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THE ALLIANCE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

presented to the

MULTI-PARTY TALKS ON THE FUTURE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

held at Castle Buildings, October 1997

THE ALLIANCE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

There has never been a time when all the parties here present were around one table, and since the last set of substantive talks in 1992 only the leaderships of Alliance and the SDLP remain as the veterans of such negotiations. Since then our efforts have been bent more towards the establishment of All-Party Talks, than the exchange of views which is the content of such Talks. If we are to reach agreement over the next few months, then time is very short, and must not be wasted. But if we are to understand each other, we must, before moving rapidly to the structural issues, share our different analyses of the problem.

Alliance was born, in the aftermath of the outbreak of the present 'troubles', out of a commitment to build a fair and just society, and the starting point for an understanding of our analysis may be found in the statement of fundamental principles upon which the party was founded in April 1970.

These identify Alliance as a liberal party, committed to pluralism, tolerance, participatory democracy, respect for human rights, non-doctrinaire economic policies, and the necessity of an impartial but firm application of the rule of law.

The principles also identify the constitutional dispute as being at the root of all our most fundamental difficulties in creating a pluralist Northern Ireland, and affirm the view that it is for the people of Northern Ireland to determine their own future.

It was natural therefore that when the Joint Declaration was published by the British and Irish Governments on 15 December 1994, Alliance gave an immediate and fully supportive response. That declaration, in its rejection of violence as a legitimate political instrument, its affirmation of the imperative of respect for human rights, and its watershed commitment to the requirement of separate consent from the people of Ireland, North and South, is regarded by Alliance as an international expression of some of our most cherished views. We believe that these are also some of the central elements of the constitutional settlement which we are met to negotiate.

In presenting our analysis of the problem we would start by noting the very ancient nature of our feud. It is no new thing for the North to be the scene of struggle. Centuries before the Reformation brought its religious divisions, and long before England was England, and began its struggle for control of the islands, the legendary Cuchulainn was defending Ulster against Queen Maeve. In more reliable history we are informed that when Congal of Ulster was fighting with Domnal of Meath as far back as 637 AD, his support came from his friends in Scotland. This suggests that there has never been a simple unity of the people of Ireland, that the Northern people have long had a sense of separateness, and often felt closer to those who lived across the channel in Scotland, than they did to those in the South-West of the island. This is not strange for we usually build relationships with those who we meet most easily and frequently, and the stretch of water between Antrim and Galloway, has throughout history been as much a channel of communication, as a boundary. For this, and many other historical reasons, the people of the North, with their many different origins,

religious views, political affiliations, and cultural attachments, have always been seen as forming a community, though without entirely consistent geographical boundaries.

Superimposed on the natural development of this and other communities, there has been the historic struggle for control of land in this archipelago of islands. The people of England, for many centuries sought to extend their control to include all the islands. This was expressed politically in the Unionist, or British Nationalist view that all the people on these islands should form one nation state. It found its expression in the United Kingdom, though a full political integration, the aim of unionism, was never achieved. This British Nationalist view, and particularly the attempts to enforce it, often in most unjust and cruel ways, provoked a natural reaction, the development of a strong Irish Nationalism. This rebelled against British Nationalism by expressing the view that it was not the people of the islands, but the people of Ireland, that should form a nation state. A whole mythology was created to support this view, and the real historic divisions of origin, religious affiliation, political conviction, and cultural diversity, were submerged in the struggle to create a separate Irish Republic, characterised by Gaelic culture, and Roman Catholic practice. These struggles are not unique. The fight for control of land, even between siblings, is a common feature of life, no less in rural Ireland than elsewhere and those who devote themselves to striving for control of land or property often acquire them at the cost of good relationships. Excessive pressure on one side, usually produces an equal and opposite reaction, and such rivals often find themselves forced into taking up a particular position, simply in contrast to their opponent.

