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Campaign of Democracy in Ulster

In the absence of Kevin McNamara, M.P., who was in Europe on business, the chair was taken by Councillor Pat Byrne, who is originally from Dublin. The subject of the meeting was "Ulster - the way forward" and there were four speakers, Alan Carr, Denis Haughey, Rory Quinn T.D. and Gerry Pitt M.P. Only about 40, including 12 or 13 journalists, attended the meeting.

Pat Byrne said that the CDU existed to provide a platform for representatives of parties who desired a just and peaceful solution to the situation in Northern Ireland. He went on to criticise the Government's present "non-policy of neutrality" and argued that the basic goal to be achieved was that of working-class unity.

Alan Carr, who was the first speaker, advanced his by now traditional argument that direct rule was the only viable form of government for the North. It was politically acceptable to a majority in both communities, as could be seen from, ^{on} the one hand, the present loss of momentum of the Provo campaign and, on the other, from the reaction of the Protestant community to the recent Loyalist strike. He suggested therefore that direct rule should be converted into a long-term system of government for the Province, through increased representation, a proper application (i.e. not Orders in Council) of UK legislation and a proper system of local government. These three problems needed

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to be tackled in the immediate future and he urged the CDU to wage a campaign for them. This could well meet with a sympathetic response as the Government was already moving in this direction and all they needed was a push.

Carr went on to call for the full participation of the British Labour movement in Northern Ireland with a view to uniting the working class there. The present parties in the North institutionalised sectarianism and it was necessary therefore to extend the British parties to the North. The Labour Party could, for instance, move in and absorb the NILP and the SDLP.

Denis Haughey said it was now necessary for Britain to look again at Northern Ireland and redefine its policies there. The problem was to create consensus and that was what the Government must set about doing.

There were five options open to the Government, viz:- (1)

Integration: This would be an absolute and total mistake, and would mean the triumph of the British over the Irish tradition. Practically no one in the North or Britain wanted integration, which did not in any way address itself to the fundamental problem of creating consensus.

(2) Majority Rule: Power could be handed back to Northern Ireland through majority rule institutions, with built-in safeguards for Catholics. Again this would represent a triumph for one tradition and would neither lead to peace nor provide a basis for a solution. (3) Withdrawal: A declaration to leave, if done hastily, would bring about

civil conflict as left to themselves there was no consensus between the parties. Neither did it address itself to the fundamental problem of creating consensus. (4) Early creation of a united Ireland: This again would lead to civil disorder as the Unionists would look to arms to protect their identity and culture. It also did not address itself to the fundamental problem. (5) Partnership government: The only realistic solution was to recognise the present divisions and establish institutions that could work, be they called power-sharing or partnership. What was at present lacking in Government policy was a clear statement of that fact. Moreover, in recent months, those who favoured integration had had their hopes heightened though he himself did not believe the Government was moving towards that position. The Government should state clearly that it was working for partnership and would accept nothing else. But words were not enough. Governments were elected to take action. In Rhodesia and on the economy, for instance, it would be absurd for the Government to say to the groups concerned to get together yourselves and then come to us when you have sorted things out.

Since Roy Mason became NI Secretary, the Government's policy has reflected the one aim of ending terrorism which, though highly desirable in itself, was not a solution to the problem, which would only come back in more violent form later.

They could not wait for the violence to end as, while they were waiting, the process of politics would suffer severely. The SDLP, apart from Gerry Fitt, had no representative

status. Try as they might, they did not have the clout of elected representatives. If there was no political outlet, people would turn to other means.

Rory Quinn said he was frankly appalled at how far down their list of priorities Northern Ireland was for numerous MPs. He appealed to the British Labour Party to be consistent in its concern for human rights throughout the world and in the UK, and not to sweep the rights of 1½ million UK citizens in the North under the carpet. These 1½ million lived in appalling conditions, which wouldn't be tolerated anywhere else in the UK. The primary task was to put the North back on the agenda and now was the time, with violence decreasing, to try to seek a solution.

Gerry Fitt was afraid that Mason would arrogate to himself all the credit for ending the violence and, now that it was ending, would see no need for political action. He was also severely critical of the Prime Minister for showing no concern for the North in his speech and likewise attacked the integrationalist line of the NILP.

Mr Fitt went on to warn that if the British Government did not show alacrity and concern, violence would increase again, particularly as many disillusioned men were released from prison. The only solution was for the British Government to spell out that it was the sovereign power in the area and that there must be partnership government. The time had arrived when Unionists should be told the facts of life by

the Labour Government. In the absence of any political steps, there was no doubt that violence would erupt again in Northern Ireland.