

# Paddy Lynn of the Workers Party: “I want to see mainstream politics coming back to Northern Ireland”

18 June 1998



Paddy Lynn

*Paddy Lynn is the Workers Party candidate in South Belfast for the Assembly elections. The Workers Party was founded in 1982, having emerged from the Official Sinn Féin, which split with Provisional Sinn Féin (Gerry Adam's party) in 1970.*

*When the Official Sinn Féin broke with the Provisionals they rejected the armed struggle in favour of a turn to trade union and community politics. Official Sinn Féin became the Workers Party and advocated a united struggle by Protestant and Catholic workers in defence of jobs and social conditions on the basis of a reformist programme. Internationally it established links to the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In 1992 a group of Workers Party deputies in the Dail (Irish parliament) left to form the “Democratic Left”.*

*Like similar nationalist organisations throughout the world, what attracted the Workers Party to Stalinism was its two-stage theory: first national independence, then, at some point in the future, a struggle for socialism. In practice this perspective serves to subordinate the working class to the national bourgeoisie.*

**RT:** What is your position on the Agreement?

**PL:** A lot of attention has been paid to the negative parts of the Agreement, but there are other issues that are very good. Integrated education for example. At present state-run

schools are either exclusively Protestant or Catholic. Each year there are over 15,000 young people waiting to get into integrated education and they can't because the governments refuse to give any funding to these schools.

There are a lot of young people who want the issues affecting local communities to be talked about rather than constitutional questions, such as the Republic's claim over Northern Ireland. This area is predominantly Roman Catholic and is seen by many politicians as nationalist, but there are quite a number of people who would not consider themselves to be either nationalist or unionist. About 10 percent of the voting population class themselves as “other”, neither Orange nor Green.

**RT:** Doesn't the Agreement keep Protestants and Catholics divided?

**PL:** Our society has been polarised since the early 1970s. This area has seen many deaths of innocent people. We have seen young people hurled out of this area, or getting their legs broken, for being allegedly involved in anti-social behaviour. We have paramilitaries, both on the nationalist side and the loyalist side, that are still carrying out punishment beatings. They are still intimidating people who don't support them

If someone does something wrong then they can be punished, either with baseball bats or being shot in the knees. We need the police service in Northern Ireland to represent all the different views and opinions of the people that live here. We can't have paramilitaries taking the law into their own hands.

**RT:** Isn't the aim of the British state to hand policing over to these groups? After all, they've been unable to police these areas.

**PL:** I hope not. I grew up in this area and I've seen violence all around me. I survived an attempted murder in 1989 by loyalist paramilitaries. They're now serving an 18-year sentence. I have my own views about the release of prisoners. But I don't believe in revenge—that's what has kept this conflict going. It will be hard for people to bite their tongue and let the past be the past, but this is the best opportunity we have had.

I was born in 1965 and grew up in a Protestant area. Because we were Roman Catholics we had to move here in 1969. I've known nothing but violence, hatred, bigotry, sectarianism and it's very, very deeply rooted. If the vote is “Yes” I'll be very happy. I am involved in a mixed relationship. My girl is a Protestant and comes from a middle class background. I come from a working class background. I want to be able to live next door to people with

different cultures, different religions, different coloured skins.

*RT:* Do working class people have different expectations from this agreement than the corporations seeking an economic springboard for Europe?

*PL:* International investment is very important if peace is to be successful. There are many working class people who are unemployed. If the situation goes bad again and the young kids listen to those politicians who have misled them, they'll be the ones left with the guns and bombs. They'll be the ones who will be pushed into an irretrievable situation. They'll either go to prison for their activities or they'll end up dead. About 12 of my friends have been murdered in Northern Ireland. Maybe 20 or 30 friends who went to school with me have ended up in prison because they were involved in paramilitary organisations. We need to resolve that.

