

WORKERS PARTY

Northern Ireland Regional Executive

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For The Attention of News Editor

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FRESH PROPOSALS TO END POLITICAL DEADLOCK

Late last February The Workers' Party initiated a series meetings with all pro-agreement parties to discuss the crisis which brought about the suspension of the Northern Ireland Executive. Stemming from our historical experience and the totally different political perspective we hold we have formulated a set of proposals, which if taken together, we believe, would allow for the executive to be reinstated and the issue of decommissioning to be dealt with in a credible and positive manner.

Over the course of the last number of weeks we have met with the following:-

the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern
the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Mr. Peter Mandelson
the Ulster Unionist Party
Sinn Fein
The Social Democratic and Labour Party
the Fine Gael leader, Mr. John Bruton
the Labour Party leader, Mr. Ruairi Quinn
Mr. Niall Andrews MEP
the Alliance Party
the Progressive Unionist Party
the Ulster Democratic Party
the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
the Confederation of British Industry
senior diplomats of the British Embassy in Dublin
senior diplomats of the United States Embassy in Dublin

We will be meeting with the Green Party / Comhaontas Glas within the next few days.

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We also expect to meet with the Chief Constable of the RUC, Mr. Ronnie Flanagan and the Garda Commissioner, Mr. Pat Byrne very shortly. In addition we have requested meetings with the leadership of the Provisional IRA, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association and are hopeful of securing these meetings shortly.

Having met or about to meet with the aforementioned, encompassing the two governments, all of the parties which support the Good Friday Agreement, with the exception of the Progressive Democrats, we wish to make the following observations and proposals.

Sometimes in a crisis such as currently exists it is worthwhile reflecting on what has been achieved over the past few years.

Acceptance of the principle of consent
Removal of Articles 2 & 3 of the Irish Constitution
Local Devolved Assembly established in Northern Ireland
Formation of a broad-based administration representing all major parties in the community
The Patten Report on Police changes in the RUC leading to a more broad-based police service receiving support and acceptance across the society
Release of Prisoners
North-South Bodies established
Council of the Isles established

Coupled with all of the above we also place great stress on the new political environment where the legitimate hopes and aspirations of all people are recognised and given their due place in society.

All the parties that we met with expressed their desire to see devolved democratic government re-established in Northern Ireland. All the parties expressed a wish to see something done but all felt unable at this stage to say what this something should be. Again all stated the great need, indeed that it was essential to have movement very soon if the gains made were not to be lost.

The issue of decommissioning is for all the parties the most serious and important. We well recognise the great difficulties this issue imposes on all parties involved.

The following proposals could provide the conditions upon which, if given the support and goodwill of all pro-agreement parties on the basis which the People's Agreement was endorsed, the peace process can be re-secured and the Executive reinstated.

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1. We believe that the realities of the present serious situation demand that the Executive must be reinstated immediately but along with its reinstatement we must have a credible, verifiable timetable for all paramilitaries to disarm.
2. The British Government must declare that a return to direct rule or joint sovereignty is not an option and that democratic devolved government must be maintained in Northern Ireland.
3. We propose that General De Chastelain's Commission should have its term extended for a period of at least 18-24 months and along with this extension to clarify and remove all ambiguities concerning the steps necessary for all armed groups to disarm.
4. As an immediate step towards building trust we say there must be an end now to all the so-called punishment attacks.
5. That the paramilitaries immediately reappoint their interlocutors to General De Chastelain's Commission.
6. Now that the guns are silent and to ensure this situation continues all paramilitaries must make a declaration that they accept the democratic structures now established and that they will work only within these democratic structures to achieve any political aims and objectives.
7. All the political parties allied to or who speak for paramilitary organisations have repeatedly stated their full and unequivocal support for the Good Friday Agreement so it is reasonable to ask Sinn Fein to call upon the IRA to accept and fully support the Good Friday Agreement and it is equally reasonable to ask the Progressive Unionist Party and the Ulster Democratic Party to call upon those paramilitary organisations to which they are allied to do likewise.
8. That the paramilitaries declare that they accept the will of the people as expressed in the referenda which took place in 1998 when the Good Friday Agreement was ratified by an overwhelming majority of the people of all Ireland.

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9. We are of the firm opinion that along with all the positive proposals that have been introduced over the past few years one most important proposal has been ignored. This is the issue of a Bill of Rights, which was one of the primary demands of the Civil Rights Association of the 1960s and remains a fundamental demand of all democrats today. The introduction of such a law would make a significant difference in the lives of the people.
10. We urge that Mr. David Trimble as leader of the UUP and the First Minister of the Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly be invited to address the Oireachtas. It would be (i) a positive declaration that the people of the Republic are at one with him in the struggle for democracy, and (ii) a wonderful opportunity for Mr. Trimble to speak directly to all of the Irish people.
11. In future all negotiations should be between all the parties to the agreement and not between individual parties.
12. Along with the above measures and declarations the British Government should take immediate steps to reduce British Army presence in sensitive areas and close military bases as soon as possible in light of the improved security situation which would flow from the above positive steps taken by the paramilitary groups.
13. The European Union should have a role in this process. Given that within the EU we have ongoing political problems which have resulted in terrorist actions, Spain/Basque, France/Corsica, Northern Ireland plus the potential that exists when countries such as Cyprus with a divided community and occupied by Turkey and Turkey joins with its problem of Kurdish nationalism these will then also become EU problems. In the light of this it would seem to be area where the EU should begin to develop policies and action which will help to eliminate the potential for division and terrorism.

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