

# Election Briefing 2004

Election Date: Northern Ireland: June 10, 2004

Election Date: Republic of Ireland: June 11, 2004

## Values, Politics and Voting in Elections

- All political systems operate on the basis of values.
- A fundamental value of the Catholic Social Thought tradition is the dignity of the human person.
- From this value flows a range of rights and responsibilities for all people.
- When people vote on June 11, they should vote for candidates and parties who will use power guided by these values and rights.

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## European and local elections highlight the centrality of values

**W**e choose our political leaders through the electoral process in which we vote and express our preferences. The votes we cast are based on values. The choices made in elections reflect the values of those voting. Those elected have power to make decisions that affect many people.

In June Irish people, North and South, will vote to choose representatives in the European Parliament. In the South we will also vote in local government elections. It is crucial that we all take a moment to reflect on the values that underpin our choices when we vote.

A fundamental value of the Catholic Social Thought tradition is **the dignity of the human person**. Consequently, we need to recognize that

- The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy.
- All economic and political life should be judged by how they protect the life and dignity of the human person, support the family and promote the common good.
- A fundamental moral measure of the economic and political system is how it tackles poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

- All people have the right to life and to the basic necessities required to live life with dignity e.g. sufficient income, relevant education, appropriate accommodation, essential healthcare, safe environment, cultural respect and real participation.
- All people have responsibilities that accompany these basic rights.

When we vote in June these are the among the principal values and perspectives that should guide our choices. We should vote for candidates and parties who will use power guided by these values and these perspectives.

## It is important that people vote

**E**lections are very important in ensuring the democratic process is effective and renewed constantly. The second week of June this year will provide all voters with an opportunity to make their voices heard in both the local and European elections.

Very often people are critical of the democratic process maintaining that politicians and policy-makers tend to ignore the will of the general population. There may be evidence to support this from time to time.

It is also true however, that politicians pay close

attention to the wishes of voters. It is voters who elect and re-elect them. That is why it is important to vote.

**We urge every person to study the candidates and policies on offer and to cast their vote.**

## Moment of major change in the EU

Europe is changing dramatically. Recent months have seen the most intense period of change in the EU since its foundation in 1957. From May 1st, 2004 the EU has 25 member states, including the 10 new entrants, with a population of 450 million people. This means the Union's population has increased by 28 per cent while its average income has fallen by 18 per cent.

Many of the structures and procedures currently in place in the EU are being adjusted and a new draft constitution sets out a blueprint for change. Final decisions on the proposed Constitution are imminent. Both Ireland and the UK will hold a referendum in the coming year or two to decide whether or not a new treaty, incorporating a new European Constitution, is to be approved and implemented.

This is a special moment in the development of the European Union. It provides Ireland with major challenges and opportunities. What sort of future Europe do Irish people, North or South want? What contribution can we make to this momentous development? What priorities should guide us in making decisions on these issues? These are among the questions that all voters need to consider when they cast their votes in the European Parliament elections.

The parliamentarians elected will be in office for the next five years during which the EU will face many challenges both internally and externally. The following pages highlight five of the key issues to be addressed. In each case we highlight values, principles and criteria that should guide decision-makers' reflection, judgment, and action. They can also guide voters as they decide on who is to represent them in shaping the future EU.

## Ireland will have 16 seats in new EU Parliament

Ireland will have sixteen seats in the new European Parliament. This means a reduction of two due to the expansion of the EU to include 25 member States.

Three of these seats are in Northern Ireland, the remaining 13 are in four constituencies in the Republic.

The constituencies in the Republic have been re-organised. The main changes have been in the old Connacht/Ulster constituency which now includes Clare and is called North and West.

The old Munster constituency, minus Clare, is now called South and will have only three seats compared to its former four.

There has been a similar reduction in seats, from four to three, in the old Leinster constituency now called East.

The Dublin constituency maintains its four seats.

