

The Progressive Unionist Party does not oppose the total integration lobby, though no-one has, as yet, spelled out the totality of it. “. . . to be governed and have laws as in the rest of the United Kingdom”, is an ambiguous definition. One example of different U.K. systems is glaringly apparent in the legal system and its differences throughout England, Scotland and Wales. The different legal procedures in Scottish Law serve to highlight this very point.

The recent argument that “. . . integration is not possible because it is not agreed within the Anglo-Irish Agreement . . .” is far too serious to laugh at. This very Agreement has been introduced by a British Parliament over a region that it has ruled over since 1972. A British Parliament has introduced an Accord in order to change what it has itself been doing. The British Parliament has introduced a foreign government into a joint-authority pact over one of its own regions.

The major British political parties have thwarted legitimate demands that they should organise here in Northern Ireland and give people in this region a chance to vote for legitimate United Kingdom parties and their respective policies. It is totally wrong that our citizens should be disenfranchised in this way. It is a complete denial of basic British rights. It may even contravene European Laws.

The pursuit of integration with our colleagues in the rest of the United Kingdom is seen as a democratic and legitimate aspiration to pursue, with or without the achievement of a devolved administration in this region. As in Scotland and Wales, devolution can be discussed and pursued within the integrated system and there is no valid reason why this should not apply here in Northern Ireland. Bad laws and double standards must be put aside. Ulster people should be allowed to open local offices for the Conservative, Labour and other political parties. They should be allowed to put forward candidates in the name of those parties. It is disgraceful that British political parties have abdicated and left this region open to fascist and communist organisations.

The vast majority of the Ulster people wish to remain part of the United Kingdom. After almost twenty years of violence and serious disorder nothing has changed that opinion and a simple referendum would confirm it. Neither is there any evidence of movement towards a unilateral declaration of independence — a legitimate aspiration — but one that commands little support and is too ludicrous to contemplate.

The Progressive Unionist Party will continue to seek a solution to the problems that beset this region. There must be a commitment by all, to end sectarian conflict and pursue a better life for all the people.

Our own devolution plans, drawn up long before the advent of the Anglo-Irish Agreement remain as Party policy, to be implemented only after wide discussion and general consent. (See Appendix II).

APPENDIX II

Devolution within the United Kingdom — a genuine way forward

Introduction

The British Parliament has agreed and continues to maintain that there can be no advancement in the area of devolving powers to a Northern Ireland structure without ‘widespread Acceptance’ throughout the community in Northern Ireland. It is also important to point out that Parliament has also decreed that this region is and will remain part of the United Kingdom so long as our people wish to remain within that constitutional position.

It is clear therefore that with a sizeable section of the community insisting that the philosophy of 'power-sharing' must be the outlet for 'widespread acceptance' and with an even greater number of people insisting that 'power-sharing' is totally unacceptable . . . then the chances of political stability on those Parliamentary terms within the present Assembly is most unlikely.

Clearly there will have to be radical change

This document puts forward the policy of the Progressive Unionist Party as a genuine attempt to provide acceptable political structures that would enable representatives of all the community to contribute in a responsible way towards the enhancing of wider local government and all the inherent political stability that it offers.

Of course there are ruthless and personally ambitious men who do not hold the interests of the community as a whole at heart. They will have to search their consciences NOW and decide whether they would consider these proposals or reject them and perpetuate by words or deeds unending violence.

The re-structuring of the Northern Ireland Assembly into a broader local government

It is a fact that if Local Government functions are restricted to limited discussions and not a great deal more, then much valuable time will inevitably be spent on issues totally outside the remit of local government institutions.

However, the Progressive Unionist Party recognises that irrespective of the recurring 'mad-house' atmosphere created within these local institutions, it must be said that they provide the one area of debate wherein all parties are prepared to play a part. Obviously this area must be developed and expanded throughout the community to enable elected representatives to pursue a wider range of local and Regional government issues in a Greater Regional Council.

