

# **A New Deal for Northern Ireland**

**Proposals for the future  
of Northern Ireland**



**Policy Paper 4**

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# A New Deal for Northern Ireland

Liberal Democrats recognise the depths of belief and loyalty, fear and prejudice which fuel the crisis in Northern Ireland from generation to generation. Our commitment to the principles of liberal democracy - individual empowerment, upholding human rights and promoting equal opportunities for all - enables us to address the problems of Northern Ireland with both radicalism and sensitivity. Our approach is four-pronged:

- *Promotion of social and economic justice and progress* for all the people of Northern Ireland.†
- *Recognition of the varied traditions in Northern Ireland*, including in particular those of both unionists and nationalists, *and an acceptance that they are legitimate.*
- A belief that the evolving arrangements for governing Northern Ireland, and its future constitutional status, should be acceptable to all sections of the community in Northern Ireland.
- *Rejection of violence* as a means to political ends in Northern Ireland.

*The particular responsibility of the UK Government is to play a facilitating role in Northern Ireland, cajoling the constitutional parties to participate constructively in the talks process, but neutral as to its outcome, so long as it accords with the principles of liberal democracy. Indeed, it would be foolish to prescribe a detailed blueprint for a full and final settlement, as the first requirement for a successful settlement is that it has the support of all sections of the Northern Ireland community. This means finding a form of government which is, in the first instance, acceptable to the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP and Alliance who together represent 70% of the people of Northern Ireland. If the support of others can be added then that would be a definite advantage, but the failure to do so should not be an insurmountable block to progress. Negotiations should not be entered into with any groupings which will not fully accept the constitutional process.*

On the basis of past political negotiations in Northern Ireland and of the widely perceived aspirations and attitudes of all the people of Northern Ireland, the following elements should make up part, if not the whole, of a constitutional settlement:

- *A power-sharing executive answerable to an assembly of representatives elected by a fair voting system.*
- *An Irish dimension*, based on cross border agencies and some ‘guarantor’ status for the Republic.
- *A legally enforceable package to guarantee civil liberties and social and political justice.*

- *A commitment to hold referenda from time to time* to determine whether the majority of the people of Northern Ireland wish to remain in the UK.

We acknowledge the indication given by the Republic that it would be willing to put forward amendments to Articles 2 and 3 of its Constitution, as part of an overall settlement. We believe that there are concrete advantages for both North and South in establishing ‘island-wide’ agencies, in particular in areas such as the economy, infrastructure, European funds, the environment, transport and tourism. Liberal Democrats favour practical cross-border cooperation between Dublin and Belfast, rather than cross-border government.

Given Northern Ireland’s past history and continuing insecurities, a constitutional guarantee of individual civil liberties is essential. The key elements of such a package are:

- The introduction of a *fair voting system for all elections in Northern Ireland*.
- *The incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights in UK law*, as the first step to the establishment of a UK Bill of Rights.
- *Reform of the justice system* and repeal of the broadcasting restrictions.

We believe that peace and reconciliation is key to the recreation of a more diverse and broadly-based ‘civic society’ in Northern Ireland. We would encourage efforts to build bridges of common interest across community divides. We welcome the role played by voluntary and women’s organisations and integrated education programmes to this end.

Terrorism in Northern Ireland is the most horrifying aspect of the political problems of the Province. The object of Liberal Democrat security policy is to increase the trust of the broad mass of the population in the justice system and the security forces, and remove the grievances off which the terrorists feed. We would seek to do this by:

- *Making exclusion orders and detention without trial subject to review by a judge*.
- *Introducing video-taping of police interviews* for serious offences, and custody time limits for all persons on remand.
- *Gathering anti-terrorist intelligence in a more coordinated and systematic way*.

*Social and economic justice, respect for individual human rights and civil liberties, and recognition of the aspirations of both unionists and nationalists.* These are the core ingredients of the Liberal Democrat approach to Northern Ireland.

# ***The Liberal Democrat Approach to Northern Ireland***

**1.0.1 The roots of ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland go far deeper than the violence of the last twenty years. It is necessary to go back to the seventeenth century and before to appreciate the strong sectarian loyalties and the accumulation of grievances that created the depth of feeling which exploded in the 1970s, and gives rise to the mistrust and violence of the 1990s. Both unionists and nationalists have their own interpretations of history. At the extreme, violence and bloodshed are justified by reference to the perceived injustices of the past.**

1.0.2 Liberal Democrats do not believe that such violence can be justified. We do, however, recognise that it is necessary to understand the depth of belief and loyalty, fear and prejudice which fuels the crisis from generation to generation (see *Appendix One: Background History*).

1.0.3 In terms of British politics, both Labour and the Conservatives are always going to struggle to hold the confidence of *all* the people of Northern Ireland. Labour supports the policy of Irish unity, albeit by consent, while the Conservatives are the historical allies and partners of the unionists. Liberal Democrats, together with our Northern Ireland sister party, the non-sectarian Alliance Party, seek to lend rationality and impartiality to the debate on the future of Northern Ireland.

1.0.4 If we are to do this, however, we must start from where we are, not where we would like to be. We have to recognise what is, and what is not, realistically achievable. The Opsahl Commission (*Citizen’s Inquiry*; 1993), which received over 550 submissions from organisations and individuals in

Northern Ireland, summarised the reality of the situation in this way:

- Northern Ireland is not just like any other part of the United Kingdom.
- The communities of Northern Ireland will not agree to independence.
- The Republic will not unilaterally renounce the aim of Irish unity.
- Irish unity is not a realistic prospect in the foreseeable future.
- Majority rule in Northern Ireland is not currently a viable proposition. The nationalist community has no obligation to agree to it and has the critical mass to prevent its imposition.
- The unionist community will not accept an administration for Northern Ireland that gives an executive role to anyone outside the United Kingdom.

## **1.1 The Liberal Democrat Approach**

1.1.1 The very nature of our party establishes a framework within which we are able to develop our approach to Northern Ireland. Liberal Democrats start from the value of each individual in society, their power and potential, their rights and responsibilities. It follows that our notion of democracy goes deeper than the imposed will of the majority, to embrace both the inviolability of the individual person and the protection of minorities on the one hand, and the full opportunity for all to participate in decision-making and public life,

within an active and mutually caring society, on the other.

1.1.2 Throughout this paper, we seek to apply this liberal democratic approach to tackling the problems of Northern Ireland through:

- Our commitment to *democracy and decentralisation*, giving individuals and local communities a real say in the decisions which affect their lives.
- Our commitment to uphold *human rights*, underpinned by a written constitution and a Bill of Rights.
- Our *opposition to discrimination* and commitment to equal opportunities for all.

1.1.3 Our goal is the creation, step by step, of a liberal, democratic, pluralist and non-sectarian society. *Given the problems in Northern Ireland, we believe that this goal can only be achieved there by a departure from the Westminster model of democracy.*

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***he UK Government should cajole the constitutional parties to participate constructively in talks, but remain neutral as to their outcome.***

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1.1.4 *The particular responsibility of the UK Government is to play a facilitating role in Northern Ireland, cajoling the constitutional parties to participate constructively in the talks process, but neutral as to its outcome, so long as it accords with the principles of liberal democracy.* It is for the people of Northern Ireland to decide the future of Northern Ireland. Liberal Democrats therefore support the statement in 1993 Joint Declaration that Britain has “*no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern*

*Ireland.*” Britain’s role should be more like that of an honest broker, enabling the emergence of a society with a culture and a constitution of shared power and inter-communal tolerance.