*Ireland will have sixteen seats in the new European Parliament—three in Northern Ireland and thirteen in the Republic.*

## Need to rebalance EU focus to ensure the European project has a social as well as an economic dimension

Many of the major issues confronting the leaders and peoples of Europe at this time are in the social sphere. The terms of the social contract are contested constantly. The rich grow richer while poverty and social exclusion are the lived experience of a substantial proportion of the Union's population. Equality of opportunity, not to mention equality of outcome, remains an ideal to be achieved in many spheres. Public services are inadequate. Social provision is in decline and, increasingly, not seen as a responsibility of the State. Government decisions and policies seem intent on strengthening these divisions while Government rhetoric claims to be achieving the opposite.

European development at this point requires that the social dimension be given greater priority and that the economic and social agendas be rebalanced. We identify four key initiatives we believe would make a substantial contribution to this much needed rebalancing. These four initiatives are: 1. Adopt a rights-based approach in addressing social, economic and cultural issues; 2. Recognise the elimination of poverty as an objective of EU; 3. Strengthening the Open Method of Co-ordination which is ineffective in ensuring the social area receives priority; and 4. Recognise the community and voluntary sector as a social partner in the European context.

Check the positions of the various candidates and political parties on these issues before deciding on how to cast your vote in the European Parliament Elections.

# European Election issues

## 1. Eradication of Poverty should be an objective of the European Constitution

### Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action

According to the Irish Government's National Anti-Poverty Strategy:

*People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living that is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalized from participating in activities that are considered the norm for other people in society.*

This is a description of poverty and social exclusion with which we wholeheartedly agree. In particular it recognises the importance of the dignity of the human person.

Despite having a number of programmes and initiatives aimed at tackling the reality of poverty and social exclusion, the EU has not given these issues the priority they require. There are 55 million people living in poverty in the EU-15 and millions more in the ten new member States.

The reality of the EU today is that the rich grow richer while poverty and social exclusion are the lived experience of a substantial proportion of the Union's population.

Equality of opportunity, not to mention equality of outcome, remains an ideal to be achieved in many spheres. Social provision is not adequate to meet the basic needs of many and, increasingly, is not seen as the responsibility of the State.

For the European Parliament it is important that this understanding of poverty and social exclusion guide actions in relation to the EU itself and in relation to the wider world.

The eradication of poverty in the EU should be made an objective of the new European Constitution and be supported by the European Parliament.

## 2. Sustainability

### Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action

In the modern world sustainability has a number of different dimensions i.e. the economic, the environmental and the social. An approach to economic development that is not sustainable in the long run is not a sensible option. Neither is an approach to policy that

would see the environment seriously damaged. Most often overlooked is the need to ensure that policies are socially sustainable over the years. Economic development may well produce a future that people are not happy with. A good example of this at present is

*All EU policies should be economically, environmentally and socially sustainable.*

the growing disillusionment among a great many people with the frenzied nature of modern living and the lack of balance this produces in their day to day lives. There is more to life than becoming better off—as more and more people recognise.

## 3. Environment

### Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action

Building a just society, in the Christian understanding of that term, includes the development of right relationships with the environment. Our environment is a

priceless asset. Its protection is of major importance not just to current times but also to the generations that will follow us. However, the environment is regularly taken for granted, it is often mistreated and excessively exploited. In this context we can see major problems in Ireland on issues such as waste disposal and recycling, greenhouse

gases and air pollution to name just a few. These are EU-wide issues that have implications for agriculture, water resources, forestry, sea-levels and eco-systems. In the EU context there is also a range of issues concerning genetic engineering and the patenting of seeds. All of these issues require urgent attention at EU level.

## 4. Developing a rights-based approach

### Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action

Economic growth does not provide any guarantee that poverty and social exclusion will be eliminated or even addressed in the EU. We have had substantial economic growth over the decades but poverty and social exclusion persist and are the lived experience of a large proportion of EU citizens.

