

## **SDLP SUBMISSION ON THE LAUNCH STRAND II.**

The SDLP this morning outlined the basic principles which are at the root of agreement in this process.

The Strand which we launch here this afternoon is arguably the most important in terms of redefining relationships between the two main political traditions on this island whose identities and allegiances transcend the confines of Northern Ireland. The issues to be addressed in this strand go to the heart of our problems, and pose the greatest challenge to the outcome of these negotiations.

The New Ireland Forum led the way in redefining the basis to these relationships. The Forum did so by marking the formal end to an exclusively territorial perspective on the partition of Ireland. Henceforward, partition was to be regarded primarily as the product of dismembered relationships in Ireland and not exclusively the result of British self interest. While the Forum parties stressed that Irish unity would continue to be the objective of the nationalist tradition, the agreement of unionists was recognised as a necessary factor in healing relationships.

The immediate aim now is a constitutional and political settlement embracing both parts of Ireland and giving due recognition to unionist and nationalist rights and aspirations. Underpinning such a settlement would be a satisfactory accommodation of relationships between the communities on both parts of this island.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was an essential step towards attaining such a settlement. In that agreement that Irish and British governments committed themselves to recognise, reconcile and acknowledge "... the rights of the two major traditions that exist in Ireland, represented on the one hand by those who wish for no change in the present status of Northern Ireland and on the other

hand by those who aspire to a sovereign united Ireland achieved by peaceful means and through agreement". The latter represents the SDLP's perspective as we head into these talks.

Of these three commitments, reconciling both set of rights poses the greatest challenge. Recognising and acknowledging two sets of rights as legitimate does not automatically reconcile them, at least not in the political and constitutional sense.

Recognition and acknowledgement can be afforded in a variety of ways, none of which might directly impinge on the major problem of how to reconcile two mutually exclusive aspirations, one of which is also reality, i.e. the unionist aspiration to maintain Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom and the nationalists aspiration to a united Ireland. In the Anglo Irish Agreement this was addressed in Article 1, by affirming the principle of consent as the ~~only~~ basis for change in the status of Northern Ireland and by recognising both the North of Ireland's present status alongside the potential for it to become part of a united Ireland. While the Agreement did not explicitly use the language of self-determination, it did so implicitly and in a manner which required the British government to acknowledge for the first time in an international agreement the legitimacy of the aspiration for a united Ireland. Indeed, while the concept of self-determination was being implicitly accepted, its application was being defined in terms more suited to the Irish context and so, could more accurately be described as 'co-determination'. Irish unity was now deemed to require assent from the communities in the North as well as assent from the people in the South, a position never before so formally endorsed by both governments.

In their 1993 Joint Declaration the then Taoiseach and then British Prime Minister repeated their commitments. Significantly they also went beyond the actual terms of the Agreement by endorsing the need for an all Ireland

framework to a solution by pledging themselves "to foster agreement and reconciliation, leading to a new political framework founded on consent and encompassing arrangements within Northern Ireland, for the whole island and between these islands". This common pledge was followed by a commitment on the part of the British Prime Minister, first, "to uphold the democratic wish of the greater number of people of Northern Ireland on the issue of whether they prefer to support the Union or a sovereign united Ireland... (but also) to work together with the Irish Government to achieve such an agreement, which will embrace the totality of relationships. The role of the British Government will be to encourage, facilitate and enable the achievement of such agreement... They accept that such an agreement may, as of right, take the form of a united Ireland achieved by peaceful means"

Placed alongside the statement that the British government has "no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland", it is difficult to interpret this commitment other than as the door being clearly opened to a united Ireland. The invitation to go through that door is left to those convinced that it is in the best interests of all of our people to do so. Meantime, the British government committed itself to encouraging, facilitating and enabling agreement between the people of Ireland and if, in seeking agreement, the Irish people decide to unite, it is clear from the declaration that this wish will be accepted.

For its part, the Irish Government reiterated its acceptance, in the Anglo Irish Agreement, of the principle of consent to constitutional change by stating that "it would be wrong to impose a united Ireland, in the absence of freely given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland... (and).. 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 of Northern Ireland ...."

*Pledge given without coercion, no pressure etc by COI Govt. ...*



Within the context of these commitments and assurances, the Joint Framework Document argues that in addressing North - South and all-island relationships a settlement will have to ensure that political structures are put in place which will provide the fulcrum and dynamic for a new partnership. The SDLP sees such institutions with <sup>exec</sup> ~~executive~~ powers as being an integral part of any new settlement because such a partnership is essential to the expression of the nationalist community's allegiance. Such institutions will be characterised by:

- a capacity to represent both the nationalist and unionist identities in a manner which would attract support and allegiance throughout the island;
- a capacity to address all matters of mutual concern and interest to the people of the whole island;
- a capacity to promote and achieve harmonious action between institutions and agencies throughout the island;
- a capacity to promote co-operation and co-ordination in social and economic developments as they affect the whole of the island;
- a capacity to provide for the administration of services on mutually agreed basis;
- a capacity to represent common Irish interests to the European Community and other international agencies as appropriate, and;
- a capacity to breakdown barriers of distrust which have led to past divisions and to promote agreement accepting both diversity within Ireland and the unique relationships between the peoples of Ireland and Britain.

Within such political arrangements due cognisance must be taken of the opportunities and prospects for the development of economic, social and cultural relationships which exist throughout the whole island. As the New Ireland Forum's report on the economic consequences of partition clearly pointed out, many sectors of the island's economy, as well as many <sup>of</sup> ~~many~~ areas, especially those along both sides of the border, have been seriously inhibited in their development.

In the more favourable economic climate which has been emerging in recent years and from which both parts of the island are, in differing degrees, benefiting, the need to develop a coherent and co-ordinated all-island approach to economic development is becoming more and more apparent. It is the SDLP's view that this approach should be based on a North-South partnership formally structured, which encompasses the whole range of socio-economic and business relationships on the island. The SDLP further believes that the success of the island economy <sup>may</sup> ~~will~~ be entirely complementary to the wider economic prospects of Ireland and Britain within

the European Union. Planning the approach must therefore take account of this wider context and be undertaken in conjunction with its appropriate agencies.

In the course of the negotiations the SDLP will be urging that the necessary conditions and circumstances which will produce dynamic and successful economic growth throughout the whole of Ireland be identified and the means whereby those conditions and circumstances can be sustained<sup>+</sup> agreed.

At the close of negotiations, settlement proposals will have to be put to the people of Ireland, North and South, in accordance with commitments already made by both governments. In this way nothing can be imposed which would infringe the basic rights of either community. Viewed positively such a mechanism would amount to a joint expression of the principle of consent and the right to self-determination. A successful outcome would have to obtain endorsement from both traditions.

By jointly expressing the principle of consent and the right to self-determination, the dual referendum would be the most fundamental embodiment of parity of esteem. It would represent a new covenant between the two conflicting traditions in Ireland, a covenant wherein both would not only recognise the legitimacy of the other, but the future of all would be dependent on the equal legitimacy of both. It would be a fitting and necessary end to the final chapter in the ancient quarrel.

These commitments and the principles upon which they are based remain central to the negotiations upon which we are now embarking. The reassurances that they provide to all sides should remove any fear of imposed settlements while at the same time laying the basis for a new and more positive political expression of "the totality of relationships embracing the peoples of Ireland and Britain.