## **1.2 Four Fundamental Principles**

1.2.1 These core beliefs, coupled with our independence from sectarian interests, enables us to address the problems of Northern Ireland with both radicalism and sensitivity. Our approach is four-pronged:

- *The promotion of social and economic justice and progress for all the people of Northern Ireland.*
- *Recognition of the varied traditions in Northern Ireland, including in particular those of both the unionists and nationalists, and an acceptance that they are legitimate.*
- *A belief that the evolving arrangements for governing Northern Ireland, and its future constitutional status, should be acceptable to all sections of the community in Northern Ireland.*
- *Rejection of violence as a means to political ends in Northern Ireland.*

## **1.3 Promoting Social and Economic Justice**

1.3.1 While the root causes of the problems of Northern Ireland lie buried deep in history, the intensity of both unionist and nationalist grievances can, in many cases, be directly linked to the social imbalance between the Catholic and Protestant communities over the past fifty years. The systematic discrimination perpetrated by the old Stormont regime, in particular, significantly contributed to the disillusionment felt by many Catholics.

1.3.2 The problems of inequality have been compounded by the poor performance of the Northern Ireland economy. In part, this is a direct result of terrorist activities, but other factors have also contributed to levels of unemployment and poverty in the Province well above the UK average. In turn, economic failure has contributed to disenchantment and despair in some quarters - a mood off which the terrorists are able to feed.

1.3.3 *Without social and economic progress, Liberal Democrats believe lasting political progress is impossible. We believe that social and economic progress are essential to underpin any political settlement. We therefore welcome the actions that the Government has taken over the last ten years to prevent discrimination, for example, by establishing the Fair Employment Commission. Liberal Democrats would continue to support and encourage measures to address inequality and promote economic progress across all sections of community; in other words to rebuild Northern Ireland's 'civic society'. Specific proposals are set out in Chapters Four and Five of this paper.*

## **1.4 Recognition of the Unionist and Nationalist Traditions**

1.4.1 Liberal Democrats view all the varied traditions in Northern Ireland as 'legitimate', including both the unionist and nationalist traditions. What this means is:

- The ultimate *future of Northern Ireland is a matter for the people of Northern Ireland.*
- *Britain should not seek to persuade* either unionists or nationalists to give up their aspirations or cultural identity.
- Whatever the political settlement in Northern Ireland, it must have *regard for the human and citizenship rights of all sections of the community there.*

*Our objective is to address the insecurities of both unionists and nationalists which have so often undermined political progress in the past.*

1.4.2 Taken in their purest forms unionism and nationalism are not just mutually exclusive; they are directly contradictory. The unionist tradition is rooted in the aspiration to remain part of the United Kingdom. The nationalist tradition is not only based on the wish to be part of a united Ireland, but rejects the validity of Northern Ireland as a political unit. Only the sort of obscure formulation which characterises the Anglo-Irish Agreement (and implies different meanings for different people) enables this contradiction to be circumnavigated. *But a lasting peace cannot be founded on 'nods and winks'. There is no 'solution' that will satisfy everyone from all sections of the community.*

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***Success depends upon recognition that there is more that unites the people of Northern Ireland than should divide them.***

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1.4.3 Fortunately, the unionist and nationalist traditions are neither all-inclusive, nor homogeneous. The *Social Attitudes* surveys (1989-1991) show that a little under half of the Catholic population identifies themselves as nationalist, while only a little over half favours a long term policy of Irish unity. A further 8% of the population is neither Catholic or Protestant. The objective of a settlement - to satisfy at least a substantial majority of the people of both traditions (see section 1.5) - is not impossible. *Success will depend upon a recognition that there is more that unites the people of Northern Ireland by way of mutual interest than divides them.*

1.4.4 *Liberal Democrats attach the utmost importance to encouraging community-based and cross-community activities, be they social, cultural or political.* Bringing people together to address practical problems is every bit as important as grand political ‘settlements’. Thus we would encourage the provision of both political and financial support to non-sectarian voluntary organisations, women’s organisations, trade unions, and others that work for common goals across community divides (see Chapter Four).

1.4.5 It seems inevitable that cross-border cooperation and trade will increase over the next few years, not as a response to a specific political agenda, but because, in the single European market cooperation will become an economic imperative. Liberal Democrats welcome increased cooperation and would encourage the development of this trend, not only on the island of Ireland, but throughout the European Union and beyond. The emphasis that the Union quite rightly places on the regions of Europe, rather than its sovereign states increases the scope for a European role in Northern Ireland. Europe alone cannot solve the problems of Northern Ireland, but it is a piece of the jigsaw. *Liberal Democrats, with our commitment to Europe and our understanding of the decentralising nature of federal democracy, are well-placed to develop the role of the European Union in Northern Ireland.*

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***The main elements of any constitutional settlement must be demonstrably acceptable to both nationalists and unionists.***

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## **1.5 Making the Agreement Acceptable to All Sections of the Community**

1.5.1 The second prong of the Liberal Democrat approach is *that the evolving arrangements for governing Northern Ireland and its future constitutional status should be acceptable to all sections of the community in Northern Ireland.* This means that Northern Ireland will remain part of the UK, unless the majority of the people of Northern Ireland give their free consent to change.

1.5.2 Of course, there are many options for change which fall short of a change in Northern Ireland’s constitutional status. Liberal Democrats believe that *the main elements of any constitutional settlement must be demonstrably acceptable to both nationalists and unionists.* This is necessary for reasons of practice as well as principle, as effective government is not possible in Northern Ireland without general assent across community divides. The role of the UK Government is help to build consensus across the community.

## **1.6 Rejection of Violence**

1.6.1 We believe that there is no justification for the violence of the ‘paramilitaries’, be they unionists or nationalists. Where democratic structures are available, as they are in Northern Ireland, any political view should be advanced by argument and persuasion, not by force of arms.

1.6.2 The use of violence in Northern Ireland has deepened the divisions in the community and makes a settlement more difficult to achieve. It leads to greater bitterness and mistrust, which has a distorting effect on the ability of local politicians to negotiate and compromise.

1.6.3 Despite the great prominence given to violence in the Province, it must be remembered that the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland from all sections of the community consistently reject violence. The number who do not is very small indeed.

1.6.4 It follows, therefore, that those who support or make excuses for the terrorists should not be involved in negotiations, unless they renounce violence. Furthermore, their renunciation of violence and participation in talks cannot be made conditional in any way on a prior commitment as to the outcome. It must also be right that any organisation abandoning violence must prove its commitment to the constitutional process and a peaceful settlement, and accept that it will not have a veto. *Subject to these conditions, however, any organisation should be open to join the political process of negotiation, argument and compromise.*

1.6.5 *Security policy should complement the political process, not be an end in itself, since it treats the symptom and not the cause.* It is our belief that violence will continue until such time as a political settlement is achieved and that some violence may even persist thereafter. Security policies can only contain and minimise violence, rather than end it. Furthermore,

excessively harsh measures designed to combat terror can instead exacerbate the problem. In the past, UK governments, unable to envisage progress on the political front, have derogated from the UK's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights; they have resorted to internment and detention without trial; and they have banned the broadcasting of the voices of Sinn Fein spokespersons and others with counter-productive effect. Some such efforts to suffocate terrorism in a blanket of security have not worked, while others have lent fuel to the resentment off which the terrorists feed.