The developments of a rights-based approach to social, economic and cultural issues within the EU is essential to secure progress for all people in the long term. Within international human rights

instruments there are divisions between different generations of rights. The first generation consists of civil and political rights. The second consists of social, economic and cultural (SEC) rights. The third generation concerns issues such as ethical globalisation and is seen in the growing emphasis on the right to an environment free of pollution.

SEC rights recognised by the EU should include the rights

- sufficient income to live life with dignity,
- meaningful work,
- appropriate accommodation,

*Economic growth does not eliminate poverty and social exclusion. A rights-based approach is essential for these to be addressed.*

- relevant education,
- essential healthcare,
- cultural respect and
- real participation.

Developing a rights-based approach in these areas should be a priority of the EU Parliament.

## 5. Relationship with the Developing World

### Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action

The global economy has moral dimensions and human consequences. Decisions on investment, trade, aid and development should protect human life and promote human rights, especially for those most in need wherever they might live on this globe.

The European Parliament is having increasing influence on EU economic policies which directly and adversely impact on populations in Africa and other least developed countries. Current issues of concern requiring action by the European Parliament include:

- Proposals to privatize public water services in Africa;
- Legalisation of bio-piracy and

undermining of farmers rights in Africa and beyond;

- Failure to priorities financing of national poverty reduction strategies over the financing of debt service.
- The AIDS pandemic.

The European Parliament can play a major role in ensuring these and related issues are addressed.

## What kind of Europe do you want to see emerge?

The European Parliament elections provide an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the kind of Europe we would like to see emerge. Too often decisions in the Union are developed on the basis of what is good for economic growth or for the progressing of priorities that concern an economic and social elite.

As a result, there are more than 55 million people in the EU of 15 member States at risk of poverty and millions more in the ten countries that joined the Union on May 1.

It also explains why issues ranging from sustainability and the environment to the Union's relation-

ships with the developing world receive so little attention compared to the issues of concern to those with resources and/or power.

*What kind of Europe do you want to see emerge?* This is the voter's opportunity to have a say in the shaping of a new Europe.

## Major changes in Local Government

**M**uch lip-service is given to supporting people's right to participate in shaping the decisions that impact on them. There have been some developments long these lines at various levels in recent years. At local government level the development of strategic Policy Committees and County/City Development Boards are moves in this direction.

Real participation by all is essential if society is to develop and, in practice, maintain principles guaranteeing human dignity, satisfaction of basic needs, respect for others as equals, etc. Modern means of communications and information make it relatively easy to involve people in dialogue and decision making. It should be easy to do this in the context of local democracy and local government. It is a question of political will: will the groups who have the power share it with others?

Local government in Ireland has had little power over the years. There has been a strong resistance in some quarters to devolving power to a local or regional level. The development of new structures at local government level in recent years, however, provides a basis for real decentralisation.

The development of local democracy seems to be a priority of recent Governments. While these developments have a long way to go before they show a real willingness to involve more people in local decision-making, they are steps in the right direction and should be supported. When voting in the forthcoming local elections it is crucial that people reflect on the kind of local government they want in the years ahead. Do they want a more participative local democracy? Do they want more decisions made locally? People should cast their votes based on their answers to these questions.

## Dev. Strategies add new dimension

**E**ach County Development Board has, during the term of office of the outgoing Council, produced a County/City Development Strategy to cover the period to 2012. Work is ongoing on developing the actions to ensure this strategy is implemented across a wide range of activities.

*County Development Boards will have growing responsibility for a wider range of activities in local authority areas in the years ahead.*

The Community and Voluntary Sector representatives on these Boards were chosen by the Community Forum in the local authority.

Each of the Boards has a Social Inclusion Measures Committee which focuses on the various initiatives in the social inclusion area that are being developed within the Local Authority area. A measure of the importance of these Committees is the fact that they have been given responsibility for reviewing all proposals being made by groups or organisations within the local authority area before these are forwarded for funding.

## New structures provide new opportunities for all those interested in local development

**D**uring the past term of office of the local authorities going out of office at this time there has been a number of developments that transformed the way local government works and the ways in which it is expected to involve a wide range of local interests in its deliberations and decision-making.

