

# news from Labour

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**EMBARGO: 17.00 HRS 4TH JUNE 1996**

## **THE JOHN SMITH MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**GIVEN BY DR MARJORIE MOWLAM MP**

**SHADOW NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY**

**At The Dunadry Hotel, 2 Islandreagh Drive  
Dunadry, Co. Antrim  
Northern Ireland**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Labour** 

Party - and that a backlash would be so counter-productive as to undermine the changes achieved

However, change was necessary and some pain inevitable to get there. And I, like many others backed the changes. You won't see the impact until after the next election. Whatever the outcome of that election, the House of Commons will be radically changed - we should have nearly 100 Labour women. That will change the nature of how politics operates.

I joined John Smith's Shadow Cabinet - and my abiding memory of him will be his directness, his honesty, his ability to prioritise and go directly for the political jugular.

When offering me my first Shadow Cabinet post he said, "this job might look minor and lacking political meat, but I assure you it is not. You can either make a success or a political balls-up of it, its up to you. I'm not sure which you will do - but good luck."

He was candid, but he also had a very kind and gentle side - perhaps not often seen in the Shadow Cabinet, but well known.

His PPS, Hilary Armstrong, travelled with him extensively and is a fund of stories about the time he spent - not with names to be seen with, but with party members who had given years of service.

That was his style. On his last visit to Belfast, in the midst of all the media clamour, John took the time to sit down with voluntary sector groups to discuss their specific experiences and concerns.

I know that I will always remember John's contribution to the Labour movement. Hilary will carry it with her, and Elizabeth, Sarah, Jane and Catherine will always be proud and strong as a result of what the man in their family gave them - just as he gave to the larger family of the Labour movement.

John Smith would not have flinched at appointing a woman to the Northern Ireland brief for the first time.

Yet, I know that when I'm asked, as I often am "Do I want the job? Do I really care? ", sometimes underneath, implicit, is the question "is it a job for a woman?"

The answer is yes to all three questions - although whether I get the job or not depends less on my wanting it and more on the electorate, the Parliamentary Labour party and on Tony Blair.

Its difficult and dangerous to prejudge any of the above. The one I know best, Tony Blair, I am most confident of.

He and I discuss the politics of Northern Ireland regularly in meetings or with colleagues at the Shadow Cabinet. But I can judge best his knowledge of the subject by our irregular train journeys North to our constituencies.

There are a number of aspects of the present political situation in Northern Ireland which would have greatly concerned John Smith, but, in my opinion, at the same time appealed to his sense of irony.

What would John have made of the elections that have just been fought - which many people didn't see the point of and thought were an unnecessary pain barrier to go through to arrive at the all important negotiations on June 10th?

I think he would have looked at the hurdles, the muddles and the confusion that all of us politicians get ourselves into while making decisions, and understood and smiled at the frailty and limitations of human nature.

But at the same time he would have been deeply and immensely proud of the people of Northern Ireland - of their commonsense and sound judgement.

He believed that if politicians don't lose touch and keep listening to their constituents - they won't go far wrong.

I know without a shadow of a doubt that he would have welcomed the formation and participation of the Northern Ireland Womens' Coalition in the political fight.

He, like me, would have been mindful of the work and effort of women in the main political parties struggling against the odds to break through the glass ceiling - but at the same time would have understood the importance, the symbolic message, the encouragement to women in the established political parties that the coalition provides by its very existence.

Northern Ireland has a very poor record on women in public office. It has no female MPs or MEPs. Only 11% of the Councillors in Northern Ireland are women.

This situation must be remedied.

But it doesn't mean women have been wholly absent from decision-making.

John's commitment to greater and fuller participation by women is one of the lasting changes that his leadership of the Labour party will have on British politics.

The small proportion of women at Westminster puts us at ninth out of the 14 countries in the E.U.

We have to tackle this problem as a party.

John took the party down this route with a forthrightness and determination for which he was known.

The mechanism put in place - 100% women-only shortlists - has since been challenged. For many it was a step too far. I, too, began by thinking it was out of step with the culture of the

Party - and that a backlash would be so counter-productive as to undermine the changes achieved

However, change was necessary and some pain inevitable to get there. And I, like many others backed the changes. You won't see the impact until after the next election. Whatever the outcome of that election, the House of Commons will be radically changed - we should have nearly 100 Labour women. That will change the nature of how politics operates.

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Heading for Darlington, we will chat about issues of the day, gossip about party matters and then just talk about Ireland.

