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# Neither democratic nor a programme: the Democratic Programme of 1919

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ABSTRACT. *On 21 January 1919, the first Dáil adopted four constitutional documents, the best known of which is the Democratic Programme, a statement of social values, based on proposals from the Labour Party. The Programme is usually regarded as a cynical reward to Labour for its abstention from the 1918 general election, and nationalist elites have frequently been criticised for reneging on it. This paper will argue that the Programme was written to advance the Irish cause at the International Socialist Conference at Berne in February 1919, that parts of the Programme were implemented, and that it is very likely that the Labour Party did not write it to be implemented.*

On 21 January 1919, the first Dáil assembled in Dublin's Mansion House and adopted four constitutional documents: the Constitution of Dáil Éireann, the Declaration of Independence, the Message to the Free Nations of the World, and the Democratic Programme, a statement of social values and ideals, based on proposals from the Labour Party.[1] 'Democratic' was synonymous with 'socialist' in contemporary central and eastern Europe, though in the western world it would have been closer to 'progressive', and it was about to be endorsed as a universal aspiration in the post-war settlement. Of the four documents, the Labour-related Programme is by far the most widely referenced in the historiography of republicanism and political debate since 1919. Sinn Féin gets no credit for adopting it. On the contrary, historians have commonly cited the Programme as evidence of the conservative outlook of the national revolution. If the first Republic was so radical, the argument goes, why was the Programme never implemented? To which an obvious counterpoint is, if the Republic was so conservative, why was the Programme adopted at all? It is fair to say that the first question has been the more

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[1] Brian Farrell, *The founding of Dáil Éireann: parliament and nation-building* (Dublin, 1971), p. 51. The Labour Party was officially known as the Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party from 1914, and the Labour Party and Trade Union Congress from November 1918 to 1930. To minimise confusion, the trade union wing of the movement will be referred to throughout as the Irish Trade Union Congress or 'Congress'. By 'Labour' is meant the Labour Party or trade unions or related political groups, depending on the context. Workers are otherwise referred to as 'labour'.



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influential. Repeatedly, Sinn Féin and subsequent nationalist elites have been accused of reneging on the Programme.

The two big misconceptions about the Democratic Programme are that it was democratic – in the sense of having a popular mandate – and a programme – in the sense of being written for implementation. The 2006 feature film *The wind that shakes the barley* (2006) featured a scene where republicans debate the Treaty. Dan, a union man and socialist, quotes from paragraph 1 of the Programme and says: 'that's what we all signed up to when we voted for the Dáil.'[2] *The limits of liberty* (2010), a three-part television programme on twentieth-century Ireland shown on R.T.É., took the Democratic Programme as the point of departure for a thesis that the political class had climbed to power in 1918 with the aid of radical promises and then failed to deliver.[3] Historians who have given careful consideration to its origins accept that the Programme was not part of the Sinn Féin platform in 1918. So why should a party that had just won a sweeping victory adopt a manifesto from a party which had thought itself too weak to contest the election? Historians find it difficult to shake off a connection with the election. The usual explanation is that it was 'a debt of honour to the Labour Party, as a gesture of appreciation for its recent abstention from the general election'.[4] The assumption is reinforced by another assumption: that Sinn Féin had decreed that 'Labour must wait' and abstain from the election.[5] In fact, nothing of the sort had happened. Sinn Féin had offered an electoral pact instead. Labour stood down for its own reasons. There was no debt to be honoured. The Democratic Programme was not about looking back to 1918, but looking forward to the post-war world. Neither of the two first-hand accounts of its formulation – by Cathal O'Shannon and Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh – reference the election, whereas O'Shannon does reference the forthcoming international socialist conference at Berne.[6] Similarly, the only detailed treatments of the Programme's adoption, found in Farrell's *The founding of Dáil Éireann*, Mitchell's *Labour in Irish politics,* and Ó Cathasaigh's article 'Getting with the programme', all concur on Berne as the rationale.[7] The domestic dimension was very secondary.

[2] Technically, this was true of the second Dáil, but it is reasonable to assume that the film was not distinguishing between the first and second Dáil, to which almost all Sinn Féin deputies were returned unopposed.

[3] The programme opens: 'All successful revolutions depend on popular support. In the general election of December 1918 we, the Irish people, said yes to the pursuit of the republic … In return for the support it received, Sinn Féin made certain promises. The Democratic Programme … promised to Irish people that things would get a lot better: that their welfare would be a number one priority. Not only would this not happen, for many Irish men, women, and children, life would get worse.'

[4] Michael Laffan, *The resurrection of Ireland: the Sinn Féin party, 1916–1923* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 259.

[5] D. R. O'Connor Lysaght, 'Labour must wait: the making of a myth' in *Saothar,* xxvi (2001), pp 61–5.

[6] *Irish Times*, 31 Jan. 1944; for Ó Ceallaigh's recollections, see *Seanad Éireann deb.,* xxviii, 243–4 (25 Nov. 1943), and his memoir quoted in Farrell, *Founding of Dáil Éireann,* pp 59–60.

[7] Farrell, *Founding of Dáil Éireann,* pp 56–62; Arthur Mitchell, *Labour in Irish politics, 1890–1930: the Irish Labour movement in an age of revolution* (Dublin, 1974), pp 107–12; Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh, 'Getting with the programme: Labour, the Dáil and the Democratic Programme of 1919', in *Red banner*, xxxv (2009), pp 24–35.

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Primarily, the Programme was predicated on the importance of internationalism to the Labour Party, assumptions that a socialist International would help to shape the post-war peace settlement, and a belief that Labour could advance national aspirations through a socialist International.