Thirdly, the drive to create a nation state is a strong one. It is an attempt to include within certain borders as many of 'my people' as possible, while keeping 'the others' outside. This may arise whether or not there is an apparently natural geographical boundary, as in an island like ours. The up-side of such an ambition is the group cohesion it creates. The down-side of such nationalism is the powerful tendency to homogenize society and disregard the welfare of dissidents, and contribution of minority groups.

It is our view that the struggle between British and Irish Nationalisms for control, has tended to polarize our people, and to diminish the opportunity to recognize that many of us in this island do not wish to identify ourselves exclusively or even primarily, with a British, Protestant, monarchical ethos, nor with a Gaelic, Roman Catholic, republican ethos. We come from many different roots, with diverse faiths, conflicting political creeds and rich cultural variety. The political task which lies ahead is for us to create structures which facilitate the expression and exchange of this rich diversity. To institutionalize the divisions in our community would be failure. We must recognize them, and then seek to overcome them.

This by definition requires something much less tidy than the exclusivist propositions designed to give expression to Irish Unity, or a simple United Kingdom, or even the apparently more progressive jointery which sees a solution in terms of parity of esteem for only these two views.

We have earlier mentioned the principles of the Joint Declaration of 1993, and in our view these provide an excellent basis for progress. When combined with the widely

accepted, three sets of relationships, upon which in recent years, talks have been based, a useful map emerges.

Firstly, it is for the people of Northern Ireland to find a way of living together, and deciding their own constitutional future. That we in Northern Ireland are divided on this is clear, so some other principles must be outlined to assist us in reaching agreement. Violence must not be regarded as a legitimate political instrument, and it is an enormous help in the search for a settlement that the use of terrorism has been set aside by both sides. It is also of central importance that the rights of every individual must be respected and the contributions of all minorities must be welcomed, facilitated and valued.

Whilst the people of Northern Ireland are more than likely to decide, for economic, social, historical and other reasons to remain for the foreseeable future within the United Kingdom, the significance of our shared island home cannot continue to be minimized. The economic, environmental and social imperatives of cooperation can only be ignored at great cost to all of us. Structures within Northern Ireland should have institutional opportunities to work alongside the political arrangements in the Republic of Ireland. These institutions should express the realities of our relationships, rather than a forced political agenda, so some may have more responsibilities than others, some may extend to the whole island, and others to this part or that. In all we should be striving to help relationships grow, rather than force our people into fulfilling the requirements of a political creed.

Thirdly, the British and Irish Governments must deepen their mutual respect through constitutional recognition. It would be counter-productive if the Irish Government sees it as important only to address the sensitivities of Nationalists in the North, and the British Government is only really concerned about Northern Unionists. Both Governments must be sensitive to the anxieties and aspirations of all sections of the people of Northern Ireland, and divorce themselves from any temptation to use partisanship as a card to be played in their own domestic politics, now or in the future.

Finally, we must all be prepared to pay a price for peace. An honourable compromise will require each giving up elements of political control. London, Dublin, and our divided people must understand that there will not be mutual satisfaction, without significant sacrifice, but surely after all this time, we have begun to realize, the cost of failure, and to appreciate that the prize of peace, is worth the price of peace.

Strand One

Opening Address Tuesday October 7

- Labour welcomes the opening of Strand One and hopes that all Parties will participate in a spirit of understanding of the views of all other participants.

While Labour holds no strong views on the traditional constitutional issues it will endeavour to ensure that discussions and agreements reflect the desires and concerns of all traditions. Questions of identity must be addressed openly and honestly and our objective must be to establish a society where cultural pluralism is the norm and is cherished by all. Such pluralism should not threaten any but bind all in recognition of our different but interwoven history.

The central principle of all discussions must be directed towards creating a genuine integrated society at peace with itself and to this end agreement must include removing the barriers to integration. Fundamentally and crucially we must aim to create not two communities treated equally but one community where everyone is treated equally.