1.6.6 Rejection of violence means:

- Change only on the basis of free consent and never in response to violence.
- A system of justice which commands the respect and support of all sections of the community.
- Security measures which respect the human rights and civil liberties of all.

The policies which spring from these principles are laid out in Chapter Five which deals with security policy.

# Recent Government Initiatives

**2.0.1 Enshrined in the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, the 1993 Joint Declaration and elsewhere is the assurance that Northern Ireland will not cease to be part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. In reality, however, Britain has tended to regard Northern Ireland as a place apart. If there were common consent for Irish unity or indeed for any other proposal, UK governments would be delighted for the problem to be resolved. Yet, since the collapse of the power-sharing executive in 1974, successive attempts by UK governments to restore self-government to the Province have failed.**

2.0.2 The attitude of the Irish Republic to Northern Ireland is even more complex and at present particularly fluid. Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's Constitution lay claim to the "*whole island of Ireland, its territorial islands and its seas*" and reunification has been the policy of successive Irish governments. Nevertheless, Irish governments have done little to turn this claim into a reality. A united Ireland, with the devastating impact that the withdrawal of British subsidies would have on the North's economy (not to mention the security implications), would cause very real problems to any Dublin government. Public opinion is similarly ambivalent. While a clear majority of people in the Republic continue to aspire to a united Ireland one day, most regard the immediate problem with a mixture of fear and indifference. A recent poll (27.2.94) by the BBC and the Irish *Sunday Independent* found 97% support for the Joint Declaration. The overriding concern of many people is to prevent the violence in the north from spreading southwards.

2.0.3 The Republic has traditionally been a very conservative state both socially and politically. There are several signs, however, that this is beginning to change: the founding of the

Progressive Democrats in 1985, the election of Mary Robinson as Head of State in 1990 on the platform of modernising and liberalising Irish Society and indeed of seeking reconciliation with the unionists; the relatively high vote for the Irish Labour Party at the most recent election; and the decline in that for Fine Gael. It seems that public opinion is changing fast enough to make acceptable amendment of Articles 2 and 3 as part of a wider settlement, with a view to making them less threatening to the unionists. The referendum required to achieve such amendments would, however, take careful handling if it was to be endorsed.

## 2.1 The Anglo-Irish Agreement

2.1.1 After years of relative political stagnation, the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement at Hillsborough in November 1985 indicated a highly significant development in the Government's Northern Ireland policy.

2.1.2 Until this point most recent efforts had concentrated on some form of 'internal' settlement between unionists and nationalists, with only the mildest form of 'Irish dimension' being seriously considered. This was in part due to the failure of the 'Council of Ireland' element of the 1974 Sunningdale Agreement, which led to the withdrawal of unionist support for that structure.

2.1.3 In 1985, the British Government went over the heads of the unionist parties and set up its own 'stand alone' Irish dimension, in the form of the Anglo-Irish Conference and Secretariat. The Republic of Ireland was officially given a consultative role in Northern Ireland affairs. The nationalist SDLP had a voice in the agreement through the Dublin government, but the unionists were not consulted.

2.1.4 In establishing the Agreement the UK Government had three main objectives:

- To bolster support among nationalists for the non-violent SDLP against Sinn Fein.
- To increase Irish support for and cooperation in security matters.
- To give public recognition to the belief that the cooperation of the Irish government would probably be necessary to make any further progress on political matters.

2.1.5 Predictably the agreement was welcomed by the SDLP but condemned by the unionists. The latter saw the agreement as treachery by an erstwhile ally, the Conservative Party. Nine years later the anger may have somewhat dissipated, but unionists remain distrustful both of the UK Government and of new initiatives.

2.1.6 The Agreement has undoubtedly brought some benefits, especially in the increased cooperation between the two governments and the stalling of the advance of Sinn Fein. Violence, however, rose markedly after the Agreement and the constitutional parties could not agree to convene for talks again until 1992, a gap of seven years. The lesson of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is not that there should not be an 'Irish dimension'. Nor is it that the Agreement itself is bad; attempt to move the situation forward is to be applauded. *Instead, the lesson of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is this: that the process by which it was arrived at was flawed. Any future initiatives must seek the overt support of the majorities of both unionists and nationalists.*

## 2.2 The Brooke Initiative

2.2.1 Although the Anglo-Irish Agreement increased the Irish dimension, it remained clear that both governments were committed to power-sharing and devolution. Indeed, the British and Irish governments, in trying to sell the Agreement to the unionists, made great play of the fact that the powers currently held by the Anglo-Irish Conference could be transferred to a new power-

sharing executive, if a suitable settlement could be reached.

2.2.2 Although the talks - initiated by Secretary of State Peter Brooke in 1992 and continued by Patrick Mayhew - were eventually abandoned, they too represented a significant progression in governmental initiatives. They clearly defined the different elements of agreement required for a settlement, in the form of the 'three strands'. These were: agreement between the people of Northern Ireland on the future system of government; agreement between North and South on their future relationship; and agreement between London and Dublin over their relationship.

2.2.3 The responses of the main political parties showed that the Ulster Unionists and Alliance are moving closer to accepting some form of power-sharing assembly. In contrast, however, the SDLP has moved away and now appears wary of any form of elected assembly, pressing instead for an executive comprised of equal numbers of Northern Ireland representatives and 'external' delegates from London, Dublin and Brussels. Sinn Fein were explicitly excluded from these talks.

## 2.3 The Joint Declaration

2.3.1 By 1993, with the Anglo-Irish Agreement in place for eight years and the Brooke Initiative stalled, the two governments needed a new way forward. In December 1993, under increased public pressure - resulting from terrorist atrocities by both unionists and nationalists, the Hume-Adams talks and increased public interest aroused, in turn, by media speculation - the two governments issued a joint declaration. The Declaration's importance was that it set out a framework of principles concerning the Irish conflict on which the two Prime Ministers were able to agree. The content may not have been original, but it was indicative of a desire for progress on behalf of the two governments.

2.3.2 The Declaration differed from previous efforts in its stated primary aim of obtaining an immediate cessation of violence; hence its use of

language intended to draw Sinn Fein into the talks process and persuade the IRA to renounce violence. The arrangements for the political settlement were to follow, but the Declaration reaffirmed the principle that majority consent would be needed for Northern Ireland to leave the UK.

2.3.3 The concentration on a cessation of violence recognised that political talks would be more likely to succeed in a peaceful environment. *While a cessation of violence would be welcome, it would be only a temporary reprieve, however, without a political settlement commanding the support of the majority of people from all sections of the community in Northern Ireland.* The governments' approach has given an undue prominence to the role of Sinn Fein and the IRA and there is no guarantee whatsoever that a cessation of violence by republican terrorists would be matched by loyalist ones.

2.3.4 The Declaration initially received the cautious backing of constitutional parties from all sections of the community, in particular the Alliance Party, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party. Liberal Democrats therefore welcome the Joint Declaration as a first step to political talks between these constitutional parties.