No one has ever suggested that the Democratic Programme wasn't a programme. One of two interruptions at the golden jubilee meeting of the first Dáil in 1969 involved Owen Sheehy-Skeffington asking the then taoiseach if he saw 'the likelihood of the democratic programme … being implemented'?[8] Yet there was just one practical undertaking in it. In so far as its deficiencies have been recognised, Sinn Féin has been blamed for toning it down or emasculating the Labour draft.[9] In effect, there was no meaningful difference between the Labour and Sinn Féin drafts as both were aspirational. And it is plausible that the Labour draftsmen deliberately crafted a document which made no practical commitments. Just the same, the programme did what it was intended to do, and it was applied in so far as there was anything in it to be applied. So what was it all about?

## I

In a collection of documents published in 1919 as *Irish Labour and its international relations*, Labour claimed that:

> Since the outbreak of the war, in 1914, the tendency of Labour in Ireland has been more and more towards the establishment of formal and permanent relations with the International Socialist Bureau [the standing committee of the Second International] and with the movement and parties in other countries.[10]

Since its establishment in 1889 as a biennial or triennial conference of socialist parties, to debate the major issues of the day, Labour had ignored the Second International, but much was to change between 1917 and 1920. The war and socialist efforts to end it, the Bolshevik revolution, and expectations of a big swing to the left after the war, made the increasingly strong Irish Labour movement ever more determined to pursue its internationalism. Internationalism was also an attractive diversion; a straightforward way of waving the red flag without having to confront Unionists, Home Rulers, or republicans at home. The tendency was reinforced by the revival of the Socialist Party of Ireland (S.P.I.) in January 1917. The S.P.I. had been identified with James Connolly between 1910 and 1912, and arguably the

[8] Andrée Sheehy Skeffington, *Skeff: the life of Owen Sheehy Skeffington 1909–1970* (Dublin, 1991), p. 228.

[9] Opinion varies on the significance of the re-draft. One of the first textual analyses, Patrick Lynch, 'The social revolution that never was' in Desmond Williams (ed.), *The Irish struggle, 1916–1926* (London, 1966), pp 41–54, plays down the difference between the drafts, whereas one of the most recent, Ó Cathasaigh, 'Getting with the programme', p. 30, argues that 'most of the good had been hollowed out' of the Labour draft.

[10] Cork Workers' Club, *Irish Labour and its international relations*: *in the era of the Second International and the Bolshevik revolution* (Historical Reprints, no.13, no date), p. 17.

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revived party was intended to associate Labour leaders with their 'national martyr'. In practice a party within a party, it included many of Labour's most powerful figures and was not going to embark on any domestic campaigns that might embarrass Labour or the trade unions. Instead, mindful of Connolly's connections with the Second International and the American left, and of how Connolly's Irish Socialist Republican Party had secured recognition as a distinctly Irish delegation at the 1900 congress of the International, the S.P.I. saw its special role as the affirmation of Ireland's national rights through internationalism.[11]

By 1916 the Second International had shrivelled to the International Socialist Bureau as affiliates and disparate initiatives to reconvene the International took conflicting positions on the war. The S.P.I. was 'uncompromising in its absolute opposition' to the war, while the Labour Party moved gradually to an anti-war stance and a 'position which, on the whole, is that of the Independents in Germany, the late Minoritaires in France, the B.S.P. [British Socialist Party], I.L.P. [Independent Labour Party], and S.L.P. [Socialist Labour Party] in Great Britain, and the official Socialist Party in Italy and the United States'.[12] But before 1920, Irish Labour was willing to work with all tendencies. Its core principles boiled down to support for the revival of an International and for the two Russian revolutions, and insistence that the International not be confined to belligerent countries and that the Irish be admitted as a separate national section. After the first Russian revolution in March 1917, the Labour Party welcomed the Petrograd Soviet's call for an international socialist conference and established a formal link with the International Socialist Bureau. William O'Brien, the leading official in the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, attended the conference at Leeds in June 1917 convened by the British United Socialist Council to salute the Russian revolution. At the annual Irish Trade Union Congress (I.T.U.C.) in August, it was agreed 'to establish the Irish Labour Party as a distinct unit in the International Labour movement'. In January 1918, a joint Labour Party–S.P.I. delegation met Maxim Litvinoff, Soviet Russia's plenipotentiary in London, and officials of the International Socialist Bureau attending the British Labour Party's conference at Nottingham. Another mission was sent to England in April to lobby against conscription. The annual I.T.U.C. in August established 'an Irish Section of the International', comprising three members of the Labour Party and two of the S.P.I.[13]

In the wake of the annual congress, the national executive met on 9 September and decided to contest the next general election. At this point it was felt that Germany had lost the war, but would fight on for another year. Labour expected a wartime election, in which, because conscription was still on the statute book, all of the non-Unionist parties would be standing on an abstentionist platform. Four reasons were given.

> Resolved also that in view (1) of the proved futility of Irish members attending the British parliament during the war, (2) of the disregard

[11] Emmet O'Connor, 'True Bolsheviks? The rise and fall of the Socialist Party of Ireland, 1917–21', in D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Ireland in transition, 1867–1921* (London, 2004), pp 209–22.
[12] Cork Workers' Club, *Irish Labour and its international relations*, pp 37–8.
[13] Ibid., pp 18–27.

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> which that parliament has shown to its own acts and pledges, (3) of the strategic importance of undermining by a National Boycott its moral authority when dealing with Ireland, (4) of the need for strengthening the claim of Irish Labour for separate representation as a distinct unit in the International, more especially at the Conference of Labour Representatives from all nations which is intended to be held at the same time and place as the Peace Conference, we recommend that Labour Candidates shall in this election pledge themselves that they shall not take part in the proceedings of the House of Commons unless an annual or special Congress shall have decided otherwise.[14]

The expectation of a socialist bearing on the peace settlement was realised to a degree: specifically in that government delegations to the Paris peace talks included labour sections, and the Treaty of Versailles provided for the establishment of the International Labour Organization, and more vaguely in the impact of socialist demands for a peace based on democracy and self-determination.