The Workers Party was not represented at the peace process for various reasons, but we played a role in breaking down sectarian barriers. In 1970 a split took place within the mainstream IRA, and the officials and the Provisionals split. Then in 1972 the officials called a cease-fire. They knew from the early 1960s that violence was going nowhere. Thankfully, since 1984 we've seen people saying that the armed struggle is not going anywhere and we need the unity of Catholics and Protestants.

Approximately 100,000 people do not vote in Northern Ireland because they don't believe that the politicians represent them as they are either nationalist or unionist. The ordinary guy wants to get a few bob, to hold down a good job, get a house and live in an area of his choice. In Northern Ireland there is 7 percent of the population who now live in areas which would be perceived as mixed communities.

*RT:* You obviously have a great hope that the Agreement is going to bring about a situation where politics can take a non-sectarian form.

*PL:* Sectarianism is within all of us in Northern Ireland. History is a part of Northern Ireland and the Agreement needs to deal with all that. We've had 30 years of violence. We need to give at least another 30 years to build a durable peace where all the people can feel part of this society. Rebuilding the infrastructure is very important. This area, which is less than five minutes away from Belfast City centre, would have seen 30 massive bombs detonated per year in the early 1970s. And even 30 bombs per week when it got really bad. All the businesses moved and this area was gutted.

I want to see mainstream politics coming back to Northern Ireland. The politics of right and left, not orange and green; where social issues such as unemployment, social deprivation, housing, childcare and everything else is talked about. It's not at the moment. If this thing goes pear-shaped, it's going to go back to the bombers, back to the killings, back to the hatred we've had for over 30 years.

It's a very long road for people to come away from a military organisation in the 1960s, 1970s to a political organisation in the mid-70s, 80s and 90s like the Workers Party. There are other parties going through it at the moment—the Unionist Party, the Ulster Democratic Party and Sinn Féin, who are involved in the talks at the moment. It's going to be a long, difficult road.

*RT:* What is the political influence of the Workers Party?

*PL:* It comes from the Marxist-Leninist family. It is also a Socialist Republican party. It was the first political party that came out of republicanism that realised that the campaign of violence was wrong and that sectarianism was very wrong. In May 1972 it called a cease-fire which it has held since then. The original organisation—the Officials—have since disappeared.

I have been involved with socialist parties throughout the world, like the Communist Party of Great Britain and other groups in the former Soviet Union, Vietnam and countries like that. At one time in this area the Workers Party had 1,700 votes; it has 350 now.

*RT:* You mentioned that the Agreement would promote inward investment. Do you think this will benefit the working class?

*PL:* I am a bit cagey on that question. We've heard all this before: "When there's peace in Northern Ireland, we'll give you millions." The problem is where do those millions go? Will they bring full employment? The money is going into some very good investments like the regeneration of Belfast, the waterfront, etc. But I do have problems with that as well.

I think about this in very simple terms. We've had mass unemployment in this area, yet a conference centre was built, using £32 million of ratepayer's money, and less than 30 people work in it. Northern Ireland's infrastructure is based on beautiful big buildings and not creating full-time jobs for people. In this area the vast majority of jobs would be cleaning floors, washing glasses, working behind bars. I don't think the money they are talking about will really make a difference.

That brings us back to the point about the redistribution of wealth. We look at people with £40 million sitting in banks and living in massive houses. That money is not going into infrastructure, just sitting in banks not being invested in people. We all should be equal here. There is a wealthy society and they are not the ones who are affected by sectarianism. It's people on the ground that are being affected by sectarianism.

*RT:* How do you see the future of socialism in the North of Ireland?

*PL:* The small political groups will eventually come together if peace holds. Maybe some 15 years down the line they will form a left coalition. It would be people like the Women's Coalition who see themselves as quite left-wing. There will be people in the unionist organisations that consider themselves socialists and some of them are, but they still class themselves as unionists.

I hope we get to the stage where there is no such a thing as unionists and nationalists. There are people within the Progressive Unionist Party, Ulster Democratic Party and the middle class Alliance Party who call themselves socialists. If we do have a stable period of time we could have a political party in Northern Ireland where the class issues are finally represented.



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