## 2.4 Into the Future

2.4.1 *The UK and Irish governments must now seek to capitalise on this support for the Declaration.* We expect the UK Prime Minister to look beyond any personal or party political advantage in doing this and to be neutral between the competing objectives of Northern Ireland's political parties. He must seek to involve the people of Northern Ireland in the political process as it is the people of Northern Ireland who will have to live with the terms of the settlement. *The role of the British Government is to bring whatever pressure it can to bear on all the parties in Northern Ireland, but particularly the unionists, to resume constitutional talks as soon as possible.*

2.4.2 We hope that the Irish government will also actively involve itself in the search for a

settlement, so that Republican paramilitaries in the North can be isolated and the fear of unionists reduced. Modification of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ireland, which lay claim to the North, could help bring about a final resolution, but modification cannot be a precondition of negotiations so much as an element in a settlement. We note with interest the proposal for such an amendment made recently by Kevin Boyle and Tom Hadden. Articles 2 and 3 can only be amended with the consent of a majority of the population of the Republic, expressed in a referendum. *We call on the Irish Government to bring whatever pressure it can to bear on all the parties in Northern Ireland, but particularly the nationalists, to resume constitutional talks as soon as possible.*

2.4.3 Far too often the debate on the future of Northern Ireland degenerates into the question of sovereignty, in other words whether the North is part of the UK or the Republic; we believe that the key sovereignty that matters is that of the people of Northern Ireland. The purpose of talks is to look beyond simplistic and unhelpful analyses. All parties that support a constitutional route to a solution should be invited to participate in negotiations and all parties should come to the negotiating table with a recognition that they will have to make concessions.

2.4.4 In contrast to those who pursue constitutional solutions, those who seek to impose their will through violence must be excluded from negotiations. Liberal Democrats recognise that the door should remain open to paramilitaries who lay down their arms and take the constitutional path. The talks process should not, however, wait on a decision by the IRA to accept or reject the Joint Declaration.

2.4.5 The Joint Declaration may yet prompt a virtuous spiral of resolution. Even if it does not, Northern Ireland must not be allowed to slip from its current position at the top of the political agenda. There must be further initiatives, and the UK Government must seek further consensus on the available constitutional options.

# ***Liberal Democrat Proposals for a Political Settlement***

## **3.0.1 At the 1992 General Election, Liberal Democrats made a number of specific proposals for Northern Ireland:**

- *Maintenance of the principles of the Anglo-Irish Agreement* unless and until such time as an improved agreement emerges from cross-party talks.
- *Strengthening the constitutional rights of individuals within Northern Ireland*, including the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law, as the first step to developing a UK Bill of Rights.
- *Support for non-sectarian organisations*, which bring individuals together from across community divides.
- *Welcoming the opportunities offered by the development of the European Union*, in terms of both economic assistance to Northern Ireland and the new framework for progress in the relationship between the UK and the Republic of Ireland which it provides.

3.0.2 We remain committed to these proposals, while being all too aware that they do not constitute a 'solution'. Indeed, it would be foolish for any UK party to prescribe in too great detail a blueprint for a full Northern Ireland settlement as the first requirement for a successful settlement is that it has the support of all sections of the Northern Ireland community. *This means finding a system of government acceptable primarily to Alliance, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists who together represent 70% of the people of Northern Ireland.* If the support of other voices can be obtained that is a definite advantage, but

the failure to gain wider support is not an insurmountable block to further progress. Negotiations should not be entered into with any grouping which will not fully accept the democratic, constitutional process, although we would expect low level exploration of the circumstances in which violence might be renounced to continue.

3.0.3 On the basis of past experience of political negotiations in Northern Ireland, of the widely perceived aspirations and attitudes of all the people of Northern Ireland and not least of the principles stated in Chapter One, the following elements should make up part, if not the whole, of a constitutional settlement:

- *A power-sharing executive* answerable to an assembly of representatives elected by a fair voting system.
- *An Irish dimension*, based on cross border agencies.
- *A package to guarantee civil liberties.*
- *A commitment to hold referenda* from time to time to determine whether the majority of the people of Northern Ireland wish to remain in the UK.

The aim of this programme is to give all sections of the community a say in the running of Northern Ireland and a stake in its future.

## **3.1 Power-Sharing Executive**

3.1.1 The constitutional options for the future government of Northern Ireland have been discussed and debated interminably. Liberal Democrats believe that the option

finally chosen must accord with the principles set out in Chapter One, namely it must be:

- *Fully democratic and decentralised*, giving individuals and local communities a say in the decisions which affect their everyday lives.
- *Respectful of the rights of individuals*, regardless of creed or nationality.
- *Non-discriminatory*, either indirectly or by design.

3.1.2 The reality of the situation summarised in 1.0.4 is that “*Northern Ireland is not just like any other part of the United Kingdom*” (*Citizen’s Enquiry*, 1993). Thus *full integration into the UK* is not realistic. Any large scale *repartition* would be unacceptable to unionists while not addressing the concerns of nationalists. *Independence* would mean tyranny by the majority and the negation of the rights of the minority nationalist tradition. *Unity by consent* is a legiti-

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***Devolved power-sharing would be acceptable to - if not the first choice of - the majority of unionists and nationalists.***

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mate aspiration for nationalists, but it could only come as a result of a long period of peaceful co-existence, after which unionists chose this option of their own free and full consent. For all practical purposes, therefore, this is not an immediate option so much as an aspiration for nationalists. *Joint executive authority* (between London and Dublin) has attractions for some, but it would not on its own address the conflict between the people of Northern Ireland. We believe that at the present time there are other ways in which an Irish dimension with greater acceptability can be provided. The present system of *direct rule from Westminster* is manifestly unsatisfactory,

being centralised and unaccountable. ‘Orders in council’ can be at best temporary as they are undemocratic and, in our view, constitute an infringement of the civil rights of the people of Northern Ireland.

3.1.3 Thus, having carefully considered the other alternatives available, *we have come to the conclusion that the final settlement should include a devolved, power-sharing executive, accountable to an assembly made up of elected representatives*. We support this option for three main reasons:

- It places the people of Northern Ireland in charge of their own affairs and requires them to work together for mutual interest across community divides.
- It is consistent with our ideas for home rule and decentralisation within the rest of the United Kingdom.
- It meets our concerns over equality and non-discrimination.

3.1.4 A solution based on power-sharing and some form of devolved assembly has been the explicit or implicit aim of successive British governments since the suspension of Stormont. The problem rests in devising a devolved government which is not seen by the minority as putting too much power in the hands of the majority and vice versa. The Sunningdale agreement tried to achieve this by the creation of a power-sharing executive. Unfortunately, the agreement was brought quickly down by unconstitutional action. There is much opinion poll evidence to suggest that a devolved power-sharing executive would be acceptable to - if not the first choice of - the majority of unionists and nationalists. *No other current proposal enjoys such a status*.

3.1.5 Liberal Democrats believe that the Executive should exercise as much power as possible, so that responsibility for the governance of the Province is once again held by local people. Obvious areas of responsibility suitable to be transferred to such a body include health, education, transport services

and environmental protection. Such an executive should be accountable to an assembly of representatives elected by proportional representation. As such, it would address the huge ‘democratic deficit’ in Northern Ireland, and would be in line with our policy of devolution throughout the UK. The resulting more stable democratic political environment, coupled with local management of the economy, would address the social, economic and political grievances which are the fuel of the terrorists (see Chapter Five).

3.1.6 There are, however, a number of problems with power-sharing which must also be addressed. There is a significant danger that the allotment of power to apparent ‘communities’ would strengthen sectarian allegiances. A power-sharing structure may be too inflexible to adjust to changing or disappearing loyalties, and it is likely to overlook the growing numbers of people who count themselves as neither unionist nor nationalist. We therefore recognise that much work still needs to be done to produce a model of power-sharing which will be acceptable to both unionists and nationalists.