But the crumbling position of the Central Powers in October meant that by the end of the month it was plain that the war would be over within weeks. Labour became more anxious to establish an international presence and more nervous about contesting a peacetime election in which there would be no consensus on abstentionism. At the special congress on 1–2 November at which Labour famously decided not to contest the forthcoming election, all of the speakers opposing withdrawal made the point that without M.P.s, Labour's voice in a revived International would be diminished. Some argued that this would weaken Ireland's case for self-determination, and there was clearly a feeling that Labour could make a unique contribution to the national cause through the International. Tom Johnson, who led the case for withdrawal, conceded: 'The position of labour at the International was undoubtedly a very serious one. Undoubtedly it almost overbalanced all the other questions and all the other arguments against taking part in the elections'.[15] A lengthy statement on foreign policy was adopted, urging the International Socialist Bureau to 'call the International together without further delay'.[16]

Once the armistice was signed on 11 November, Johnson was despatched to London to press the case with Camille Huysmans, secretary of the International Socialist Bureau. The conference would eventually take place in Berne, Switzerland, in February 1919. Huysmans told Johnson to 'prepare our case and send our delegation to the Congress'.[17] On 23 December 1918, the S.P.I.'s executive nominated O'Brien and O'Shannon to a 'Hands off Russia' conference in London on 18 January, and J. J. Hughes as its delegate to Berne.[18] On 28 December the Labour Party executive appointed

[14] Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress national executive minute book, 1917–21, minutes 9 Sept. 1918 (Irish Labour History Society Archive, Dublin).

[15] Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, *Report of a special conference, 1918*, p. 116 (University of Ulster, Magee College (U.U.M.C.)).

[16] Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, *Report of a special conference, 1918*, p. 119 (U.U.M.C.).

[17] Farrell, *Founding of Dáil Éireann,* p. 58.

[18] Thomas J. Morrissey, S.J., *A man called Hughes: the life and times of Seamus Hughes, 1881–1943* (Dublin, 1991), pp 101, 363, fn.80.

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Thomas MacPartlin, O'Brien, O'Shannon, and Johnson to Berne. The last three were also given credentials as S.P.I. comrades.[19]

## II

Who first thought of the Democratic Programme? In November 1917, with due fanfare in St Mary's Hall, Belfast and repeated emphasis on 'democratic', Joe Devlin, M.P. for Belfast West and the Irish Parliamentary Party's labour spokesman, had proposed a 'Democratic Forward Movement' to improve the industrial and social conditions of workers, and outlined what the *Irish News* called 'a practical programme of reform'; an initiative which was welcomed in the new Labour paper, *Irish Opinion: A Weekly Journal of Industrial and Political Democracy*.[20] Meeting in March 1918, Dublin trades council welcomed 'the proposed establishment of a people's Peace, based on the right of all nations to self-determination' and called for a special Labour congress 'to adopt a democratic programme for proposed embodiment in the future constitution for the government of the Irish people, and to make arrangements for the election of representatives of labour to before-mentioned Irish assembly. International representatives of Labour to be invited to attendance at said Congress'.[21]

According to O'Shannon, the 1919 document originated in a request to O'Brien from Ó Ceallaigh.[22] That the support of free nations for Irish freedom would prove a trump card in the struggle had become 'an article of faith' in Sinn Féin.[23] Dáil Éireann intended to put its case to the Paris peace talks, and picked Ó Ceallaigh to do it. For the Republic to feature a social manifesto in its founding documents would have been in keeping with the temper of the times, the conventional wisdom being that the International would influence the talks. Nor was it surprising that Sinn Féin didn't draft its own statement. Since the industrial unrest of 1911, advanced nationalists had acquired a respect for a Labour movement that seemed determined to guard its patch jealously. If Sinn Féin wanted Labour's help at Berne, it was not going to patronise it, the more so as Sinn Féin and Labour leaders were in regular contact. Conversely, the Labour Party's attitude to the Republic was one of passive and conditional support. The Labour leaders made no effort to milk the occasion by projecting their draft of the Programme as an official Labour document, and it was not referred to in the minutes of the I.T.U.C. national executive. If the Labour Party had asked for the Democratic Programme, it would have been its only demand of Sinn Féin other than insisting the Republic did not restrain industrial conflict.

On the other hand, it is possible that the S.P.I. was a prompt. A joint meeting of the Sinn Féin executive and Sinn Féin T.D.s at 10 a.m. on New Year's Day 1919 agreed to call a secret assembly of 'the Republican representatives' on 7 January, at which they would be asked to consider the relations between Sinn Féin and Dáil Éireann, a declaration of independence,

[19] Cork Workers' Club, *Irish Labour and its international relations*, p. 27.
[20] *Irish News*, 19 Nov. 1917; *Irish Opinion*, 15 Dec. 1917.
[21] Dublin trades council minutes, 11 Mar. 1918 (U.U.M.C.).
[22] *Irish Times*, 21 Jan. 1969.
[23] Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland since the rising* (London, 1966), p. 26.

