - Rolling out broadband nationally;
 - Creating a second-hand computer grant scheme.