His knowledge and depth of understanding is impressive - he feels strongly and cares about the issue.

He always returns to his biggest fear - that of complacency. As he rightly says, however fine the intentions, however good the policy - we have to be in government to make a real difference to people's lives.

So, with such an important overwhelming caveat to my chances - that of being elected and appointed I hope to have the opportunity to do the job.

Given the chance, I will try and bring to the office a directness and honesty which sometimes gets me in trouble - as some of the Northern Ireland MPs could tell you.

But that's me, and I hope the up-side that the directness brings will counter-balance any offence that might be caused along the way.

I also believe that I am a good listener which is crucial for a Westminster politician in this job.

If there is one characteristic that I think all politicians need - but have to work at - its that of humility. I think it's central to this job.

Looking back through the sad and tragic history of Northern Ireland, the importance of humility as well as confidence and determination to achieve your goals is crucial. It is a sad reflection on us all that efforts to understand our history - but not to live in it - have had such a limited success.

But unless we get to the point of understanding our past, but thinking about our future, we are all going to have difficulty moving forward.

Humility is an element of that equation.

As American writer Maya Angelou wrote,

"History despite its wrench and pain,  
Cannot be unlived. But if faced with courage,  
Need not be lived again."

In Northern Ireland I think we all have to start with history - a history where we have all played our part - which can be adduced to justify, excuse or blame for present or past actions.

For those who have lost loved ones, for the families torn apart, their memory and their sadness will never be forgotten.

But we also have to work very hard to break the cycle of dwelling in the past to justify the present - otherwise it will be impossible to build confidently for the future.

Such a step takes forgiveness - I do not use the word in any religious sense - I am no great believer - I use it in the sense of us all being strong enough to forgive each other for the past.

An enormous demand I know.

For some to forgive leads to a desire to blame, feel guilt, anger and hurt. For me with no personal history or family ties in Ireland, studying our history just fills me with a sadness, and a desire for everyone to be strong enough to say I'm sorry about the past.

Let's remember, understand and build for the future.

It's difficult to know what the next week will bring. Let alone the months and years in the development of the peace process in Northern Ireland.

The difficulty is compounded by not knowing when or if we will see a change in Government.

That is why today I want to set out what will be Labour's priorities if we form the next Government in Westminster

The values at the heart of Labour's policies - fairness, justice and equality of opportunity - are crucial to Northern Ireland.

They drive our policy-making in all areas along with the central belief that we can do so much more together than we can do apart.

Equally, we believe that many of our policy initiatives will be made far more productive by effective cross-border co-operation - like that developing now between universities and within industries.

There is no way that I could cover all the policy areas in a meaningful way in the time we have available here today.

So if I don't mention a specific area, this does not mean that it's not important or that we don't have policies.

One area desperately in need of change is that of welfare policy.

Our welfare system has to adapt to meet the changes of today's world, where family structures and where the nature of work itself has changed so much

The present Government are creating a whole section of our society that is excluded from participation in the community - excluded from opportunities, racked by poverty and locked into dependency.

We need a new relationship between the welfare state and the individual who turns to it for help: a relationship which treats them as a citizen and not a supplicant, and with a combination of the rights and responsibilities that flow with citizenship.

We need a change in the emphasis of the Department of Health and Social Security from dealing with the consequences of poverty to tackling its causes, in particular with a comprehensive "welfare-to-work" strategy.

Our spokesperson on economic development - Eric Illsley MP is here with us tonight. He will be working to implement Labour's economic policies in Northern Ireland.

Creating jobs and ending the misery of long-term unemployment is a key priority for labour.

Labour's first budget will be a budget to rescue a lost generation of young people. It will be part of a comprehensive strategy to tackle what is an educational and employment crisis.

Among other things,

- we have proposed a new deal for the under 25s - paid for by part of the windfall utilities levy. We will ensure that everyone under 25 who is out of work for more than 6 months is offered the choice of either a job in the private sector; work in the voluntary sector; full time education; or a place in Labour's environmental task force.
- and we will also use part of these resources to fund a tax rebate for employers taking on the long-term unemployed;
- we will relax the 16 hour rule which penalises the long-term unemployed wanting to study;
- and we will help key job creators too through measures like our Moratorium Law to give small firms in financial difficulty the time to develop a rescue package and measures to save them from the dangers of late payment.

We believe that everyone should have a stake in the economy. But we know how hard that is if you don't have a job - and one with a decent wage and decent conditions.