## 3.2 An Irish Dimension

3.2.1 *Liberal Democrats believe that it is essential that both the UK and Irish governments are seen to endorse fully the final political settlement in Northern Ireland.* The two governments must act as joint guarantors of the settlement, in recognition of the fact that many people in Northern Ireland look to the Irish Republic for security. We recognise that the mechanisms by which these guarantees are provided need careful examination, in consultation with Northern Ireland’s constitutional parties. We believe that the Irish government should not have an executive role in Northern Ireland in the current situation, but that its guarantor status should nevertheless be meaningful (see for example 3.3.3 and 5.2.1). Instead of an executive role, joint agencies should be established to deal with a range of issues of practical concern on either side of the border.

3.2.2 We emphasise three points to those wary of closer North-South links:

- In the economic and social circumstances of the end of the twentieth century, there are concrete advantages for both North and South in the establishment of ‘island-wide’ agencies on a host of issues. These include, in particular, the economy, all-Ireland infrastructure, European funds, the environment, transport, and tourism (see Chapter Six). Liberal Democrats are interested in practical cross-border cooperation between Dublin and Belfast, rather than cross-border government.
- Cross-border institutions between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland do not have to (and we believe should not) entail any weakening of the United Kingdom or transfer of government to Dublin.
- The Republic has already indicated that it would be willing, as part of a total settlement, to put forward amendments to Articles 2 and 3 of its Constitution.

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***Both the UK and Irish governments must be seen to endorse fully the final political settlement.***

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3.2.3 *In the final analysis, if nationalist support is to be obtained for a power-sharing executive and assembly, then we believe that the unionists must accept an Irish dimension including some inter-Irish agencies.*

## 3.3 Guaranteeing Civil Liberties

3.3.1 We believe that given Northern Ireland’s past history and the continuing insecurity of all sections of the community, a constitutional package guaranteeing individual

civil liberties is essential. The key elements of such a package are:

- *The introduction of a fair voting system* for all elections in Northern Ireland (see Federal White Paper 6, *Here We Stand*, 1993).
- *The incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights in UK law*, as the first step to the establishment of a UK Bill of Rights (*Here We Stand*).
- *Reform of the justice system* (see Section 5.1).
- *Reform of the security system* (see Section 5.3).
- *Repeal of the broadcasting restrictions*.
- *Support for organisations engaged in promoting equality and fighting discrimination*, (see Chapter Four) including the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Fair Employment Commission.

3.3.2 The Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights (SACHR) should be responsible for overseeing human rights cases in Northern Ireland.

3.3.3 While we would like Britain to be viewed as a neutral guarantor of rights, we accept that, rightly or wrongly, this is not the perception of many people in Northern Ireland.

For them, the Irish Republic offers security and this reality must be reflected in any long term settlement (see 3.2.1). We believe that such a role can be found which does not prejudice the position of Northern Ireland within the UK.

### **3.4 Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom**

3.4.1 We believe that Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK unless the majority of its people freely consent to a change. Consent should be determined through a referendum.

3.4.2 We believe the process described above will, over time, reduce the grievances of certain sections of the community and thus reduce the salience of Northern Ireland's constitutional status. As the European Union develops, the role of nation states will inevitably change and the emphasis will shift to regional cooperation.

3.4.3 At some stage in the future, when the proposals in this paper have had time to influence the political, social and economic culture of the Province, it would be appropriate to enable the people of Northern Ireland to consider the question of the Province's constitutional future. If the principle of free consent is to be maintained, it is necessary that, from time to time, this consent is reaffirmed by referenda.

# Community Efforts for Peace

**4.0.1** It is often argued that Northern Ireland has been ill-served by its political leadership. Certainly, in recent years, progress towards peace and reconciliation has been more likely to come from the grassroots of the Northern Ireland community - from voluntary organisations, women's organisations, trade unions and integrated education programmes - than from some of its political parties.

*4.0.2* Liberal Democrats recognise and welcome the role played by such organisations in helping to bridge community divides. We welcome the focus of the Opsahl Commission on submissions from non-politicians. We believe that individuals and voluntary organisations have a vital role to play in reuniting the people of Northern Ireland, reminding them not of things which divide them but of the mutual interests they share in common. We recommend that community development should be one of the highest priorities for the UK Government. Liberal Democrats would:

- *Encourage the use of education to bridge community divides, including support for integrated schools and joint school projects.*
- *Endorse the recommendation in the Opsahl Report for a feasibility study into integrated housing projects.*
- *Encourage religious organisations to continue their work bringing people together across community divides.*
- *Recognise and seek to enhance the role played by women in promoting peace and reconciliation.*
- *Encourage voluntary organisations, trade unions and others working across community divides for common goals.*

## 4.1. Educating for Peace

4.1.1 Liberal Democrats believe that education is the key to breaking down sectarian allegiances in Northern Ireland. We therefore support:

- *Increased encouragement to and financial support for integrated education, at all levels from nursery to sixth form.*
- *Joint education projects to bring together those still in segregated education.*
- *The introduction of a common Northern Irish history syllabus for all schools in Northern Ireland, drawn up in consultation with representatives of all sections of the community.*

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***Investment in education  
in Northern Ireland should be  
targeted on integrated schools.***

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4.1.2 Integrated education cannot by itself solve the problems of a divided society like Northern Ireland, but it is a component of any solution. Increasingly, parents prefer integrated schools for their children and there are now 21 throughout Northern Ireland. At present, however, many parents who want integrated schooling for their children are denied their choice. *Liberal Democrats would therefore actively promote integrated education in order to make it a viable choice for all, by switching some of the current investment in Northern Ireland specifically to funding integrated education.*

4.1.3 We recognise that denominationally-based schools exist in Northern Ireland, as they

do throughout the UK, because some parents want them. Integrated education is desirable in Northern Ireland, but it would not be right to impose it on unwilling parents. Other steps are therefore also necessary to ensure that all children have the opportunity to meet and mix with children from different denominational backgrounds. Liberal Democrats support increased contact between segregated schools, including, for example, twinning and joint school projects. We support the recommendation of the Opsahl Report to investigate the establishment of shared schools - run jointly by Catholics and Protestants - as part of a process of ecumenism.

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***Liberal Democrats believe  
that women have a particularly  
constructive role to play in  
Northern Ireland.***

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4.1.4 Liberal Democrats support the attempts of the Department for Education to promote interaction between Catholics and Protestants, through its policy of Education for Mutual Understanding. We endorse its efforts to acquaint pupils and students with the culture and beliefs of different religions, through sensitive teaching of History and English and educational visits and projects. We would introduce a common Northern Ireland history syllabus for all schools in Northern Ireland, produced in conjunction with representatives of all sections of the community.

## **4.2 Promoting the Role of Women**

4.2.1 Women have been particularly prominent in the peace movement and women's organisations have played an active role in promoting community conciliation. Mary Robinson's election as President of the Republic was, in part, based on her conciliatory approach to Northern Ireland, and

her candidature commanded the overwhelming support of the women electors in the Republic. It is argued that women are more sensitive than men to the impact of the violence in the Province and are less likely to see violence as the solution to their own troubles.

4.2.2 Liberal Democrats are convinced that ways should be found to promote women's participation in public life throughout the UK, on an equal basis that of men. We believe that this is necessary not only on the grounds of fairness, but also to ensure that the country utilises all the talents available to it to full. (A policy paper on ensuring equal opportunities for women is currently in production for debate at a future conference.)