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and a message to the free nations of the world. The absence of any reference to the Democratic Programme at this point suggests that Sinn Féin had not thought of it. An entry in O'Brien's diary for the same day reads: 'JJH and self saw RM re ISC'. 'JJH' must be Hughes, and 'ISC' is likely to be 'International Socialist Conference', though in European socialist circles the abbreviation referred to the International Socialist Commission, the permanent committee established by the Zimmerwald Conference of anti-war socialist parties in 1915, and which eventually dissolved into the Communist International in March 1919. Farrell believed 'RM' to be Richard Mulcahy, T.D., who eventually proposed the formal adoption of the Democratic Programme in Dáil Éireann.[24] Ó Cathasaigh reckons it was probably Ronald J. P. Mortished, an S.P.I. comrade and a linguist, who would later work with the International Labour Organization in Geneva.[25] But if O'Brien had not met Mulcahy on 1 January, he met P. J. Little and Rory O'Connor on 3 January, the same day as an S.P.I. plenary session on Berne. On 11 and 14 January, Michael Collins, Harry Boland, Michael Staines, Gavin Duffy, O'Connor, and Little, met O'Brien, Johnson, Hughes, O'Shannon, and Thomas Farren 're ISC and DE [Dáil Éireann]'. Also on 14 January, Sinn Féin T.D.s discussed the documents to be put before the first Dáil.[26] Included in a press release was the first public reference to what became the Democratic Programme:

> A document drafted by the Irish Workers' Delegation of the International Conference was submitted to the members present, and it was decided that the statement of national claims set out were heartily approved. A committee was appointed to draw up the draft of a programme of constructive work on democratic lines in consultation with the Labour leaders.[27]

A further meeting of Labour and Sinn Féin leaders – including J. J. Walsh, Mulcahy, Collins, Duffy, and Little – took place on 18 January.[28]

## III

There are two versions of the drafting of the Programme. Speaking in Seanad Éireann in November 1943, Mulcahy criticised the government's record on welfare and education, and quoted from the Democratic Programme. Responding as Minister for Finance, Ó Ceallaigh said:

> The social outlook that inspired the 1916 programme, to which Senator Mulcahy referred also, is the outlook of this Government. Virtually every member of the Government is a 1916 man. They were brought up in that tradition and they have that national, social and economic outlook.

[24] Cited in Farrell, *Founding of Dáil Éireann,* pp 57–8.
[25] Ó Cathasaigh, 'Getting with the programme', p. 26.
[26] Farrell, *Founding of Dáil Éireann,* pp 56–8; Morrissey, *A man called Hughes,* p. 101; Thomas J. Morrissey, S.J., *William O'Brien, 1881–1968: socialist, republican, Dáil deputy, editor and trade union leader* (Dublin, 2007), p. 162.
[27] Cited in Farrell, *Founding of Dáil Éireann,* p. 57.
[28] Morrissey, *A man called Hughes,* p. 101.

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> They have done their best, with the resources available, in the past 11½ years to implement that programme. The democratic programme adopted by the First Dáil in 1919 was – perhaps I may mention this as a matter of interest – written by myself. I sat at a meeting all the afternoon of the day before the First Dáil met. Some of those who were at the meeting are now dead. We had gone round to people who were for years advocates of social reform – Mr. Johnson, Mr. William O'Brien and others – and got a variety of notes from them. We discussed all that afternoon the drafting of the programme. But committees cannot write programmes. About 12 o'clock at night, somebody said: 'Go and write it yourself'. I took the material home, sat up the greater part of the night, wrote it and brought it down to Michael Foley to be typed in time for the Dáil. That is the history of the democratic programme.[29]

According to a more elaborate passage in Ó Ceallaigh's memoirs, Sinn Féin had charged Boland with the job of drafting the Programme, Boland being regarded as a socialist sympathiser. Boland arrived at the Dáil arrangements committee on the night of 20 January with no more than 'rough notes' received from O'Brien and Johnson. Ó Ceallaigh, as chairman, read the notes to the meeting. Some points encountered fierce opposition, and nothing was agreed except that Ó Ceallaigh produce something acceptable.[30]

Ó Ceallaigh's Seanad statement was challenged by O'Shannon in articles in the *Irish Times* printed shortly after the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first Dáil. O'Shannon insisted that the Democratic Programme was drafted by Johnson, with inputs from himself and O'Brien. Crucially, he was able to produce Johnson's draft, 'laboriously thought out and worked in … patiently revised and amended'.[31] That attention to detail was characteristic of Johnson, and O'Shannon's account is the more widely believed.

Ó Ceallaigh's recollections are further undermined by P. S. O'Hegarty and Dr James Ryan. O'Hegarty claimed that Collins had summoned a meeting of Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.) members on the morning of 20 January to vet the declarations to go before the Dáil. Collins read the papers evenly, expressing no opinions on the content. Only the Democratic Programme provoked a debate, the majority deciding that 'all internal and arguable questions like this should be left over until the English had actually been got out'. Certainly, that was O'Hegarty's attitude, and the future Free State civil servant recalled how the 'doctrinaire jargon' of the 'doctrinaire English Radical' had 'made his gorge rise'. Oddly, he didn't know at the time that Johnson was the author. Collins promised to have the offending document 'suppressed', but 'next morning, the others refused to go on' without it and the proposed Programme was passed to Ó Ceallaigh who, according to O'Shannon, had insisted on its retention.[32] Ryan stayed in Ó Ceallaigh's house on the night of 20 January, and remembered Ó Ceallaigh and his wife 're-phrasing' a draft by Johnson.[33]

[29] *Seanad Éireann deb.,*xxviii, 243–4 , (25 Nov. 1943).
[30] An excerpt from the unpublished memoir is quoted in Farrell, *Founding of Dáil Éireann,* pp 59–60.
[31] *Irish Times*, 31 Jan. 1 Feb. 1944; supplement, 21 Jan. 1969.
[32] P. S. O'Hegarty, *A history of Ireland under the Union* (London, 1952), p. 727; *Irish Times*, 21 Jan. 1919.
[33] Interview with James Ryan, *Irish Times*, 16 Mar. 1967.