We believe in basic rights at work for all whether your full or part time. That is why we will,

- Sign up to the social chapter to ensure that UK workers are treated as fairly as other workers in the European Union.
- ensure everyone has the right to join a trade union;
- and introduce a minimum wage.

There has been a great deal of debate about the effects of a minimum wage on competitiveness. We have always argued that innovation, high-skill, high-tech - not sweat shop wages and poor conditions - that's what gives companies the competitive edge.

In Northern Ireland where wages are low - though not as low as in my own area of the North East - you'll never compete with the low wage levels of economies in parts of Asia for example.

To see how you *can* compete - high-skills, high-tech, innovation - you need look no further than a textile company here in Northern Ireland called Lintrend Inverbleach. As the managing director says "Our strength lies in our technological innovation".

And what are the results? They're now exporting textiles to the Middle East in direct competition with low-wage economies like Korea and China. And they expect to double their workforce in the next two years.

It is because Labour believes in the equal worth of every person that we will manage the economy to provide opportunity for the many, not privilege for the few.

These same principles apply to areas that are the cornerstone of our policies like education and training.

Starting with early learning - Northern Ireland has only half the nursery places available to three and four year olds that England has.

So we will use the resources currently allocated for nursery vouchers to extend preschool education for every four year old whose parents want it. And we will work with the private sector to extend provision to three year olds.

We have new policies in relation to Secondary, Further and Higher education - for full and part-time students - which we will be publishing shortly in a consultation paper.

Opportunity for the many not privilege for the few. That applies to health care too.

I know the concerns felt by people working in the NHS in Northern Ireland as well as the people who use it and rely on it. Yet despite the pressures and problems the service and the standards of care remain excellent.

Labour believes that the NHS should be run with minimum waste and maximum efficiency. But money must be put to its most effective use - spending more on patient care and less on the bureaucracy that supports the internal market.

Labour will put a stop to the two-tier health service:

- by removing the internal market from the NHS;

- by replacing GP fundholding with GP commissioning to give doctors - the people who know and care - a bigger say in an areas health needs and save money on bureaucracy too.

Labour values - fairness, justice, equality of opportunity.

We will bring these to bear on the policies that effect peoples lives.

In Northern Ireland, because of the history, because of the divisions these values translate in different ways.

Fairness must take account of a history of unfairness.

Justice of a history of injustice.

Equality of opportunity a history of division.

The short-hand phrases we use are legendary - parity of esteem, equal respect for both traditions, mutual recognition of aspirations.

These aims require clear policies formed on the basis of our beliefs but specific to Northern Ireland.

Of crucial importance to all people across the UK will be Labour's incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights and the passing of a Freedom of Information Act.

Incorporation of the ECHR would be an important statement for Labour, particularly in Northern Ireland, as early proof of our commitment to equal respect for the rights of individuals. The Freedom of Information Act would also provide more open Government which is essential in Northern Ireland, as it is throughout the rest of the United Kingdom.

In addition, we would make it an early priority to take away the hereditary rights of individuals to sit in the House of Lords. It is totally unacceptable in this day and age, that people have a job simply as a result of who their parents were.

After the incorporation of the ECHR, I hope that Northern Ireland parties would already be discussing the production of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland - a process Labour would encourage, promote and develop

There is a need to recognise and protect the identities of both communities in Northern Ireland, their language and cultural rights, their freedom of thought and expression as communities as well as individuals.

A Bill of Rights could:

- build on and augment the ECHR
- dovetail with, and where necessary, re-codify existing protections
- and find resonance in provisions in the Republic of Ireland to ensure that both communities can have full confidence that the same rights will be protected now and into the future.

Similarly, I hope the parties will also have made progress in the area of policing. But despite the uncertainty about the future, we cannot postpone consultation on the function and control of the police in Northern Ireland.

Rigorous impartiality in the conduct of policing is vital to public confidence in any community.

In a divided community like Northern Ireland, the police are constantly on the front line. And against these odds the men and women of the RUC have shown great courage and determination.

But, for there to be a successful political settlement, the police service has to command the loyalty of all sections of society in Northern Ireland to shore up any new political developments.

Labour has produced a consultation paper - we have copies here - on policing in Northern Ireland - a credit to the work of my colleague Tony Worthington - which contains specific proposals on issues such as:

- The powers of the Secretary of State;
- The role of the Police Community Liaison Committees,
- The need for the Police Authority to show every year how progress has been made towards achieving a police service with more catholic and women officers.

