

Progressive Unionist Party of Northern Ireland

Confidence Building Liaison Committee

Further Paper on Social and Economic Issues

Meeting Tuesday, February 10, 1998

As a result of the Secretary of State's suggestion to examine details of papers submitted and discussed at the previous meeting, we in the Progressive Unionist Party, would suggest that all issues to be dealt with by the CBLC, should be linked directly to the key steps in the process. This would be in keeping with our principles of confidence building and our proposals to deal with the prisoners' issues in a three part strategy.

This can be done by linking actions which are feasible to the pre-agreement, consolidation of agreement and implementation of agreement stages. The S.O.S. intimated recommending actions that it may be practical in the execution of these stages.

Some confusion is taking place during this process in the CBLC, as most requests are being directed mainly at the Governments. Rather than those with perceived influence on matters under discussion. We all bear a mutual responsibility to carry out some action for all itemised agenda and the sooner we reach an understanding of what can, and cannot be achieved, the sooner we will become more effective.

NEW DEAL {Welfare To Work Program}

It is understood that this program is intended to provide training and work experience for those from disadvantaged areas, which should eventually lead to employment. The paper itself may be well intentioned, but it is our view that it is obviously not addressing the real issues.

A lot of the causes for the deprivation and disadvantage were widely recognised at the previous meeting but there certainly appears to be a failure to deal directly and proactively with those causes, to reduce and ultimately eliminate them.

I am referring to, Education/Training, Employment and Social conditions. All of these are multifaceted and need to be addressed at all levels simultaneously. There is nothing new in that statement. We have heard it many times over and we have then been presented with superficial programs designed to appear to address these identified issues.

The WTW program takes disadvantaged kids and even adults and tells them that this programme offers an opportunity to compete with those from a middle class background. They will be offered menial employment experience and linked to a training programme from 12 to 26 weeks and as result of which it is alleged that they will be as well equipped as those who took three years at university to achieve. If the WTW is likely to be so successful, why maintain the extended three year university programmes in further and higher education.(Call me cynical)

The sting in the tail, is that if you refuse to allow yourself to be exploited by this golden opportunity, your benefit entitlement will be reduced and you will eventually accept anything on offer, just to obtain benefits.

How naive can you really be, here we have a group of people who already feel that they are social rejects and they are then expected to jump to new rules which will keep them on the margins of society. The attitudes of those described will be, "Well, if they do not give it to us, we will go out and take what we need. Why should we respect laws that repress us anyway". Any financial savings which the government hoped to gain through the welfare to work initiative will have to be redirected into the fight against crime.

EDUCATION

The concept of Education and Training is sold as a means to obtaining a good job. We are told that the better educated we are, the better are our chances of securing a job.

The honest reality is, that in this day and age, with the developments in technology, there will never be a return to full employment. Those from disadvantaged areas recognise this fact and are contemptuous of schemes such as WTW, which are perceived to be scams to keep the unemployment figures down.

It is time to implement the right to a proper education, fully and totally, to all elements of our society and to sell it as a tool to make one a better element of that society, as opposed to selling it as a means to solely gaining employment.

The point being made is that, children from middle class backgrounds and experience, move from grammar schools to university for a further three year program of education.

A potential positive way of genuinely helping the same group of people is to introduce a three year system for them to move from secondary education. A programme that could replace the old apprenticeship type training which was the norm in its day with a programme that will genuinely build individual confidence to move on to further and higher education at the end of three year period thus least better equip them to compete in specific job markets.

It is often argued that the ratio of pupils to teachers has a direct impact on the pupil's success. Why not identify specific schools in disadvantaged areas and test that theory. There are many potential teachers or supervisors who could take part in such a

programme. Why not train some of the prisoners to take on this role as a potentially positive form of employment upon their release? Some of the prisoners would have educational qualification, sufficient experience and influence within their respective community to work positively with the most unruly children. This is something we in the Progressive Unionist Party with which we have had some experience.

EMPLOYMENT & SOCIAL CONDITIONS

As mentioned earlier, full employment will be a problem. However, many community development services could be identified and jobs created to provide those services. The education referred to earlier is just one example.

Working with the long term unemployed in a similar manner could be developed to improve all of our social conditions.

Stages of our proposals could be implemented at specific times of the process and could have a positive effect on that process. This should be the intention of CBLC. The sooner the socially and economically deprived see their needs being seriously addressed, the more stable the community and society would probably become.

This submission is intended to assist the meaningful suggestions from the S.O.S. voiced previously at the CBLC meeting held on 4/2/98.