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While O'Hegarty and Ó Ceallaigh conflict on timing and on the basis of the final version, they are agreed that it was done by the latter under instructions to tone it down. It is obvious too that Sinn Féin was not worried about Labour objections to amendments. Ó Ceallaigh remembered going home in the small hours of 21 January, finding a quiet spot in a house crowded with T.D.s, composing an acceptable edition with his wife until after 4 a.m., and then taking it to the office for typing by 10 a.m.[34]

## IV

O'Shannon wrote: 'of the 133 lines [in Johnson's draft] 66 were deleted … of the 91 lines in the official record 36 were not in the Johnson draft'.[35] The difference between the texts was not as stark as this suggests. Some of the revisions were purely textual to eliminate wordiness, repetition, or detail deemed inordinate in a constitutional document. Others were more substantial. Comparing the texts (see Appendix), it can be seen that Ó Ceallaigh largely followed Johnson's plan and the I.R.B.'s instruction to tone down the rhetoric (as O'Hegarty recalled), or 'put it in a more historic or more presentable way' (as Ryan described it).[36] He was, of course, working against the clock in distracting circumstances which did not encourage originality.

How significant were the changes? O'Shannon, an Easter Week veteran, had suggested the inclusion of the quotation from Pearse in paragraph one.[37] The key change in the final draft here was that Pearse's statement that 'no private right in property is good as against the public right of the nation' was replaced with the phrase 'all right to private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare'. The tone is softer but the meaning is not essentially different. Arguably Johnson's second paragraph is a restatement of his first. Ó Ceallaigh's version is quite different and bland. In his third paragraph, Johnson's wording hints at a right to work and a minimum wage. Ó Ceallaigh's formulation is a little more diffident, but amounts to the same thing. Johnson edged closer to a real, enforceable commitment in his fourth paragraph, without quite sealing it. Ó Ceallaigh retained the most important passage ('the first duty of the Government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing, or shelter'), and deleted the aim of encouraging the 'most capable and sympathetic' to enter teacher training. Paragraph 5 of Ó Ceallaigh's draft, on 'the necessity of abolishing … the Poor Law System', is entirely his own. It reflected long-standing nationalist rhetoric, and, significantly, it includes the one positive promise in either draft.[38] Paragraph 5 of Johnson's draft and paragraph 6 of Ó Ceallaigh's draft both retained the aspiration to develop natural resources, but

[34] Farrell, *Founding of Dáil Éireann,* p. 60.
[35] *Irish Times*, 1 Feb. 1944.
[36] Interview with James Ryan, *Irish Times*, 16 Mar. 1967.
[37] *Irish Times*, 21 Jan. 1969.
[38] 'Irish nationalists seized on the popular view of the workhouse system as an alien imposition unsuited to Irish culture and society to argue that there would be no need for workhouses in a home rule Ireland': Virginia Crossman, 'The poor law in Ireland, 1838–1948', http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/welfare/articles/crossmanv.

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the latter deleted the reference to the possibility of state requisition without compensation. Johnson's paragraph 6 and Ó Ceallaigh's paragraph 7 were influenced by the food supply crisis of late 1916, when a special I.T.U.C. conference called for price control and a ban on selected exports. Johnson's version came close to demanding state 'organisation' of external trade, but arguably only in times of a food shortage. Ó Ceallaigh took the latter interpretation and restricted the proposal to food and necessities in times of scarcity. In respect of paragraphs 7 of Johnson's draft and 8 of Ó Ceallaigh's draft, Ó Ceallaigh deleted the requirement to 'encourage' trade unionism and co-operatives and workers' control of industry, though this was the section in which Labour would have had the strongest vested interest. Coogan attributes the excision to Collins.[39] Greaves argued that Johnson's final paragraph, including 'the elimination of that class in society which lives upon the wealth produced by the workers' paraphrased Friedrich Engels's introduction to the 1883 German edition of *The Communist Manifesto*. A critical difference is that Engels made it clear that the bourgeoisie was the class to be eliminated, whereas Johnson's formula was pointless. O'Shannon claimed the I.R.B. took particular exception to it, and it was the only paragraph to be removed completely.[40] Ultimately, the changes were of little significance.

## V

At 3.30 p.m. on 21 January, Dáil Éireann assembled in a chilly Mansion House. The Democratic Programme was the last of the four constitutional documents to be adopted. Ironically, two future Cumann na nGaedheal stalwarts introduced it. As the Programme was the only one of the four documents which had not been translated into Irish, Piaras Béaslaí was given the job of making an 'impromtu translation' while pretending to read it in Irish. 'Nobody seems to have noticed anything unusual', he recalled. 'The version which appeared in the official report was written by me some days later.'[41] After the English version was read by Tom Kelly, who had a pro-labour record on Dublin Corporation, the Ceann Comhairle invited Mulcahy to propose its adoption. Speaking entirely in Irish, Mulcahy commended the Dáil to give effect to the Programme in terms that Connolly would have approved of:

> Ní féidir le náisiún bheith saor an fhaid agus tá an chuid is lugha dá mhuintir gan saoirse. Ní féidir le náisiún bheith beo agus 'na bheathaidh an fhaid agus a dhiúltuighthear d'aon chuid des na daoine a gcionceart féin den mhaoin agus den tsaidhbhreas a bhronn Dia orainn go léir chun sinn a dheunamh beo, agus chun na beatha bhuanú ionainn. Dá bhrigh sin iarraim oraibh glacadh leis an rún so. Cuirimí sibh feidhm i nár

html, accessed 7 Aug. 2014. See also Virginia Crossman, *Poverty and the poor law in Ireland, 1850–1914* (Liverpool, 2013), pp 2, 64–5.

[39] Coogan, *Ireland since the rising*, p. 25.

[40] C. Desmond Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish revolution* (London, 1971), p. 170; *Irish Times*, 21 Jan. 1969.

[41] Cited in Ó Cathasaigh, 'Getting with the programme', p. 30.

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> reachtaibh é, agus bíodh cuimhne againn i n-árn gníomharthaibh i gcomhnuidhe arna daoine gur cúram dúinn iad do theagasg agus do chosaint.[42]
>
> [A nation can not be fully free while the least part of its people are without freedom. A nation can not live fully and refuse to any part of its people its right to the resources and wealth which God gave us all to live and prosper. For that reason, I ask you to endorse this proposal. We will put it into effect in our laws, and remember it always in our business, on behalf of those we need to teach and to protect].

