

PROGRESSIVE UNIONIST PARTY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

PRESENTATION TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

THE RT. HON. JAMES PRIOR, M.P.

TUESDAY, 6TH OCTOBER, 1981.

"MOVEMENT TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND"

BACKGROUND - STATEMENT OF AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Our presentation of a Democratic Administration involves no change in our previous submission. We make no apologies for taking a firm stand, for it is a democratic and fair submission directed at achieving a system that would take into account all those issues that affect the daily lives of all Northern Ireland Citizens. There is therefore, no compromise on what is fair and reasonable.

The attached submission was presented to Mr. Atkins in his capacity as Secretary of State. His Administration absorbed our ideas into Option 2 of the Government's Working Papers on Devolution.

Having established our case and having already seen it embodied by the Government in a Possible Political formula, we make our submission again to your Administration with an emphasis upon our commitment and our added reasons why previous attempts at forming a Local Administration failed.

FAILURE WITHOUT THE MINORITIES PARTIES

All negotiations at previous Constitutional Conference Level have always followed a familiar yet unfruitful pattern. The Progressive Unionist Party, supported by many eminent national personalities and observers and virtually all the minority parties and groups made representation to the previous Constitutional Conference on the grounds that the combined weight of minority parties at that time could have had a considerable influence over the conference decisions, and at the same time directly inject new ideas.

Equally important is the case made that the broader the Conference the more it would reflect a wider public opinion. Unfortunately previous administrations fell into the old trap of conferring with what are now loosely termed the 'warring factions' under the guise of negotiations with the 'Major Parties'. That situation has now changed with the virtual demise of the Alliance Party now reduced to representation by a handful of City Councillors forming a new minority party. In short - the Conference needed and indeed Northern Ireland needed better men and women and far better ideas than those available through the limited vision of the 'major parties'. Those parties with 'horns locked in combat' and 'policies wedged in tramlines' were not and are probably still not capable of finding a broad consensus of opinion for Democratic Devolution. We would therefore suggest that any new constitutional talks should involve a conference table with all established political parties present. This would be one subject for early discussion and Resolution.

THE DEMOCRATIC WAY FORWARD

Much has been said about a democratic structure for a Devolved Administration. New phrases have been introduced. Parties controlling the majority viewpoint on Constitutional matters have been labelled as 'intransigent'. They have been wrongfully accused of 'obstinacy', 'pursuing ascendancy', 'holding a veto' and what is far worse, they have been accused of 'wrecking progress during Constitutional talks'.

It is essential that Her Majesty's Government is clearly seen to be pursuing a democratic course. Indeed, Parliament has decreed that the people of Northern Ireland should shape their own constitutional destiny. That is precisely what they are trying to do, as did the people of Gibraltar when faced with political constitutional pressures from Spain.

In the 1920's the Republican Secessionists accepted a 26 county withdrawal from the rest of the United Kingdom, unfortunately they were unable to accept for very long and to this day they have insisted that the people of Northern Ireland join them. That is not only unacceptable but it is also unreasonable for the people of Northern Ireland to give up their nationality. Equally we would not expect the Swiss to become French. It is as simple as that and changes in the Irish Constitution and political overtures from Republican and Nationalist orientated political parties will not alter that thinking. There is nothing bigotted or sectarian in our stance it is purely a recognition of the Northern Mandate endorsed by the British Parliament and Internationally recognised.

The failure of all Republican and Nationalist Parties to change the Constitutional structure of the United Kingdom has led to the present campaign of the Provisional Irish Republican Army, they have recognised the stance of the Northern Majority on the constitution and have decided to attempt to change the structure of the United Kingdom by force of arms. The might of the Axis forces of Europe were unable to do that. A fitting reminder of the price paid as a direct result of similar undemocratic politics and pursuits.

Successive British Administrations in Northern Ireland have failed to appreciate the foregoing points and have actually retreated from democratic principles in the face of undemocratic political and military pressures. British Government Policy must now change.

The Progressive Unionist Party is a minority Party and has not sought to build an undemocratic structure, neither have we any intention of doing so. Our political ideologies are aimed at securing a Democratic Devolved Administration serving the needs of all the people of Northern Ireland and there is no better approach than majority consent.

The British Government and Parliament must therefore make it clear that no minority party will again effectively veto the Democratic Constitutional wishes of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. This must be a declared basis for any fresh political initiative.

ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION WITH A EUROPEAN MEMBER STATE

The Progressive Unionist Party recognises the presence of a European member State as a neighbouring country with some common interests. There are important issues to be discussed affecting Tourism, Agriculture, Fisheries, Energy, etc.

As Progressives we are also realists and recognise the need for an acceptable Institution to discuss problems in all these areas and if possible resolve them. We should be prepared to contribute our ideas to such an acceptable Institution that could draw membership from the two Administrations North and South. The emphasis is upon acceptability and responsibility and here the firm removal of any Constitutional discussions from such an Institution could lead to acceptability. But such an Institution is based upon the initial formation of a Devolved Administration.

THE PRESENT CONFLICT

There is the recurring problem of the present violent conflict. There does not appear to be any real effort to end it. Our emphasis is upon the word effort and is directed in the main at the Provisional I.R.A. and the British Government. Two factors are emerging. The Provisionals cannot win and attain their main objective. The British Government can never achieve a 100 per cent military defeat of the Provisional I.R.A. and their support groups. After thirteen years they are in a stalemate situation.

No political party has yet put forward a possible formula to attain a declared ceasefire period wherein reasonable and responsible negotiations can begin. The Progressive Unionist Party believes that the following four-point plan should be accepted by all parties to the Conflict, namely all Paramilitary movements:-

1. There should be a declared ceasefire of all Paramilitary organisations.
2. Troops should be withdrawn to barracks.
3. The R.U.C. should be accepted as a police service for all people in all areas.
4. Subject to completion of points 1 - 3 the British Government should commence an all party conference of political parties established before 6th October, 1981.

All four points being subjected to an overall time scale.

SUMMARY

Our submission is generally intended to pave the way towards a Democratic Administration working for all the Community and at the same time giving military organisations the opportunity to pursue their aims through political persuasion and not through force of arms.

After thirteen years of violence the Constitutional position of Northern Ireland still remains with the majority by consent and the 1980's should be years in which the community moves forward instead of continuing the sterile gun-politics that stifle progressive political and economic thinking. We are prepared to play our part. Now it is firmly up to others, including the British Government.