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SUBMISSION BY 'LABOUR' ON 'PRINCIPLES AND REQUIREMENTS', STRAND 1
10 October 1997

1. The aim of Strand 1 is to achieve agreement on internal political arrangements within Northern Ireland.
2. We believe that the fundamental principle guiding this work is, that the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland want to reach an agreement, are able to reach an agreement, and will at some time, with or without our assistance, inevitably reach an agreement, that is just, equitable and stable.
3. The fundamental requirement is that the participants in these Talks genuinely have the aim of trying to bring about such an agreement.
4. 'LABOUR' is strongly of the view that a lasting solution to the political stalemate in Northern Ireland is within our grasp. It requires a willingness to compromise and a willingness to accept the practical realities, by all participants, of the history and the present situation. Failure to agree a workable solution in the next months will not be because one is not possible, but because some or all of the political leaders, inside and outside these Talks, have acted selfishly and irresponsibly.
5. The state of Northern Ireland is a fact. Practically all states and borders in the world arose out of conflict and violence and are based on varying degrees of injustice. Northern Ireland is no different. After 75 years of existence any alteration in Northern Ireland's internal political structure and its relation with its neighbours must be voluntarily determined by its people and its people alone. Any other arrangement would be a violation of the democratic rights of the people of Northern Ireland. We believe that the recent history of Northern Ireland has confirmed that its people will assert these rights no matter what neighbours or various political groupings may decide or try to demand.
6. The two 'sides' in Northern Ireland should unite to establish a democracy and a system of government and international relations that best serves the interests and future of all the people of this province. Adopting any other approach creates conflict and contributes to the sterile division that harms primarily the ordinary people in all communities.
7. A united people of Northern Ireland, a people genuinely co-operating and supporting one another will in time reach agreement on mutually acceptable relations with the South and with the rest of Britain. However in the first place we have to achieve internal stability and trust.
8. Nationalism is only progressive when it enhances democracy, when it fulfills the democratic wishes of those affected and when it is not linked to the oppression and domination of any people.
9. Whilst a people may want, and be obligated to assert a degree of independence to develop and preserve their population and their culture, there is a more powerful need in the world to increase co-operation and genuine mutual respect and equality between all people. This applies to the way that relations should develop between the peoples throughout our islands.
10. Developing separateness, including nationalism, has to have the more fundamental aim of developing unity. It should be a means of building trust and overcoming historical problems, so that can be a new start and a new co-operation.
11. The idea that it can be right to coerce a majority in any part of the world into a political arrangement that they do not want, totally contradicts the original motives and concepts behind the Irish independence movement. This principle of the right to self determination raises many issues in these islands and throughout the world. One important one is