The seconder was Con Collins, T.D. for West Limerick. He spoke briefly, pointing out that the text had been read in two languages 'agus dá bhrigh sin is beag duine annso ná tuigeann an scéal' [and for that reason few people here will not understand it]; an interesting comment in the light of subsequent controversy about whether the T.D.s really understood what they were doing in endorsing the Programme.

Sitting between his wife, Marie, and O'Shannon in the public gallery, Johnson was moved to tears. Unconcerned at the changes and omissions, O'Shannon had to restrain him from applauding. To his dying day, Johnson 'enjoyed reminiscing' about the occasion.[43] O'Brien and Hughes attended the reception afterwards, and assured Cathal Brugha, who had presided over the proceedings, of their support for the Republic.[44]

## VI

The Democratic Programme did its job at Berne. In the event, only Johnson and O'Shannon travelled to Switzerland, accredited by the Labour Party and S.P.I. respectively.[45] Received as a national delegation, they carried with them lengthy memoranda on Ireland's case for self-determination. The conference passed two resolutions on Ireland, endorsing its right to self-determination and calling for peace talks. Prior to the votes, the Irish persuaded the British Labour Party delegation, led by Ramsay MacDonald, to replace home rule within the empire with self-determination as its policy on Ireland. In return, the Irish agreed not to push for recognition of the Republic. Johnson and O'Shannon were elected to the Permanent Commission of the Berne congress, and drafted a memorandum on Ireland for the congress's delegation to the Paris peace conference. On returning via Paris, they also briefed the Dáil mission to the conference and gave lengthy interviews to the socialist dailies *Le Populaire* and *L'Humanité*.[46] The failure to persuade MacDonald to endorse the Republic did not take from Johnson and O'Shannon's achievement. Changing British Labour policy on Ireland was a slow business, as the party straddled the line

[42] *Miontuairiscí an Chéad Dála, 1919–21* [Minutes of proceedings of the first parliament of the Republic of Ireland 1919–1921: official record] (Dublin, 1994), p. 24.
[43] J. Anthony Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson, 1872–1963: first leader of the Labour Party in Dáil Éireann* (Dublin, 1980), p. 157; *Irish Times*, 2 Feb. 1944.
[44] Morrissey, *A man called Hughes,* p. 101.
[45] Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson*, p. 160.
[46] Mitchell, *Labour in Irish politics*, pp 110–12; Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson,* p. 161.

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between patriotism and socialist internationalism. It was 1920 before British Labour resolved formally in favour of self-determination for Ireland, and party leaders continued to deny that self-determination would lead to separation from Britain.[47] 'Thomas Johnson and Cathal O'Shannon have done a good day's work in a very short space of time', commended the republican weekly *New Ireland*, which published a variety of features on Russia, Bolshevism, and soviets in March and April.[48] In accordance with a recommendation at Berne, Labour called a general strike on May Day for 'international proletarian solidarity and self-determination of all peoples'. Following a meeting with Johnson and O'Brien, de Valera urged the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis in April to back the strike, emphasising the help received from Labour at Berne.[49]

But was it a Programme? Johnson's draft included no firm demands, and it is likely that this was deliberate. The idea that Labour wanted action, and pushed the first Dáil as far as it would go, is completely at variance with Labour policy at the time. Is it accurate even to say it was of Labour provenance? There was an ambiguity about the role of Johnson and O'Brien in their dealings with Sinn Féin, highlighted by Luke J. Duffy at the 1924 Congress:

> The working class as a whole were in the [national] struggle and were part of the force that sustained it. The great majority of the delegates were fully conscious of this and gave the alliance, informally, no doubt, their benediction; some went further and submerged their own identity in the Nationalistic movement, but Congress never formally, officially or specifically took any cognisance of that arrangement.[50]

Johnson regarded his part in producing the Democratic Programme as a personal service to the Republic rather than action on behalf of Labour. Throughout the independence struggle, Labour avoided a bargaining relationship with Sinn Féin and did not formally recognise Dáil Éireann until after the vote on the Anglo–Irish Treaty. Politically, Labour had resolved, in withdrawing from the 1918 election, that it was not its business to lead on the national question. Substantially, the party was really the trade unions, who did not wish to jeopardise their relations with British state agencies. They continued to deal with the British Ministry of Labour and its arbitration services and trade boards, and to operate social insurance sections under the National Insurance Act (1911), which remained a big incentive to recruitment and through which they had considerable funds held in Britain. While Labour continued to assist the Republic in various ways – most notably through strike action and canvassing British Labour – it never tried to tie these efforts to a

[47] See Fred D. Schneider, 'British Labour and Ireland, 1918–1921: the retreat to Houndsditch', *Review of Politics*, xl, no. 3 (July 1978), pp 368–91. For examples of the pressure placed on British Labour's position by international conferences see remarks by J. R. Clynes, party leader, 1921–2, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, cxi, 1505–06 (3 Apr.1919); Labour Party, *The International at Lucerne: the resolutions, the provisional constitution* (London, 1919); Bernard Shaw, *The Labour Party: Irish nationalism and Labour internationalism* (London, 1920).

[48] *New Ireland*, 22 Feb.1919.

[49] Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson,* p. 162.

[50] Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, *Thirtieth annual report, 1924*, pp 120–1 (U.U.M.C.).