Such integration of our people must be addressed in an innovative way where old paradigms are discarded and we ask the simple question. What arrangements and governance best meet the socio economic needs of our people going into the next century. Just because our ancestors, in these islands, found simple majoritarian government the most efficient method does not mean we inherit it as a tablet of stone. Equally, it is not credible to pretend that N. Ireland has not existed for nearly eighty years and is a mere aberration that will be consigned to history. Northern Ireland is here so let's stop pretending that it will either go away or that it can return to the old ways. Neither view is credible and we do our people a disservice to pretend otherwise.

We must search for schemes and systems that best meet our needs going forward not going backward. This means being open and honest not only with each other in this building but with the people outside who, in many respects, have already grasped these truths.

The absence of acceptable government structures has, through force of necessity, created systems that leave our people totally alienated from decision making. In agreeing to new local structures we must search for innovation and not merely ask how

the 'Westminster Model' can be applied to our situation. It has been attempted here and patently failed.

Simply to agree a legislature to 'run' Northern Ireland may not be the answer in itself. We should examine how people can actively participate in all facets of government so that power is diffuse and as near to the people and their aspirations as possible. Local government, Boards and all other such structures should form part of these discussions.

Labour supports the introduction of a comprehensive Bill of Rights and looks forward to discussing this and the mechanisms for ensuring that collective and individual rights are protected. We also look forward to discussions on current legislation and its effectiveness.

Every society requires a police service and in envisaging our police of the future we cannot proceed simply from the position of retaining or disbanding the RUC. No, we must ask what kind of society will we have and what kind of policing will best service that community. Widespread community support, and we mean widespread, and an efficient police service must be the only benchmark in our deliberations.

Finally, all of these matters and, no doubt others, lead to the background by which it will all be judged; the social and economic well being of all our people. We all know that Northern Ireland has held together, socially and economically, despite itself but this is a situation that will not go on forever. The notion that we can play at politics and never suffer the consequences will change as the world grows tired of our irresponsibility. Our communities will then inherit the consequences. Are we simply prepared to let that happen. It's an old saying, but a true one, and probably increasingly relevant in the future, you and your children cannot eat flags or be sustained on slogans.

What is being presented to us here is the opportunity to not only reach agreed political arrangements but to unleash the real potential of the people. To create a dynamic region that is a place where people vote with their feet to come to, rather than driving its brightest and best away.

- That unleashing of our dynamism will allow us to address the real areas of concern in education, health, elderly, poverty and numerous other 'bread and butter' issues. As of
- now we are impotent to deliver as we merely lobby in hope of benefit. Lets us grasp this opportunity to settle old fashion disagreements and really change the lives of our people for the better and forever.

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

OPENING STATEMENT - To Strand 1 of the Multi-Party Negotiations
on Northern Ireland - October, 7th 1997

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition welcomes these negotiations with an optimism born out of necessity. We have all lived too long in circumstances of unacceptable fear and insecurity - an insecurity that has been tragically underlined countless times. It is now timely that we should concentrate on the task of negotiating solutions to our shared problems rather than concentrating on mutually exclusive aspirations. It is important that we grasp this opportunity to untangle possibilities for change, rather than seeking to rely on the certainties of the past. Is there any participant who has not suffered as a result of these conflicting certainties?

We all have much work to do in building confidence and in effectively ensuring the inclusion of the wide diversity of view points that exist within Northern Ireland. Having utilised the concept of sufficient consensus we have learnt that consensus must be built and is not simply arrived at. In Strand 1 the task we set ourselves is to continue to strive for a balanced accommodation of as many interests as possible. The reality is that we are living in a society in conflict, and hence we require new ideas about how to resolve our age old problems through consensual solutions and imaginative approaches.

It is important that we give attention to the various ways in which we can ensure that people are made to feel part of any political progress. The task of peacebuilding that we all face must be seen as an open and accessible system, that seeks to win as many advocates and allies as possible. It is crucial that we identify mechanisms that will enable and encourage local communities and various interests to participate in this process of peacebuilding, and to feel a share of responsibility for the future of this society; rather than leaving this task exclusively to the owners of this negotiating table. We need to see the peacebuilding that we are all engaged in, as an interdependent model, which acknowledges the importance of this negotiating table but recognises that it is not the exclusive deliverer and sustainer of peace. We need to examine how we can bring all sectors of our society to a point where they feel that they are respected, and that they can associate themselves with the peacebuilding process. We believe that people cannot be expected to vote in a referendum without an understanding of how, and why, we arrived at our eventual conclusions.