4.2.3 *In the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, Liberal Democrats believe that women have a particularly constructive role to play.* We therefore believe that strenuous efforts should be made to involve women in the Province's institutions and political processes.

4.2.4 At present, the under-representation of women in the political structures of Northern Ireland is even more marked than elsewhere. From 1922 to 1983 the Province was represented by 12 MPs, after which the number was increased to 17. In all that time, only 3 women have ever been elected, the last in 1974. Women's representation is better at local level than at national level, but is still very low. 11% of the province's councillors are women, compared with an average of 22% on the mainland.

4.2.5 To promote women in the politics of Northern Ireland we support two key proposals from the Opsahl Report. We endorse the Report's proposals for:

- *Political parties to make particular efforts to provide women with opportunities to stand as their representatives, and the Northern Ireland Office to set targets for the appointment of women to public bodies.*

- *A Minister for Equality in the proposed Northern Ireland Executive.* The Minister would be specifically responsible for ensuring that every aspect in the governance of Northern Ireland was in line with an equal opportunities policy, in the areas of gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability or age.
- *A regional strategy for childcare.* As in the rest of the UK, childcare provision in Northern Ireland is woefully inadequate, and we would seek to remedy this as a priority (see English White Paper 4, *Excellence for All*; 1992).

4.2.6 Women are often the long term victims of terrorism, facing bereavement, vastly increased obligations and a future of struggle and poverty. The Conservatives are currently proposing strict constraints on the amounts payable to victims of crime: £25,000 for the death of a breadwinner and £20,000 for permanent invalidism. *We oppose this measure which we believe would be especially damaging in Northern Ireland.*

### 4.3 Support for Community Initiatives

4.3.1 Liberal Democrats believe that the churches, voluntary organisations, trades union and other grassroot organisations have

particular responsibilities for bridging community divides. We call upon the Catholic and Protestant churches to work together to promote peace and reconciliation by lending their support to the educational initiatives set out in Section 4.1, promoting cross-community debate and discussion, and showing tolerance for each others' moral teachings and principles.

4.3.2 Liberal Democrats welcome the recommendations in the Opsahl Report to encourage community development. In particular, we support the Report's proposals for:

- *Less emphasis on the 'political vetting' of community groups* and more on strict accountability for the use of funds.
- *The establishment of local community development trusts:* independent, non-profit making organisations bringing together the public, private and voluntary sectors with people of a local area to work for physical and social regeneration.
- *A feasibility study by the Housing Executive into the establishment of integrated housing schemes,* with subsidised rents and other support mechanisms.

# Peace and Security

**5.0.1 Terrorism in Northern Ireland is the most horrifying aspect of the political problems of the Province. The grim chain of politically-motivated killing, maiming and damage to property must remain abhorrent to all constitutional parties, and Liberal Democrats could never find such activities anything but deeply contemptible.**

5.0.2 Security is, however, only one aspect of the wider problem of Northern Ireland's political future. Liberal Democrats understand this, and so we do not look to the security forces for a panacea for the troubles. Government legislation has often implied that the problem is one which can be addressed solely by security measures. However, these do not always solve, and sometimes can even exacerbate, problems. We believe that security issues must not be isolated from the broader discussion about the Province. Security policy must be seen as a part of the wider problem.

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***The object of security policy must be to progress towards a long term sustainable peace.***

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5.0.3 Nonetheless, security policy has proved easier to adjust than constitutional policy. Since the introduction of direct rule in 1972, with the exception of the unsuccessful Sunningdale Agreement, the most significant advance in the constitutional set-up of Northern Ireland has been the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and even this bore heavily on security policy. Piecemeal government legislation and administrative decisions have allowed security policy to evolve in response to changing circumstances. Security policy provides governments with a useful way of appearing to

do something without irreversibly jeopardising their negotiating stance.

5.0.4 The object of Liberal Democrat security policy must be to progress towards a long term, sustainable peace. This involves:

- *Increasing the trust of the broad mass of the population in the justice system and the security forces.*
- *Even-handedness in the treatment of terrorists, from whichever extreme they come.*
- *Removal of the grievances off which the terrorists feed.*

5.0.5 When a political settlement is reached it will be necessary to review security policy again. There may be a small minority which attempts to impose its will and destroy the settlement through violent means. Liberal Democrats do not therefore believe that British troops should be withdrawn or reduced in the present circumstances. We recognise that tough security measures may be necessary to reinforce any political settlement and we will not shirk from using them. That is not to say however that *after a political settlement has been agreed* the overall number of troops should not be gradually reduced step by step. In the long term, when the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) has become more representative of the community and peace has been secured, it should be possible to end completely the role of mainland British troops in support of the RUC. We expect both the nationalist and unionist leaderships to play an active role in promoting and supporting the security and judicial process, both now and in the future.

## 5.1 Increasing Confidence in the Justice System

5.1.1 Upon coming to office a Liberal Democrat government would, as a matter of urgency, take immediate steps to increase public confidence in the administration of justice in Northern Ireland. We would:

- *Incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law* (section 3.3).
- *Reform the Diplock Courts* to ensure that cases are heard by three judges instead of one.
- *Make exclusion orders and detention without trial subject to review by a judge.*
- *Take action to prevent racketeering* by reforming legislation concerning terrorist funding.

## 5.2 Increasing Confidence in the Security Forces

5.2.1 Further changes to policing and detention practices would help to boost public confidence in the RUC and the security forces. Liberal Democrats would:

- *Seek to make the Royal Ulster Constabulary more representative*, thus enhancing its effectiveness and the respect which it commands throughout the community.

- *Introduce video-taping of all police interviews of terrorist suspects.* The defence could decide not to be video-taped, and video tapes would be available to them and admissible as evidence in court.
- *Introduce custody time limits* for all persons on remand for indictable offences.
- *Establish an independent procedure for investigating complaints against the security forces.*
- *Bring police disciplinary procedures into line* with procedures in England and Wales.

5.2.2 To improve the quantity, quality and value of anti-terrorist intelligence we would establish clear mechanisms for gathering it centrally and for exchanging it between agencies. Such mechanisms would be applicable not just in Northern Ireland, but also in the rest of the UK and throughout the Europe Union (see Federal Green Paper 22, *Justice and Security in the Community*, 1991).

## 5.3 Internment

5.3.1 We believe that internment, detention without the due process of law, undermines the legitimacy of the state in whose name it is perpetrated. Our moral objections to internment are reinforced by the experience of its use in the early 70s, which led to a massive escalation in violence. *Liberal Democrats are therefore opposed to the reintroduction of internment in the current circumstances.*

# ***Reviving the Northern Ireland Economy***

**6.0.1 The UK spends over £3.5 billion per year (net) in Northern Ireland. The high level of public expenditure has shielded the Province from the exaggerated booms and slumps which have characterised the rest of the UK economy. The region, however, remains among the poorest in the UK.**

6.0.2 It is clear that poverty is not just the result of terrorism. Northern Ireland is anyway physically isolated from the rest of the UK on the edge of Europe. Its industries - such as ship-building and textiles - have suffered from competition from the Far East, but this is not a phenomenon limited to Northern Ireland. The Province's most important industry, agriculture, has suffered along with the rest of the UK.