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quid pro quo. It did not try to exploit its leverage on Berne to present Sinn Féin with a side-bar of more immediate demands. It did not object to modifications of Johnson's draft. It put no pressure on Dáil Éireann to give effect to the Programme. And it had no wish to repeat the Berne initiative. When Frank P. Walsh of the American Friends of Irish Freedom and champion of radical causes urged that a similar embassy be despatched to the American Federation of Labor, Sinn Féin leaders were enthusiastic, but Johnson agreed with de Valera that the idea was impractical.[51] Neither did Labour try to encourage the Republic's pursuit of recognition from Soviet Russia in 1920–1.[52]

Some urgency crept into Labour's style in 1921 as the post-war boom yielded to an economic slump. At Easter, the I.T.U.C. issued a manifesto *The country in danger!* appealing for action on unemployment, and quoting from paragraph 1 of the Democratic Programme. Tellingly, it described the content of the Programme as 'principles', and while it said that the time had come to give them 'practical effect', it did not say what could be effected. Instead, it listed a series of more concrete measures designed to create employment.[53] Again, the rhetoric was not followed up with action or hard bargaining, and Labour tamely stood aside from the elections to the second Dáil in May.

Arguably, Sinn Féin took the Programme more seriously than Labour, initially at least. The I.R.B. would hardly have opposed it had it been mere fluff. Ó Ceallaigh inserted the nearest thing to a commitment in either text in his paragraph deploring the Poor Law. Moving its adoption, both Mulcahy and Con Collins had urged it be taken seriously in the business of the Dáil. Béaslaí reckoned the British had banned publication of the Programme for fear of the working class support it would draw to Sinn Féin.[54] But if there were concerns about Labour requesting the application of the Programme, they were scotched by the new president of Dáil Éireann, who was sprung from Lincoln gaol on 3 February. When on 11 April Tom Kelly asked about the implementation of the Programme, de Valera replied that it 'contemplated a situation somewhat different from that in which they actually found themselves' and while the foreigner occupied the country 'they could not put fully into force their desires and their wishes as far as their social programme was concerned'.[55] As de Valera was as anxious as anyone else in Sinn Féin to retain Labour's goodwill and was in regular contact with Johnson, he spoke with authority.

De Valera's opinion did not have to be the final word on the matter. The ideological coalition that was the Sinn Féin leadership ranged from those like O'Hegarty, who found the Democratic Programme obnoxious, to those like de Valera, who was sympathetic but wanted social questions to await independence, to people like Ó Ceallaigh who favoured active engagement with Labour, to social republicans like Liam Mellows. The variety of values would persist, but, on balance, the mindset of Sinn Féin leaders was radical in the immediate wake of the World War, when, for example, future conservatives like the Dáil Director of Trade

[51] Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson,* p. 163.

[52] Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia, and the Communist Internationals* (Dublin, 2004), pp 26–9.

[53] Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, *Official report of the twenty-seventh annual meeting, 1921,* pp 39–46 (U.U.M.C.).

[54] Cited in Ó Cathasaigh, 'Getting with the programme', p. 31.

[55] Cited in Ó Cathasaigh, 'Getting with the programme', p. 32; Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish revolution*, p. 176.

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and Commerce, Ernest Blythe, endorsed the re-structuring of the economy in co-operatives and stressed the need for the retention of Labour support.[56] Aside from the Democratic Programme and the contacts with Soviet Russia, Dáil Éireann created a Department of Labour which was nigh on a Department of the Labour Party, and headed by a cabinet minister, whereas agriculture, for example, was headed by a Director, outside the cabinet. The first minister of Labour was ex-Citizen Army officer Constance Markievicz. When Markievicz was on the run or detained, her place was taken by Tom Kelly, and later by Joseph McGrath, who also managed the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union insurance section. Of course all heads and officials of the Department were members of Sinn Fèin rather than the Labour Party. Through its industrial relations conciliation boards, which were established after consultation with O'Brien and Johnson and depended on trade union co-operation, the Department was one of the Dáil administration's most successful ventures in domestic policy. The boards offered a neat mutual accommodation, realising a long-standing trade union objective and getting the authority of the Republic more widely accepted. After the ratification of the Treaty, the Provisional Government invited Johnson to nominate the minister of Labour. When Johnson declined, McGrath accepted the post. The Department was absorbed into the Department of Industry and Commerce in September 1922, and did not re-appear until 1966.[57] Dáil Éireann also supported Seán Etchingham, director of Fisheries and a former union leader in Wexford, in trying to re-organise the fishing industry along co-operative lines. It was puzzling to some Sinn Féiners that more of Dáil Éireann's 'constructive work' was not implemented. Republican leaders pleaded that there were other priorities, distractions, administrative difficulties, arrests, and repressions.[58] There was, too, sporadic opposition to the application of radicalism, but only after the reactionary summer of 1920 did the ideological climate shift to the right, as it did throughout Europe.

Contrary to popular opinion, some provisions of the Democratic Programme were given effect, although there is no evidence that this was other than coincidental. In the spirit of paragraph 6 of the final draft, Dáil Éireann appointed a commission of enquiry into the development of industrial resources in September 1919. Labour was offered a seat, and appointed Johnson, who also chaired a sub-committee of the commission on food resources. The commission functioned until the formation of the Provisional Government in 1922.[59] Ó Ceallaigh's paragraph 8 was fulfilled in 1923 when the Free State joined the International Labour Organization and ratified its conventions.[60] And in 1925 his paragraph 5 was realised in part by the abolition of the workhouses and the replacement of the Boards of Guardians by boards of health and public assistance. What would Labour have got had it asked the first Dáil to implement the Democratic Programme?

[56] The range of views in Sinn Féin on social and economic questions is synopsised in Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919–22* (Dublin, 1995), pp 43–50.

[57] 'The Ministry of Labour in the first Dáil' in *Saothar: iris ráithiúil na Roinne Saothair*, iii (spring, 1969), pp 1–3.

[58] Mitchell, *Revolutionary government in Ireland*, pp 48–50.

[59] Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson,* pp 157–8.

[60] See Edward Phelan, *Edward Phelan and the I.L.O.: The life and views of an international social actor* (Geneva, 2009), p. 25.

