

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

Strand 1 10th November 1997

1) Justice Issues

The Ulster Unionist Party pays the highest tribute to those in the security forces and those involved in the administration of justice in Northern Ireland. For a generation the Royal Ulster Constabulary, supported by the Army, has placed itself between society and those who would employ the methods of 1930s fascism to destroy that society. No police service or system of justice has been subjected to such a sustained and vicious assault as our own. Despite these pressures, both have ensured that the worst efforts of terrorism has been thwarted.

As has been said in this process already, there was no fault with the administration of justice or with Government in the late 1960s that was so serious as to justify the terrible evil that has been unleashed on our community ever since. The UUP does not believe, for example, that the republican movement has been fighting to free itself 'from the yoke of oppression' as its propaganda would suggest. The truth is much more ugly. All the available evidence suggests that it has been waging a naked sectarian and racist campaign of genocide against the pro Union population here.

The sacrifice of so many within the R.U.C has not been in vain however. Many of the most vicious criminals in Western Europe are now serving sentences imposed by courts and judges who have withstood often murderous assault.

We see no reason to dishonour the memory of those who have served the Northern Ireland community well. Should the threat of terrorist violence be lifted from our Province, the Ulster Unionist Party sees the current police service and justice structure operating as police and courts do in every other region of the United Kingdom. This would mean that those powers and procedures adopted to deal with organised terror may not prove necessary in a totally peaceful situation. Such 'normalisation' would only occur when we are satisfied that there is a genuine and universal commitment to pursuing political ends by exclusively peaceful means. The UUP looks forward to this day. In the meantime we will oppose any attempt to build a false confidence by leaving society defenceless against the bomber, the assassin or the terrorist godfather.

It seems that United Kingdom wide legislation will be enacted to deal with terrorism. We welcome this. Too long has parity of treatment been denied to British citizens purely on the basis of where in the United Kingdom they live.

In relation to any new devolved body, we do not see justice policy being amongst the areas of its initial competence, although aspects of police governance would benefit from a more broadly based political input.

The Ulster Unionist Party remains committed to the operational independence of the Chief Constable of the RUC, and believes that the interests of justice would not be well served by any attempt to replace his/her professional judgement by political direction.

Legal system.

Whilst Northern Ireland has its own legal system, it is closely related to that of England and Wales. Accordingly the current Direct Rule practice of English law Officers holding a Northern Ireland brief could continue until that system of administration is fully replaced.

2) Rights and Safeguards.

With the United Kingdom incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law, we believe that the rights of individuals who reside in this part of the United Kingdom will be safeguarded in exactly the same way as the rights of citizens from other UK regions. Operating within this UK-wide rights structure we would question the need for bodies, like SACHR, which are restricted in this area to Northern Ireland. We see 'group' rights as an area for further discussion.

The Ulster Unionist Party is committed to a future where the rights of all are recognised and protected. Indeed we see this as a fundamental and essential element in the future good governance of our Province. To this end, and in line with the Labour governments' overt commitment to a rights culture both at home and abroad the government should now ratify the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. This convention comes into force on 1/2/1998.

The most fundamental right of all, the right to live, has been consistently denied by terrorist organisations for thirty years. The ordinary citizen will only be convinced of the bona fides of those who now profess that they are politicians and politicians alone, when there is concrete evidence to back this up. We believe that the decommissioning of terrorist arsenals would contribute to a safeguarding of all our rights, and begin to build confidence throughout the community.