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JOINT STATEMENT BY THE SDLP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND ASSEMBLY PARTY1. REALITIES AND PRINCIPLES

1.1. Northern Ireland is not an economic, social, cultural or geographic unit. A majority of its population are Unionists who have, in the past, regarded the union of Northern Ireland and Great Britain as the best method of preserving their community and its way of life. More than one third of its population regard themselves as part of the wider Irish community. The minimal consensus which enables other communities to erect a framework within which to contain their political conflicts and regulate their social and economic life is here absent. Political instability is built into the very fabric of the state.

1.2. If the people of Northern Ireland are to govern themselves peacefully, democratically and liberally their institutions of government must reflect these realities. They must take account of the divisions within Northern Ireland, the conflicting national identities and the special relationships that Northern Ireland will always have with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. No amount of political rhetoric will make these realities any less real.

1.3. SDLP policy has consistently recognised these realities. It is based on two principles - that all sections of the Northern people should have access, by right, to the decision making process at all levels, and that the two national identities must be recognised in Northern Ireland's relations with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. These principles underlay the Party's original policy document "Towards a New Ireland", the Party's Manifesto for the 1973 Assembly and the February 1974 elections and the Sunningdale agreement which the Party helped to negotiate. The principles remain valid regardless of the status of Northern Ireland. It is the principles to which the Party is attached; the detailed institutional arrangements have always been open to negotiation. These principles are expressed in power-sharing and in an Irish dimension - Power-sharing in Government and an Irish dimension expressed through agreed North/South institutions.

1.4. These are the principles which this Party believes are the basis of any lasting solution - principles which allow for present realities and are flexible enough to permit the evolution of new and better community relationships based on understanding and friendship rather than prejudice and fear. These are the principles which have been accepted by the British Government and Parliament, the Irish Government and Parliament and a wide spectrum of opinion within Northern Ireland. These are the principles which have received a wider consensus of support in these islands than any other proposed solution.

2. BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE

2.1. However, we are gravely concerned that the failure of the present British Government to uphold the fully agreed solution based on these principles allied to their present policy as expressed in the White Paper, seriously undermines the possibility of achieving a solution based on these principles and could in fact lead to deeper and more disastrous conflict in this community and in these islands.

2.2. The present White Paper lacks clarity and direction and has inherent and dangerous contradictions. On the one hand the impression is clearly given that the people of Northern Ireland are free to sort out their own problems at a Convention of elected representatives and on the other that the most essential elements of any solution - power-sharing and an Irish dimension - are already laid down. Loyalists have accepted the former and are ignoring the latter and clearly intend to enforce their will following such elections. Should this happen and should the British Government submit yet again, the consequences for these islands would be very grave. It is therefore of paramount importance that before any election takes place to a Constitutional Convention that the electorate in N. Ireland are in no doubt whatsoever of the conditions under which such an election will take place. Power-sharing in Government and an Irish Dimension expressed through agreed North/South institutions must be clearly stated to be non-negotiable. Both Sovereign Governments should make this declaration. Then this whole community can get down to the task of building a stable and lasting peace.

3. NEW SITUATION

3.1. In the event of the Loyalist population rejecting these terms, democratically accepted by the overwhelming majority of people in these islands, and which guarantee the rights and aspirations of both sections of the Northern Irish community, in favour of a renewal of domination by one section over another, then a new situation will emerge involving a radical reappraisal of their position by both Sovereign Governments.

3.2. In such an eventuality the policy of this Party will be clear and uncompromising. In view of the situation which would exist in Northern Ireland in such circumstances and the evident unwillingness of the Loyalist population to accept the terms laid down by the Government and Parliament of the United Kingdom for the good government of Northern Ireland, we believe that it would be inevitable then that the fundamental basis of British policy towards Northern Ireland since 1920 would have to be re-examined. It would be evident that the attitude of the Loyalist populations would at that stage even further poison the relationships not only within Northern Ireland, not only between North and South in Ireland, but between Ireland and Britain. Such a small minority - just over 1% - of the population of these islands could no longer be allowed to frustrate the agreed will of all the rest of the British and Irish people by their intransigence and their refusal to agree to terms which would provide for justice and stability in Northern Ireland and which would be supported by the entire British and Irish Parliaments as well as a substantial section of Northern Ireland opinion itself.

3.3. The basis of British policy has always been a guarantee to the Unionist population of Northern Ireland that they could remain within the United Kingdom so long as a majority so wished. Implicit in such

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guarantees was the understanding that the same unionist population would accept and abide by the policies laid down by successive British Governments and Parliaments for the good government of Northern Ireland. In the new situation we are now considering, however, a majority of unionists, through their elected representatives would have interpreted these guarantees as a licence to dominate the minority in Northern Ireland and deprive them of basic civil rights. In these circumstances we believe that the unionist population would have foregone any right to such guarantees and that the guarantees enshrined in the Government of Ireland Act 1920, the Ireland Act 1949 and the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 would have to be withdrawn.

3.4. If this new situation should develop, therefore, we shall call on the British Government to declare a new basis to its policy and to declare that it will remain in Northern Ireland only until such time as agreed institutions of Government are established which allow the people of Ireland, North and South, to live together in harmony, peace and independence. The British Government should make it clear at that stage that it will use all its influence and power to bring about a situation in which Irish people of different traditions can build institutions of Government to provide for the lasting peace and stability on this island and for new and harmonious relations with Britain itself. It should seek the full co-operation of the Government and Parliament of the Republic of Ireland and the people of Northern Ireland in achieving these objectives and should set in train the political and constitutional steps required to bring them about. Implicit in such a policy would be the ruling out of indefinite direct rule, an independent Northern Ireland, integration with Great Britain or a new partition of Northern Ireland. For our part, we should insist that any new institutions must respect and protect the different traditions in this island.