We accept the centrality of the constitutional issues to the substantive negotiations but we want to approach these issues in a manner that will seek to draw out themes, and even fears that our divided society may well hold in common.

- How can we recognise the identities and traditions of the main communities in Northern Ireland on the basis of equity and human rights?
- How can we structure the recognition of, and the right to, differences in the context of a pluralist state. And what lessons does this hold for the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom?
- How can this small piece of land recognise our British and Irish identities in a new, unique constitutional arrangement that will have sufficient acceptance to be stable, but can also be dynamic enough to allow for development and change?

We recognise the need to address all these issues and more but we also want to examine other important concerns such as:

- How can we formulate decision-making structures that are closer to people and local communities.
- How can we ensure gender equity through new electoral arrangements and appropriate social support - as we have seen in practice in South Africa and in the current discussions on a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly. This British Government has gone a long way towards changing the face of democracy by bringing women forward and ensuring their place in decision making processes.

We expect no less of them, or of any party around this table, in determining new political arrangements that are inclusive of women in Northern Ireland. Will there come a time when the Women's Coalition has no longer a job to do in this regard?

- How can we develop the concept of participative democracy that can draw on the expertise of the many sectors in our society - business, trade unions, agriculture and the voluntary sector among others - to ensure that any new political system here will reflect a new social and economic agenda that is growing so wonderfully in the communities of Northern Ireland at this time?

- How do we guarantee that human rights will be protected in the context of any new constitutional framework?

In relation to civil and political rights, we also see social and economic rights as human rights particularly in the context of the serious social and economic disadvantage which has haunted Northern Ireland for so long. We emphasise the right to live free from violence, intimidation, sectarianism and discrimination in all its manifestations. We should build on the example of the Reconstruction and Development Programme in South Africa, which brings together a comprehensive approach to rights, equity and development. There are many other issues that the Women's Coalition would wish to table for discussion - not least matters relating to the victims of the conflict and the position of politically motivated prisoners.

Justice issues are paramount in a conflict society such as ours and we need to invest in these issues if we are to secure sustainable peace.

We also want to see confidence building measures but these must not be seen as gifts or used as tests or obstacles within these negotiations. They should be used as measures aimed at creating a basis of mutual respect and tentative trust.

The manner in which we deal with these difficult issues during Strand 1 will also be crucial to their success. We are conscious of the damage done to Northern Ireland by decades of adversarial politics. We do not see politics as a battle arena for the total victory of one side over another. Instead we see it as crucial for us all to work constructively towards a form of democracy that will be open and can reflect a diversity of interests.

We ourselves were drawn together by a vision of the type of society that we might yet achieve in Northern Ireland: a society that is open and pluralist; a society that has managed to escape the "scalded memories" and to move away from conflicting political cultures which thrive on a sense of exclusion, defensiveness and victimisation.

Finally, it is our belief that we must spend time in thinking about the values that we wish to see informing the practice of government and of society as a whole. It would be political progress if Strand 1 could be driven by values and visions for the future, rather than concentrating on protecting historical certainties.

Despite the inevitable difficulties we will face, the Women's Coalition is optimistic, feeling that the climate of this society is right for successful negotiations.

The opinion polls that we all saw recently leave us in no doubt that while people of all political hues may be fearful of the possible outcome of this process, they still recognise the importance of us reaching agreement. It is also accepted that Northern Ireland has reached the end of the road in terms of the international acceptance of political intransigence. It is only so many times that the bleak grey spires of Fermanagh can re-emerge from the mists of violence. We need these negotiations to work and we need the ability to compromise to make them work.

It is the people who have suffered the most in Northern Ireland who seem the most prepared to accept the need for political compromise. We owe it to the generosity of such people to rise to this challenge.