Much of the debate on policing has focused on names and symbols. These are significant and important matters, but we believe that there is a crucial debate about the future structure and style of policing in Northern Ireland to be had first.

Similarly, our recommendations on Fair Employment, we hope will be of benefit to the current review being carried out by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.

Again, a copy of our submission to the Employment Equality Review, produced by my colleague Jim Dowd is available here today.

Our submission contains specific recommendations on

- The crucial importance of Fair Employment legislation and how it could be enhanced;
- The use and effectiveness of Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment Guidelines (PAFT);
- and the value of Targeting Social Need.

Steps that we will take to make the changes that are necessary.

Labour measures based on Labour values.

My main attention, my focus, will be on the basic constitutional questions where a sense of vision for the future - which necessitates risks to be taken - is central.

Our principles which will guide a Labour government on constitutional change have been clearly stated for a number of years, and have not changed.

Labour has an historical commitment to unity by consent.

That means that reconciliation between the two parts of Ireland can only come about on the basis of consent.

Our policy embraces four key principles:

- firstly that any change in the status of Northern Ireland can only come about through consent and by agreement between the two main traditions - unionist and nationalist;
- secondly that progress can only come through the two Governments working together to guarantee a settlement;
- thirdly that increasing cross border co-operation to make the border less relevant is simply commonsense;
- and fourthly that the rights and aspirations of both traditions must be fairly represented and fully respected.

Our commitment remains - but what has changed radically in the last 11 years is the political context.

- The Anglo-Irish Agreement
- Peter Brooke's proclamation in 1990 that Britain had no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland.

- The Downing Street Declaration
- The Joint Framework Document

These have all been great milestones on the road to where we are today.

The political paradigm has shifted, and we are all charged to respond in a constructive and flexible way.

Consent is an indispensable condition for constitutional change - defined we believe in a very constructive way in the Joint Declaration - where it is accepted that the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people in Northern Ireland.

It seems pretty clear to me that the acceptance of the principle of consent means that Northern Ireland will continue as part of the UK for a long time into the future, that is to say there isn't consent for a united Ireland among unionists.

It is equally clear that the existing status of Northern Ireland does not command the consent of nationalists.

There is a need for new arrangements and structures

The maintenance of the status quo is not an option.

And to that effect, no party should have a veto on political progress.

The competing constitutional claims of the two nations are the background to the division in Northern Ireland.

As a result, Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ireland are a source of great anxiety to unionists, just as the Government of Ireland Act in Britain underlines the concerns of Nationalists.

That is why balanced constitutional change - agreed between the two governments is an essential part of an overall settlement.

The settlement of our constitutional claims within a broadly-based agreement and developing and extending co-operation between our two countries through an enhanced role for the inter-governmental conference or by other means will help cement relationships which have been fostered in recent years.

As two nations within the European Union I look forward to a new era in British-Irish relations.

Sadly the beginning of the Irish Presidency of the European Union seems inevitably to be marred by this Tory Government's mismanagement of the beef industry's serious problems creating a crisis throughout Europe and specifically a crisis in the UK's relationship with Europe

A Labour Government would look to build a stronger, more co-operative partnership.

Labour believes that cross border co-operation on the island of Ireland and encouraging institutions which reflect that is simply commonsense.

The creation of new North/South institutions would not just serve economic advantages - although they undoubtedly would - they would also serve to help heal the divisions among the communities in Ireland and give effect to Labour's principle of making the border increasingly less relevant, promoting reconciliation and healing division.

Labour believes that the legitimate identities and aspirations of both traditions must be fairly represented and fully respected.

Within Northern Ireland we believe in decentralisation so that decisions are taken closer to the people - more openness and proper respect for human rights are all part of Labour's general commitment to constitutional and rights-based reform.

These reforms of course apply in Northern Ireland but they must be achieved because of the unique situation in Northern Ireland - in the context of a balanced overall settlement.

A settlement in which there would have to be provisions to establish a strong devolved assembly in Northern Ireland, based upon proportional representation, to ensure fair representation for each party.

The arrangements for devolved government will also need to contain checks and balances to ensure that in the future no one community can dominate the other.

There can be no return to a Stormont-like regime.

Hopefully, the politicians will be able to reach an accommodation to return power closer to the people of Northern Ireland, in co-operation with people across the whole island.