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## Appendix

The drafts of the Democratic Programme

| Johnson's draft | The official Programme |
|---|---|
| [Par 1] Repeating the words of the Proclamation of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic: 'We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible'. And further, in the language of its First President, Patrick H. Pearse, we declare 'that the Nation's Sovereignty extends not only to all the men and women of the Nation, but to all the material possessions of the Nation, the Nation's soil and all its resources, all wealth and all wealth-producing processes within the Nation. In other words, no private right in property is good as against the public right of the nation' ('The Sovereign People' – 31 March 1916). | [Par 1] We declare in the words of the Irish Republican Proclamation the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be indefeasible, and in the language of our first President, Pádraíg Mac Phiarais, we declare that the Nation's sovereignty extends not only to all men and women of the Nation, but to all its material possessions, the Nation's soil and all its resources, all the wealth and all the wealth-producing processes within the Nation, and with him we reaffirm that all right to private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare. |
| [Par 2] We further declare that as the nation in the exercise of its sovereignty may entrust its soil and its resources, its wealth and wealth-producing processes to the care and charge of any of its citizens, to use and exploit for the nation's enrichment on such terms and subject to such conditions as may be determined by the whole people, so the nation must ever retain the right and power to resume possession of such soil or wealth whenever the trust is abused or the trustee fails to give faithful service. | [Par 2] We declare that we desire our country to be ruled in accordance with the principles of Liberty, Equality, and Justice for all, which alone can secure permanence of Government in the willing adhesion of the people. |

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*(Continued)*

| Johnson's draft | The official Programme |
|---|---|
| [Par 3] In the same manner as we affirm that the duty of every man and woman is to give allegiance and service to the Commonwealth, so we declare it as the duty of the nation to ensure that every citizen shall have the opportunity for spending his or her strength and faculties in the labour of wealth production or the service of the people. In return for willing service, we in the name of the Republic, declare the right of every citizen to an adequate share of the produce of the nation's labour. | [Par 3] We affirm the duty of every man and woman to give allegiance and service to the Commonwealth, and declare it is the duty of the Nation to assure that every citizen shall have opportunity to spend his or her strength and faculties in the service of the people. In return for willing service, we, in the name of the Republic, declare the right of every citizen to an adequate share of the produce of the Nation's labour. |
| [Par 4] The Irish Republic shall always count wealth and prosperity by the measure of health and happiness of its citizens. It shall therefore be the first duty of the Government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to ensure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing or shelter, that all shall be provided with ample means and facilities requisite for the education and training of free citizens of a free nation. A condition precedent to such an education is to encourage by every reasonable means the most capable and sympathetic men and women to devote their talents to the education of the young. | [Par 4] It shall be the first duty of the Government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing, or shelter, but that all shall be provided with the means and facilities requisite for their proper education and training as Citizens of a Free and Gaelic Ireland. |

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*(Continued)*

| Johnson's draft | The official Programme |
|---|---|
| [Par 5] To promote the development of its resources, to increase the productivity of its soil, to exploit its mineral deposits, peat bogs and fisheries, its waterways and harbours – in the interests of and for the benefit of the Irish people – the nation, exercising its rights of sovereignty, shall deem it to be a duty to organise and direct into fruitful contact the labour of men with the land and raw materials and machinery and industry. Wherever the land, the mineral deposits and other forms of productive wealth are wrongfully used or withheld from use to the detriment of the Republic, there the nation shall resume possession without compensation. | [Par 5] The Irish Republic fully realises the necessity of abolishing the present odious, degrading and foreign Poor Law System, substituting therefor a sympathetic native scheme for the care of the Nation's aged and infirm, who shall not be regarded as a burden, but rather entitled to the Nation's gratitude and consideration. Likewise it shall be the duty of the Republic to take such measures as will safeguard the health of the people and ensure the physical as well as the moral well-being of the Nation. |
| [Par 6] In the sphere of overseas commerce the Republican Government, to safeguard the economic interests of the nation, shall itself undertake the organisation of the import and export of merchandise so as to prevent the shipment from Ireland of food and other necessaries until the wants of the Irish people are fully satisfied and the future provided for, and to obviate the waste of life and labour which competitive commerce involves, and the risk of destroying Irish productive undertakings. | [Par 6] It shall be our duty to promote the development of the Nation's resources, to increase the productivity of its soil, to exploit its mineral deposits, peat bogs, and fisheries, its waterways and harbours, in the interests and for the benefit of the Irish people. |

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*(Continued)*

| Johnson's draft | The official Programme |
|---|---|
| [Par 7] It shall be the purpose of the Government to encourage the organisation of the people into trade unions and co-operative societies, with a view to the control and administration of the industries by the workers engaged in the industries. It shall also devolve upon the National Government to seek the co-operation of the Government of other nations in determining a standard of social and industrial legislation, with a view to a general improvement in the conditions under which the working classes live and labour. | [Par 7] It shall be the duty of the Republic to adopt all measures necessary for the recreation and invigoration of our Industries, and to ensure their being developed on the most beneficial and progressive co-operative and industrial lines. With the adoption of an extensive Irish Consular Service, trade with foreign Nations shall be revived on terms of mutual advantage and goodwill, and while undertaking the organisation of the Nation's trade, import and export, it shall be the duty of the Republic to prevent the shipment from Ireland of food and other necessaries until the wants of the Irish people are fully satisfied and the future provided for. |
| [Par 8] Finally, the Republic will aim at the elimination of the class in society which lives upon the wealth produced by the workers of the nation but gives no useful service in return, and in the process of accomplishment will bring freedom to all who have hitherto been caught in the toils of economic servitude. | [Par 8] It shall also devolve upon the National Government to seek co-operation of the Governments of other countries in determining a standard of Social and Industrial Legislation with a view to a general and lasting improvement in the conditions under which the working classes live and labour. |