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- relation to our discussions is the question of the North/South border and the democratic rights of those large, stable and cohesive communities who clearly wish to be part of the Republic of Ireland.
12. We raise these broad issues and principles at this point in order that the participants do not have a narrow view of the problems we are trying to solve and of the consequences of agreements that we reach.
 13. We believe that the violence between the two communities in Northern Ireland has stemmed primarily from real and genuinely perceived injustice. We strongly believe that the main motivating force for violence on all sides has not been evil, but frustration and anger between the different communities and with outside forces. Those politicians who try to deny the existence of problems and injustice, affecting all sides, contribute to the distrust and anger that keeps Northern Ireland on the verge of chaos.
 14. The people of Northern Ireland, in all communities, are no different from the people the world over. They need to be treated with respect and to be trusted. There needs to be acceptance that the motives of the mass of the ordinary people are genuine and sincere. They simply want to be treated fairly.
 15. The real conflict in Northern Ireland is not between different communities, but between working and productive people and those who exploit and prosper from their labour. The divisions that were created and that have got out of control, were created in the first place to divide and rule.
 16. We pledge to represent all the ordinary people of Northern Ireland at these Talks and to oppose all attempts to foster division on religious and communal grounds.
 17. It is essential that all participants in the discussions listen to one another, respect one another and try to understand exactly what is being said and why. All participants must be prepared to sit together in small and large groups to pursue the arguments. Participants must be prepared to honestly look at the facts and history of events together, and must be willing to change their view and understanding if they find that they have been wrong, or unfairly biased.
 18. This process will not work if participants see the discussions as a means of getting something for their "side". The aim should be truth and justice, not manipulation and deliberate pandering to ignorance and prejudice in order to win points in the media and amongst the vociferous minority in Northern Ireland who are locked into sectarian and bigoted concepts.
 19. Stemming from this, the participants in these talks must be prepared to honestly take the principles that are being discussed and unravelled out to the people of Northern Ireland and work to hear their views and to win their support.
 20. It will not work if we sit in cloister and suddenly emerge one day with the world turned upside down.
 21. It will not work if the participants are afraid and unwilling to challenge prejudices, when they are found to exist, for fear of losing short term personal prestige.
 22. Some participants on both sides present themselves as defendants of a community, not as defendants of all the people of Northern Ireland. This is particularly difficult to understand when it is expressed by those organisations that claim to be socialist and to accept that the fundamental divisions in our society are class and economic. Simply representing a community has the effect of re-inforcing the religious and communal sectarianism that we are here to help remove. We think that all participants should strive to represent and speak for all the ordinary people of Northern Ireland.
 23. We support the fundamental proposals by the British and Irish governments in the Frameworks for the Future documents. In particular the proposals,
 - i. to establish a democratic Assembly consisting of about 90 members,
 - ii. for all elections to be by proportional representation.

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- iii. for a system of Assembly Committees,
 - iv. for the Assembly having a wide range of legislative powers,
 - v. for a system of detailed checks and balances to sustain broad confidence by both communities in the new government arrangements,
24. We are not convinced that the specific proposals that have been made will be effective and workable. In that the arrangements do not seem to allow for the establishment of leadership, and may have the effect of perpetuating the religious and communal divisions in our society.
 25. We are not convinced about the proposal for a Panel of 3 separately elected people. This panel appears to have a veto on all actions of the Assembly and requires unanimity in all decisions.
 26. A more practical way of dealing with the questions of communal and religious bias and discrimination would be to have an independent committee or court of arbitrators, to whom problems could be quickly referred.
 27. This court could be given detailed guidelines to allow it to determine whether an action is based on, "full respect for, and protection and expression of, the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland and even-handedly afford both communities in Northern Ireland parity of esteem and treatment, including equality of opportunity and advantage."
 28. This would make it unproductive for any legislator to try to introduce discriminatory legislation, and at the same time allow for the streamlining of government.
 29. We think that there needs to be a re-organisation of local government and the administration of health and education. Health and education are now run by quangos and are unresponsive to local needs and demands.
 30. We think that there needs to be a commitment to develop the economy of Northern Ireland. There needs to be arrangements that facilitate the local and specific needs of Northern Ireland, that are not held back by regulations that have been designed to service the English economy or the Irish Republic's economy.
 31. Effective measures must be introduced to reduce the way in which the education system and school children are divided on religious grounds. At the moment young people are being forced into communal "gangs" simply to survive and get to school. This develops loyalties and prejudices that are inevitably hard break down.
 32. There must be a Bill of Rights enshrined in law and including specific clauses on religious discrimination. The proposals for "Charter or Covenant" suggest something vague and not legally enforceable.
 33. The RUC must be radically reformed to introduce accountability and to end the religious and political bias of its members. In particular the present situation whereby the catholic community and individuals are subject to clear communalism, and yet there is no real acceptance of this reality by the police authorities and many politicians, is absurd. No solution that we propose will work unless this situation is genuinely changed.
 34. The agreements that might be reached in Strand 1, can only be seen in the context of the agreements in the other Strands. This submission concentrates on Strand 1, but its value can only be fully understood when it is seen as a part of the whole solution that needs to be agreed. "LABOUR" will be supporting the development of extensive and increasing all Ireland links and co-operation, whilst recommending, that in the present situation, Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom.
 35. However, as we hope with all participants, we are prepared to listen to other points of view and we are prepared to change, if we and our constituents can be convinced.