I hope that process will be inclusive. I hope it will enable politicians to think differently - not just to commit to closed and inaccessible arrangements for decision making that are increasingly losing public faith in democracies elsewhere in Europe.

Churches, businesses, trade unions and the voluntary sector have all played their part in the political process in Northern Ireland over the last 25 years. Let's try and include them in the future, alongside the political parties.

Ironically, despite the opposition and scepticism towards the new Forum elected last week, I

believe that if it is used sensibly by the politicians, it could provide a useful area for developing dialogue and understanding.

Rather than just a politicians talking shop, it could be different and exciting. It could bring a wealth of talent - elected and otherwise - to bear on matters referred to it by the negotiators - if they agree to - or on other issues such as those I have spoken about today.

This process - as showed by the peace Forum in Dublin or by the work of the Opsahl report - of bringing other voices into play is an important part of developing 'normal' politics in Northern Ireland.

Both positive and negative interpretations flow from the elections last week.

The positive is the clear determination on the part of the people of Northern Ireland to have their voices heard in this process. Support for some of the smaller parties - including the Womens' coalition - reflects the desire to see new views put across.

And I was pleased to see the Ulster Democratic Party and the Progressive Unionist Party begin to build support among the electorate and obtain their seats at the talks.

I should point out - in case there is any misunderstanding - that the successful Labour candidates in the election have no links with my own party.

The negative is the danger of entrenched positions having been reinforced during the campaign which reduce the desire of some parties to seek compromise.

Unfortunately polling taken since the election doesn't help the picture. Responses to Ulster Marketing Surveys' poll in the wake of last week's election show both the depth of mistrust amongst the parties and their supporters and the public's deep scepticism about the potential for reaching an agreement.

People also feel that progress will be limited over the Summer - with the intervening holidays.

That puts a focus on September when pressure may also be building further on the electoral politics in Westminster. So it is even more important that we begin to set out our programme for Government to give the parties a clear idea of what Labour will do.

But we will continue to support a bi-partisan position as long as the Government is not playing party politics.

For now, we must focus on the beginning of the talks. Because it is only by sitting down and talking, by negotiating, that a peaceful settlement will ever be achieved.

There are still a number of difficult questions to be answered at this stage.

Not knowing the format for the talks or the structure and process in place for

decommissioning can only increase fear between the different parties.

This leads to greater misunderstanding and mistrust.

Agreement therefore between the British and Irish is crucial - today or in the days ahead. When they have not worked together in the past the process has always faltered.

There are a number of critical issues.

First the necessity of an IRA ceasefire to facilitate Sinn Fein's participation in the talks on June 10th. A ceasefire is central. It cannot be avoided. It is essential that all parties round the table are committed to democratic and constitutional principles and to opposing violence.

All pressure and encouragement must be put on the IRA to call such a ceasefire.

Labour adds its voice to this call - if we were in Government we would stand as firm as the present British and Irish governments calling for such an immediate ceasefire.

If a ceasefire is called by the IRA there should be an acknowledgment of the IRA decision and a welcome to Sinn Fein into the talks process. Any procrastination, calls for validation would rightly be seen as unfair and unjust calls for further preconditions to Sinn Fein's entry into talks and should be rejected. Why relive the problems and the logjams of the last 18 months?

As I watch the British and Irish Governments trying hard to reach agreement on the issues of the talks process and decommissioning I see less and less reason not to have an external input.

The members of the former International Body - George Mitchell, Hani Holkeri and John de Chastelain - did a very positive and competent job last time they were in Northern Ireland. They developed an understanding of the people, the divisions and problems in Northern Ireland and should be invited back to assist on delicate negotiating issues.

Surely all parties would welcome external assistance again now to help bring peace to these islands.

Some of the difficulties at present faced over the thorny issue of decommissioning are, I fear, as a result of people or parties positioning themselves to avoid blame - to save face.

The culture of blame avoidance is growing - people are positioning to avoid being the ones carrying the can if the process breaks down. This is far from helpful.

If there is a serious will on all sides to engage in meaningful talks, then Senator Mitchell and John Major are both right - decommissioning arms - which won't happen before talks or at the end - can occur during the process.

If this simple compromise is agreed, the difficult question that has to be answered is how will some decommissioning take place "during talks"?

The fear of Sinn Féin is that the arms will be demanded on day one or week one. The fear of the Ulster Unionists is that procrastination on decommissioning will mean that the talks will be well under way with no progress made.