A number of **Strategic Policy Committees** (SPCs) have been established in every local authority. While the elected councilors maintain a majority on these SPCs a third of each of them is made up of outside interests which vary, depending on the issues being addressed by the particular SPC. The Community and Voluntary Sector has representatives on these Committees. **Community Forums** have been established in each local authority as well. These draw together all interested groups in the Community and Voluntary Sector. They provide a new opportunity to the sector to ensure its voice is heard as well as ensuring that the sector is fully informed on developments in a comprehensive and timely manner.

**County Development Boards** have also been established in all local authorities. These draw together representatives of the elected County or City Council, local development agencies, national bodies and social partners.

These structures provide new opportunities for all those interested in local development to ensure their voice is heard and to participate in shaping the decisions that affect them. These opportunities should be taken.

# Local Election Issues

## 1. Housing and Accommodation

### Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action

Everybody has the right to appropriate accommodation. Ireland's housing policy, however, is in some disarray as waiting lists get longer while a quarter of all new houses built in 2003 were second (i.e. holiday) homes. Currently there are 130,000 people in more than 48,000 households on waiting lists for social housing.

At the rate Government is addressing this problem it will take thirty years to eliminate the housing waiting list. The scale of this response is totally inadequate

given the size of the problem currently being faced by many of Ireland's most vulnerable people and given the resources that are available but not being used to address this problem.

Local authorities are responsible for providing sufficient social accommodation for those who do not have the resources to purchase or rent on the private market. They are also responsible for the accommodation of groups with specific needs such as homeless people, Travellers and people with disabilities.

Recent developments suggest that local authorities may be trying to renege on their responsibilities in

this area. It is important for voters to be aware of local accommodation needs and whether or not the plans developed by the local authority are of sufficient scale to address the housing challenge.

It remains a national shame that Ireland, in spite of its prosperity, refuses to provide the resources required to ensure that every person in the country has appropriate accommodation.

In terms of putting human dignity at the core of values that guide public policy it is essential that those elected to local authorities in the elections of June 2004 be committed to addressing these issues on an appropriate scale.

## 2. Public Transport

### Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action

Transport remains a major problem in many areas. Bottlenecks throughout the country are adding to the difficulty and cost experienced by people in conducting their lives. Increasing numbers of cars are also adding to problems of environmental destruction.

A new transport policy would seek to provide easy access, affordable and high-quality public transport across the whole country.

The failure to give adequate resources to some of the national rail services raises serious questions about govern-

*Transport policy should seek to provide easy access, affordable and high-quality public transport across the whole country.*

ment commitment to the environment and to rural and peripheral areas. Local authorities play a key role in the development of public transport. Consequently, it is essential that the newly elected Councils be prepared to prioritise this issue.

## 3. Local Environment

### Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action

Our environment is a priceless asset. It is crucial that our relationship with the environment respects it and ensures that a useful balance is maintained.

Where local authorities are concerned there are a number of areas that require attention. Among these are the condition of the local environment and the issue of waste management. The condition of parks, green areas, footpaths, open spaces and the like can have a huge impact on the living conditions of people. Too often

the local authority does not take sufficient responsibility on this issue. Likewise, waste management is becoming a major local issue whether it concerns waste disposal or waste charges. Addressing these issues costs money and requires a mature exercise of responsibility. Both provide major challenges to newly elected local authorities.

## 4. Poverty and Social Exclusion

### **Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action**

The sustained high rates of poverty and income inequality in Ireland are most visible at the local level. Tackling these issues is a multifaceted task requiring action on many fronts ranging from healthcare to education, from accommodation to employment.

However, the most important requirement in tackling poverty is the provision of sufficient income to people to enable them to live life with dignity.

All of these issues are addressed,

in one way or another, by local authorities. All the County/City Development Strategies have identified some aspects of poverty and social exclusion for special consideration and action. Social Inclusion Committees (SIMs) have been established at County Development Board level to address these issues. All of which is of value.