We have long advocated that the Northern Ireland Assembly should be broadened both in representation and areas for debate and resolution. This would mean a total restructuring of the present Assembly.

The re-structured Assembly should take the form of a much broader tier of local government embracing wider areas such as Agriculture; Tourism; Fisheries; Energy, Environment, etc. Plainly the more contentious issues of Housing, Education and Security would not be included until there was 'wide acceptance' within the new structure.

Basically we are proposing a wider local government structure to debate issues pertinent to this region. The main objective must be to obtain agreement; from all political parties if possible, on movement towards more general acceptability of sharing responsibility within a broadened structure of local government.

Introducing a Committee System of regional government

In 1978 we issued proposals for the introduction of a system of devolved regional government that we believed would satisfy all legitimate aspirations that were beneficial to the people of Northern Ireland. Our intention was that the formation of a democratic devolved administration could be of great value in the area of covering regional issues not normally covered by local government administrations.

We said at that time that we believed that the majority of people in Northern Ireland wish to see the emergence of a new political order. The old political system is no longer relevant to the needs of a progressive region of the United Kingdom in the 1980's.

Proposed structure of a regional government

The Northern Ireland Electorate would elect by proportional representation 153 persons to serve in an upper tier of regional government. There should be a Leader of the administration elected in much the same way as the election of the Lord Mayor of Belfast to quote but one example. There should be a deputy Leader elected who must represent a minority party or group within the administration. There should be a Speaker appointed.

The remaining 150 members of the administration would now form committees to deal with some devolved areas. There could be ten committees of fifteen persons or fifteen committees of ten persons elected. In order to encourage all minority parties and groups to participate it is suggested that the absence of a cabinet style government could provide for a Central Committee which could co-opt non-elected representatives from minority political parties (without voting rights).

The Central Committee

There should be a Central Committee consisting of the Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of all the Committees. This Central Committee should be chaired by the Leader of any Constitutional minority party, with the usual committee voting rights.

All business which has completed its House stages would be laid before the Central Committee at least an established and agreed number of days before a final reading. The Central Committee will have the power to refer business back to the House or to refer the business to the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords if the Central Committee considered that it was discriminatory or unconstitutional, or they may delay for an agreed defined period any resolutions other than money bills or emergency measures.

(The precise details of these new and sweeping powers and the mechanics of their operation will require careful all-party consideration).

A Central Committee would focus the opinions of political parties both large and small and would perform a most important role in discussing and assessing the likely success or failure of any matters being put before the full Administration. **However, at the end of the day . . . all issues would have to be put before the full assembly for approval.** (Committee numbers are open for discussion).

The principle of proportionality in deciding Chairmanship positions

The distribution of chairmanship positions should be done through the 'usual channels' with the principle of proportionality among the Constitutional parties in mind.

Committee Powers

Each Committee should be empowered, subject to suitable safeguards, to scrutinise the work of its Department by sending for persons including Northern Ireland Officials or Ministers and examining papers. They should also be able to conduct public hearings.

Committees must be involved in extended local government matters by conducting an examination of resolutions or any other business prior to a second reading in addition to handling the usual committee stages of any business. They should also have a reasonable allocation of House time for the debate of their own proposals and any other matters that a Committee may wish to bring before the House.

Conclusion

These legitimate constructive policies and proposals are presented by the Progressive Unionist Party in an attempt to draw support from all political parties and groups who genuinely desire an end to the present round of political violence in Northern Ireland. They are proposals that could be used by any political party that purports to represent the interests of the common people whatever their race or religion.

We have concentrated on the **agreed** sharing of responsibility rather than the sharing of Power. Power should not be available to any political structure designed to meet the needs of a region of the United Kingdom.

The task of everyone in this region is to bring a halt to the violence and a determination to ensure that power-politics is not allowed ever again to breed communal violence.