These fears can only be addressed, to my mind, by all parties signing up to the six Mitchell principles - which include a commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations - and then agreeing to work with a decommissioning body or committee which operates in parallel to the talks and reports regularly to them on what progress has been made.

Both sides in the struggle over a format for decommissioning will not get what they want - some compromise on both sides will be necessary.

Without compromise, the pessimists will be proved right - those who for the last 18 months have said a compromise settlement is not possible and that the sought-after trust and confidence is not achievable.

We all have to face tough decisions - make hard choices - in the weeks and months ahead.

So far in this lecture, I have addressed not just constitutional questions, but also what labour would be like in Government on general policy areas.

In this concluding section, I want to touch on one of the difficult questions that doesn't often get covered in political debate - is often avoided in discussions about Northern Ireland.

What am I talking about? Well, money.

More money per capita has been and continues to be devoted to Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK - and rightly so. Extra funding in terms of security is essential and reassuring.

With the highest unemployment rate for any area in the UK, clearly the high level of social security spending is an unfortunate necessity although I have already set out how Labour will move to tackle this issue and help reduce the burden on taxpayers.

But the current costs of the situation to taxpayers are not a factor in the peace process. No British Government is going to cut funding to Northern Ireland while violence persists and lives are being lost. Any Government would do anything in its power to help alleviate such a situation.

While steps are being taken delicately towards a peace settlement, funding is not an issue. But further down the line, if and when a settlement is reached - then a peaceful economy is different from one torn by conflict.

Everyone in Northern Ireland therefore shares a common problem whatever their view of the future constitutional situation. It is a problem that we all ought to begin to address.

The most concerned with this question at the moment are those working in the public sector. They feel the most vulnerable whether they are civil servants or in health, education or other public services.

Don't forget that four out of every ten jobs are at present in the public sector in Northern Ireland.

So in the future, are some job losses inevitable? What would the impact of any changes be on the economy?

The tendency to avoid this problem is wholly understandable as it is integrally tied to the future political structures in Northern Ireland - and therefore difficult to answer without further progress on the constitutional questions. However, incremental changes will happen and therefore we ought all to start thinking about what the future will hold.

Here are some thoughts from me as a contribution to what I hope is an ongoing debate about how, despite an unsure financial future, public services can be improved and public bodies made more open and accountable.

The central contradiction for the future of public services is, how can quality be improved and waste reduced without huge cuts in jobs and/or the pay and conditions of the workforce?

It seems an impossible question to answer - but it has to be tackled in Northern Ireland - and has been tackled elsewhere.

One part of the answer could be to use new technology. For example, if we could use the wonderful fibre optic network available in Northern Ireland, we could improve service delivery, quality of service and to then redeploy people to work elsewhere in the public sector to improve the range and quality of services available.

Changes in the civil service are equally politically fraught and dependent on a broader settlement but again I think there are some important questions to ask and some useful contributions to be made.

We should start with some very basic questions such as to ask whether the present bureaucracy has the capacity to handle a different political agenda. We ought to start entertaining and discussing different options.

This is not - let me make clear a belief in great change for its own sake - that is a Tory approach, I am more wedded to seeing how best we can deliver quality services efficiently.

Posing these questions I think is central and it was suggested in the Belfast Telegraph last week that by posing the question, it would stimulate (and I quote) "local pressure to create new administrative areas with extended powers."

I don't know what it will stimulate - but, I hope, a lot of different and varied proposals from

politicians and others.

A pretty definitive contribution from a Labour Government would be to pledge no further privatisation and a commitment to end the practice of making competitive tendering of services compulsory.

Short of an overall settlement, there are clearly difficulties in trying to change the nature of Northern Ireland's many QUANGOs.

But we do think that incremental progress could take place in an environment free from violence to improve their accountability and openness. For example,

- we need an effective register of all quango members;
- consideration could be given to a system of financial penalties in cases where they have acted irresponsibly with public money;
- and all QUANGOs should be obliged to prepare an annual report.

I have today begun to set out Labour's agenda for Government in relation to Northern Ireland.

It is not a dogmatic agenda but a programme for change through consultation, agreement and consent.

Over the rest of the period between now and the general election we will continue to prepare policies for consideration by the people and parties in Northern Ireland.

Ultimately I am looking to hand back these decisions to them as part of an agreed and balanced overall settlement.

But it would only be fair of me to do what I can to lay the ground work for a smooth transition from central to more local control in the context of that overall settlement.

ENDS

For further information contact Nigel Warner 0171 219 3572 / 0171 219 5066