However, it is essential that these issues be given priority in the years immediately ahead as we find ourselves in this new situation of having the resources to eliminate poverty and social exclusion.

Newly elected Councils should be prepared to prioritise strategies

*The sustained high rates of poverty and income inequality in Ireland are most visible at a local level*

and initiatives aimed at eliminating poverty and social exclusion.

Such prioritization should include initiatives to link with other County and City Councils to ensure Government at national level provides sufficient resources to address these issues adequately, which is not being done at present.

## 5. Resourcing Community Activity

### **Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action**

Resourcing community activity concerns both services being provided in local areas and support being provided for community and voluntary organisations.

For almost a decade organisations in the Community and Voluntary

Sector have funded the delivery of services in local areas through the Community Employment (CE) scheme. As the overall number of places on CE programmes was reduced from 40,000 to 20,000 in recent years no provision has been made by Government to ensure services such as meals-on-wheels would be resourced. This continues to cause serious hardship to a great many people.

Community Forums have been established in all local authority areas in recent years. They play a major part in ensuring that the voices, concerns and experience of local people are brought to bear on local decision-making processes.

Local authorities should ensure sufficient resources are made available to support community and voluntary activity.

## Promotion of human dignity should be top priority

### **Values.. Principles.. Criteria.. to guide reflection, judgment, action**

Local authorities are very important. They form a crucial component of any real effort to decentralize and deliver a more participative democracy at local level. Many

of society's problems and challenges are most visible at local level.

We have highlighted five of these in this Election Briefing. People will be well aware of many others from their own experience.

It is crucial that newly elected

Councils should be aware of these issues and be prepared to give them priority in the years immediately ahead. This is essential if human dignity is to be the core guiding value of our society into the future.

Learn what the candidates and parties stand for and vote accordingly on June 11th.

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**Our Triple Bottom Line**

- ◇ **Social Equity**
- ◇ **Sustainability**
- ◇ **Spirituality that nurtures equity and sustainability**



*Election Briefing 2004 is a briefing document issued by the CORI Justice Office. It continues a tradition of briefing documents issued by the Justice Commission in advance of all elections, local, national and European, in Ireland over the past two decades.*

*The Justice Commission's core areas of work are:*

- *Public policy*
- *Enabling and Empowering*
- *Spirituality*
- *Advocacy and Communication.*
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*CORI Justice Commission has been a recognised social partner within the Community and Voluntary Sector pillar of social partners, since 1996.*

*Comments, observations and suggestions on this briefing document and/or on the Commission's work are always welcome.*

## Referendum on citizenship in the Republic of Ireland will also be held on June 11

**A** referendum to change the Constitution provision governing citizenship will also be voted on in the Republic of Ireland on June 11 (cf. text of the proposed amendment in box).

Those in favour of this referendum being passed claim that:

- It is a technical change to the law which is necessary to close an unforeseen loophole in the Constitution which has been exploited in recent times by unscrupulous 'citizenship tourists'.
- No other EU country has the same laws as Ireland and we need to adjust to the situation in the rest of the EU.
- Our laws make Ireland an attractive destination for people seeking EU citizenship which puts our services under pressure.

Those who argue against this referendum claim that:

- It appears to reverse the basis of acquiring Irish citizenship which has existed since 1921. This basis is the same as applies in the USA, Canada, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Brazil and at least 36 other countries.
- This basis, now to be changed, is the traditional republican approach to citizenship, which treats all children equal at birth and does not dictate their status by who their parents are.
- We require a comprehensive debate on this issue. More time is need to have that debate.

We urge all voters to consider the arguments carefully before voting on June 11th.

### **Proposed new wording for the Irish Constitution**

1. *Notwithstanding any other provision of this Constitution, a person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and its seas, who does not have, at the time of his or her birth, at least one parent who is an Irish citizen or entitled to be an Irish citizen is not entitled to Irish citizenship or nationality, unless otherwise provided for by law.*
2. *This section shall not apply to persons born before the date of the enactment of this section.*