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***Northern Ireland's future prosperity is dependent upon increased economic cooperation with the Republic.***

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6.0.3 Sectarianism and terrorism have, however, had major impact on the economy. Fear and uncertainty discourage private sector investment and exports. Violence has destroyed many indigenous businesses. The Stormont regime based investment decisions on creed and community affiliation, rather than economic considerations. As a result, some of Northern Ireland has experienced levels of economic deprivation unparalleled in the rest of the UK. Male unemployment rates in parts of the Northern Ireland, such as Shankill and Falls, have been as high as 90%. Some towns have had overall unemployment rates of nearly 30%.

6.0.4 Perversely, the threat from terrorism and the destruction caused by terrorists sucks money into the Province. 25,000 people are employed in the security forces in Northern Ireland, not including support personnel. The construction industry in Northern Ireland is kept busy repairing and rebuilding areas devastated by bombs. National and international public investment, aimed at reducing the economic and social discontent off which the terrorists feed, has poured into the Province. *On balance, however, research suggests that the net effect of terrorism on the Northern Ireland economy is a negative one.*

6.0.5 *Liberal Democrats believe that Northern Ireland-based institutions should be charged with the task of reviving the Northern Ireland economy. The UK Government must, however, take responsibility for ensuring that those institutions have the financial and political support necessary to bring about economic revival. After all, low living standards and high unemployment are the conditions within which the terrorists find it easiest to recruit new members to their ranks. Liberal Democrats would:*

- *Implement the policies set out in Federal White Paper 4, *Economics for the Future* (1991), to create economic prosperity and sustainability through the UK.*
- *Seek to create stable political structures in Northern Ireland, to encourage greater external investment and reduce deprivation.*
- *Seek to redress the economic inequalities in the community.*
- *Reform the system of support for agriculture throughout the UK, which would have particular importance in the Province (see*

Policy Paper 5, *Reclaiming the Countryside*, 1994).

## 6.1 Creating a Framework for Economic Success

6.1.1 With the settling of the GATT Uruguay Round, it seems inevitable that trade will increase across international borders. The European Union is mirroring these advances. Increasingly, even small businesses need to trade internationally to succeed.

6.1.2 In such circumstances, all the regions of Europe will need to increase links with their neighbours. Northern Ireland's geographical position on the fringe of Europe means that its economy is inextricably linked to that of its neighbour. Thus, Northern Ireland's future prosperity is dependent upon massively increasing its cooperation with the Republic (and vice-versa), not as part of any political agenda but as an economic necessity. At present, trade between the North and South amounts to no more than 5% of either area's total imports and exports (*The Single Market: Cross Border Trade*, British-Irish Parliamentary Group, 1993). We believe that an economic corridor should run between Dublin and Belfast. We support the establishment of cross-border economic agencies as an immediate priority for the UK and Irish Governments, to increase significantly the trade across the Republic-Northern Ireland border.

6.1.3 There are many aspects of the economy which would benefit greatly from an 'all-Ireland' approach. For example, a joint project in the United States to promote tourism on an all-island basis has proved extremely successful. Cross-border agencies should be established where there are large economies of scale to be gained and where Irish involvement is necessary for effective operation. *We recognise that there may be mutual benefits to be obtained from establishing agencies which enable the North and South to work together on matters of common interest and concern such as all-Ireland infrastructure, the obtaining of EU funds, environmental protection, agriculture (especially animal*

*welfare), tourism, transport, communications and energy.*

6.1.4 Clearly, operating many institutions on an all-Ireland basis could have profound political implications for Northern Ireland. Liberal Democrats would seek to establish, through negotiations with the Irish Government, lines of accountability for these institutions which were open to all those directly affected by their operation. We would establish a rigorous equal opportunities policy for appointments to these structures, and would encourage the Irish Republic to do the same.

## 6.2 The Rural Economy in Northern Ireland

6.2.1 While Northern Ireland's economy is increasingly diverse, agriculture remains one of its most important industries. Liberal Democrat proposals to revive the rural economy through out the UK are set out in detail in Policy Paper 5, *Reclaiming the Countryside* (1994). *That paper called for a comprehensive reform of the EU's rural policies to provide support to farmers directly, largely as payments for meeting agreed environmental objectives.* In addition, it called for:

- *Countryside Management Contracts*, to encourage sustainability and long-term planning.
- *Capital grants and soft loans* to assist farmers to change to sustainable alternatives to farming.
- *Encouragement to farmers to develop co-operatives* and other appropriate marketing techniques, add value to their products and increase diversity in their activities.

6.2.2 Liberal Democrats call for the expansion of support from the European Regional Development Fund to Northern Ireland to help with the restructuring of the agriculture industry, in accordance with the objectives above.

# ***Appendix One: Historical Background***

It is necessary to go back at least to the seventeenth century to understand the origins of the problems in Northern Ireland. Whilst, in the view of Liberal Democrats, the solution to these problems does not lie in a retreat to the past, it is necessary to appreciate the depth of belief, fear and prejudice which fuels the crisis from generation to generation.

The unionist tradition stems from the predominantly Presbyterian settlers who, in the seventeenth century, came from Scotland and settled in Ireland at the instigation of Oliver Cromwell. Many were themselves fleeing from poverty and discrimination.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Irish nationalism - supported by both Catholics and Protestants - grew, as did resentment against the British. The first Home Rule Bill in 1886, introduced by Gladstone's Liberals with the support of the Irish Nationalist Party, fell when the Liberals split and the Conservatives opposed the Bill.

In 1912, the third Home Rule Bill, like its predecessors, proposed the setting up of an all-Ireland Parliament with an executive responsible to it for most domestic matters. Again, there was huge opposition from unionists in the north and it became apparent that the Protestants, led by Carson, were prepared to fight - with arms - against the imposition of Home Rule. In the face of this opposition, in 1914 Asquith proposed the option of excluding at least some of the Ulster counties from the jurisdiction of an Irish parliament. The Irish Nationalist leaders seemed prepared to give four counties the right to opt out, although for a six year period only. The Bill became law in 1914 but the outbreak of war suspended its operation.

The 1916 rising in Dublin, and more particularly the sympathy for the rebels which was generated by the subsequent executions, hardened Irish opinion. In the 1918 election Sinn Fein obtained an overwhelming victory, and the old (Home Rule) Nationalist Party was virtually annihilated. Violence erupted, largely at the instigation of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The ruthlessness of the IRA and the British Government auxiliaries were evenly matched but if there was a choice of loyalties between the two sides, there could be no doubt on whose side the majority of Irish would eventually come down.

In this state of hostilities, Parliament passed the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 which partitioned Ireland between North and South. Northern Ireland was to comprise the six counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone. There were to be two Home Rule Parliaments and a Council of Ireland. The Act contemplated the possibility of one Parliament and one Government for the whole of Ireland. The Act was not accepted in the South and hostilities continued but these eventually ended with a truce between the IRA and the Crown Forces in July 1921. Negotiations between the Government and an Irish delegation culminated in the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921). The Dail ratified the Treaty by a small margin, giving the 26 counties in the South the equivalent of Dominion status, by a small margin. The IRA split, with the majority continuing to assert the claim to Ulster and waging a civil war against the Irish Government; a war which has dominated the Republic's politics ever since and makes for continuing hostility between the IRA and the Irish Government today. The Parliament of Northern Ireland exercised its right to opt out of the Irish Free State, as had been anticipated. As a result, the Irish Free State and Northern

Ireland were created as a result of combination of military force and popular will.

The border was widely seen as unfair and dishonest: only Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry had definite unionist majorities, but as a province they were not perceived to be economically viable; conversely, a province comprising all nine counties of Ulster would have contained a Protestant majority, but a small and fragile one. The six county province of the 1920 Act created the largest possible area consistent with a safe Protestant majority.

One of the clauses of the 1921 Treaty provided for a Boundary Commission to be set up to examine the boundary. The British majority on the Commission recommended only small adjustments, however, which in the event were never implemented. The Free State, perhaps exhausted by the civil war, was strangely passive despite the resignation of its own representative. The net result was that the then Irish Government settled for a border which was far less favourable than the old Irish Nationalist Party would ever have settled for in 1914.

Some 65 years later, the border, and indeed the legitimacy of Northern Ireland, is still a matter of conflict. The 1920/21 arrangements were never regarded as final and in 1937 the Republic wrote into its Constitution a claim on the North (Articles 2 and 3). *The Treaty left unresolved the central question of whether the claim of the unionist majority in the north of the island had a greater legitimacy than the claim of the nationalist majority in the whole of the island.*

From 1920 until the late 1960s the devolved Parliament of Northern Ireland became an instrument of unionist dominance. Unionists feared the loyalty of the Catholic minority and used their inbuilt majority in the Parliament to protect the position of Protestants, at the expense of equality. Public and private discrimination was widespread, particularly in housing and in the application of regional policy, local government boundaries were gerrymandered, and the 'B Specials' became a Protestant militia.

The 1960s saw the growth of the Civil Rights Movement, largely in response to socioeconomic, rather than political, conditions. The rise of civil unrest eventually led to the deployment of the Army, and the suspension of Stormont and the introduction of direct rule in 1972. The Sunningdale talks, in which the Northern Ireland parties and the government of the Republic participated, led to the creation of an Executive in which nationalists and unionists shared power, but this, in turn, was brought down by a strike by Protestant workers in 1974.

Numerous attempts have since been made to resolve the constitutional issues. A number of measures have been taken by successive British governments to protect the rights of the minority, to control the operation of the security forces, and less successfully to involve the minority in community decision-making. These include, for example, the establishment, in 1976, of the Fair Employment Commission and the Northern Ireland Equal Opportunities Commission.

In 1985, the Anglo-Irish Agreement gave a consultative role to the Irish Government in the affairs of the Province. In 1994, at the time of writing, the British Government is making a concerted effort to find a constitutional solution to problems of Northern Ireland.

In summary, the Provisionals see the history of the Free State and the subsequent Republic as legitimising their role; they take as their role model the Sinn Feiners of 1916. The common past of the terrorists on the one hand, and the political parties in the Republic on the other, explains unionist mistrust and fear of Dublin.

The unionist paramilitaries derive their role from the followers of Carson who were prepared to take up arms in 1912. Consequently, the nationalists see unionist threats of force - coupled to the history of British government capitulation in the face of it - as evidence that Westminster cannot be trusted to safeguard nationalist rights. As a result, neither community has yet felt ready to make the compromises necessary to end the violence and reach a lasting political settlement.

# ***Appendix Two: The Northern Ireland Parties***

## **Alliance Party of Northern Ireland**

Alliance, the Liberal Democrats' sister party, is committed to a devolved system of government based on power sharing with minority safeguards and a bill of rights. It argues for an Irish dimension in the sense of North-South institutions between the Republic and any developed Northern Ireland Government.

For the present, the Party opposes additional powers for local authorities in Northern Ireland. This position is based on the belief that many councils abuse the powers they have currently. Furthermore, they argue that the question of local authority powers is a distraction from the more important goal of a devolved assembly.

Although the Alliance Party supports the Anglo-Irish Agreement, it is opposed to giving the Republic a direct, rather than a consultative, role in the affairs of Northern Ireland.

## **The Democratic Unionists (DUP)**

The DUP favours a return to a Stormont-type devolved assembly with full legislative powers. It accepts the need only for minimal minority safeguards. It does not support any institutional association with the Republic. There is a substantial element within the DUP which would prefer independence to an unacceptable, imposed settlement. It regards the abandonment of Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's Constitution as a prerequisite for talks. It

would desire much greater powers for local authorities.

## **Sinn Fein**

Sinn Fein is very closely associated with republican terrorists, in particular with the Provisional IRA. Its programme includes withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland and a united Ireland.

## **Social Democratic and Labour Party**

In the recent Talks, the SDLP supported a system of government by Commissioners, three elected from within Northern Ireland and three others appointed from outside by the Irish Government, the UK Government and the EU respectively. It also proposed a North/South Council of Ministers modelled on the EU, with decisions based on unanimity. It argues for these proposals to be approved by simultaneous referenda held in Northern Ireland and in the Republic. At present, the SDLP seems opposed to an elected devolved assembly for Northern Ireland.

## **The Ulster Unionists (UUP)**

The UUP is in favour of a devolved assembly of Northern Ireland. It is prepared to accept a degree of power sharing proportionate to the voting strengths of the parties but would be unhappy with any entrenched minority veto. It would also accept some very limited form of cross-border institutions. Unsurprisingly, the UUP is in favour of increasing the powers of local authorities.

# ***Appendix Three: Liberal Democrats and the APNI***

It is not within the remit of this paper to redefine the relationship between the Liberal Democrats and the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland. This appendix is therefore an explanation of the current situation, provided for information.

Liberalism has a long and proud history in the north of Ireland. The Ulster Liberal Party, revived in 1956, has a distinguished record in pioneering many progressive concepts such as nonsectarianism, respect for human rights, proportional representation and European unity. Its influence was disproportionate to its small size, and it had one Stormont MP during the 1960s.

In the late 1980s, the Ulster Liberal Party merged with the Northern Ireland Social Democrats; residents of Northern Ireland are now able to join the Liberal Democrats. As a result, there is a single, functioning local Party of the Liberal Democrats in Northern Ireland covering the whole of the Province. The Federal Constitution permits such an organisation to exist and allows for the

possibility of the establishment of a Northern Ireland State Party in the future.

The Liberal Democrats believe that the priority in Northern Ireland is to transform the region's sectarian political culture. It is the view of the Local Party that the Alliance Party is best placed for this task. The APNI and the Liberal Democrats share in common many ideals, values and policies and indeed a number of individuals share membership. Both parties are members of Liberal International and of the European Liberal, Democratic and Reform Party. In recent years, therefore, local Liberal Democrats have decided not to stand for election and instead to support APNI candidates, on the grounds that electoral competition would be damaging to both parties.

The local Liberal Democrat party continues to give expression to the Northern Irish liberal tradition, and to provide a means by which Northern Irish people can have an input into the Federal Party.

*This Paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 5.4 of the Federal Constitution. Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom. The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats and the Welsh Liberal Democrats determine the policy of the Party in all other areas, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas. If approved by Conference, it will form the policy of the Party.*

*Many of the policy papers published by the Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to achieve all these proposals in the lifetime of one Parliament. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next general election.*

### **Working Group on Northern Ireland**

John Roberts (Chair)	Kieran Seale
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Bob Bell	Elizabeth Sidney
Rt Hon David Bleakley	Pam Tilson
Sam Crooks	Nicholas Whyte
Stephen Farry	
Lord Holme	
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*Note: Membership of the Working Group should not be taken to indicate that every member necessarily agrees with every section or every proposal in this Paper.*

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