

A CHARTER

FOR

PROGRESS

IN

NORTHERN IRELAND

Sponsored by

The Northern Ireland Charter Group

Revised and augmented October 1986

PREAMBLE

(The guiding principles or framework for a new Northern Ireland)

1. The people of Northern Ireland urgently need hope for the future. There is a need to plan social and economic reconstruction. There is also a need for us to take responsibility for our own destiny and have a stake in the way it is shaped. Together we need to outlaw political violence.
2. There has to be a recognition of the existence of two historic traditions and cultures both of which require guarantees of their dignity, legitimacy and rights.
3. The best form of Government for Northern Ireland is a devolved government within the United Kingdom; such an arrangement recognises that the majority belong to the British Ulster traditions and that Northern Ireland is separated from the rest of the United Kingdom by geographical distance, a range of economic factors and above all by the need to accommodate justly two divergent political traditions which occur nowhere else in the United Kingdom.
4. Security, peace and stability:- Order and respect for the rule of law is the cornerstone of any civilised society. Therefore it is important to establish respect for not only the rule of law but also for the institutions and services which constitute that concept.
5. Eire Constitutional Claim:- The Anglo-Eire Agreement has conceded an undefined role for the Eire Government in events which take place within Northern Ireland. This and the Eire Constitutional Claim is untenable and must be removed.



6. The geographical existence of Northern Ireland can never be swept away by constitutional or political changes. It has established an irrevocable cultural political identity of its own which can command the loyalties of both sections of the community whilst at the same time accomodating their different rights and aspirations. Therefore the only changes that can take place must enshrine within these the concept of a continuing loyalty (and in the case of the minority a new loyalty) to the state of Northern Ireland. It is this we call the New Northern Ireland - an entity to which must be attached institutions of government, rights for individuals and prospects for economic development which guarantee the overwhelming support of the entire community.
7. In the beginning, support for new constitutional arrangements shall be gauged on the view of both a majority of the majority and a majority of the minority.

MAIN PRINCIPLES

1. A written constitution will enshrine the best possible guarantees to both traditions.
2. A devolved legislature will be established, with representatives elected by proportional representation. Only parties committed to constitutional and democratic politics will be allowed to candidate.
3. All parties reaching an agreed quota of seats in the legislature will be able to participate in Government. Those willing to do so will form an Executive Coalition.
4. A committee system, as envisaged in the 1974 Constitutional Convention, will give opportunity to Executive and non-Executive party representatives to participate in the scrutiny of legislation and executive action.
5. A bilateral liaison body will be established between the Northern Ireland Executive and the Dublin Government to liaise on practical matters of common concern.
6. As soon as practical, the Northern Ireland Executive will take responsibility for law and order making this a shared area of responsibility for all constitutional citizens of Northern Ireland.
7. The Parliamentary representatives of the Northern Ireland community must continue to play a full, consistent and positive role in national politics, at the Westminster Parliament.
8. As in other parts of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland shall register a representative flag and emblem consistent with its new constitutional position. An anthem shall also be adopted to which all can readily give allegiance.



EQUAL RIGHTS

1. All citizens of Northern Ireland should have equal rights and responsibilities before the law, full redress for any injustice they may suffer and full retribution for any illegal actions they may undertake.
2. Northern Ireland should have equal rights with other parts of the United Kingdom to a share in European prosperity. To achieve such equality there will need to be some differences in the handling of the Northern Ireland economy compared with other parts of the United Kingdom.
3. All Northern Ireland citizens who act constitutionally and within the law should have equal rights and responsibility for the Government of Northern Ireland and their respective traditions should be respected and cherished.

THE WAY AHEAD

1. The British Government must be persuaded not to obstruct inter-party talks along the lines proposed in this document.
2. Constitutional parties need to prepare their proposals for these talks.
3. The talks need to take place in an atmosphere conducive to maximising the very best intentions of those involved. Parties must come together and participate as equals. Except for 'security matters' only, no meetings under the patronage of the Anglo-Irish Agreement would be held during the process of inter-party talks.
4. The talks would be sponsored by an independent non-aligned Constitutional Commission. The Commission would assess the prospect of agreement between parties toward developing a new method of governing Northern Ireland.
5. The Terms of Reference under which the Commission would operate shall be clearly defined, outlined and acceptable to those invited to participate in inter-party talks.



TERMS OF REFERENCE

To consider firstly what arrangements for the government and administration of Northern Ireland would be:

1. Widely acceptable to democratic parties in Northern Ireland which are prepared to enter into such arrangements, forswearing violence as a means to advance political objectives;
2. Likely to facilitate wider reconciliation and co-operation throughout the community; and
3. Designed to deal effectively with the serious economic and other problems currently facing Northern Ireland.

To consider secondly :

Whether such proposed arrangements are consistent with Northern Ireland's current constitutional status (including the Anglo-Irish Agreement) or whether such proposals are of such merit having regard to the future stability and prosperity of the country that they would replace/or augment the existing constitutional agreement.

INTER-PARTY TALKS

A process for discussion on 'New Constitutional Arrangements'

1. Acting independently from direct instruction from H.M.G., a locally inspired initiative to set up a 'Constitutional Commission' would provide an essential mechanism to assess the future method of government for Northern Ireland.
2. Each Constitutional Party invited by the Commission would nominate a panel of delegates authorised to enter into a session with the Commission.
3. Within a clearly laid down set of guidelines, the Commission will receive proposals for the future governing of Northern Ireland from the Constitutional Parties who have had elected representatives since 1980.
4. The Commission will try to emerge, through discussion, a preferred option which would then be submitted to the Government.
5. On the basis of the talks reaching agreement on a preferred option, the Commission would encourage in its report that H.M.G. submit the proposals to the electorate at a referendum.



ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

1. From the commencement of inter-party talks to the conclusion of a referendum or a positive response from H.M.G. on the Constitutional Commission Report, the Anglo-Irish Conference will meet only to discuss ways of improving security.
2. At the appropriate time the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will consult separately and collectively with the Northern Ireland constitutional parties on the future position of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
3. A referendum testing the preference for (a) The Anglo-Irish Agreement, or (b) the New Constitutional Arrangements, would be submitted to the electorate. The referendum result would be binding upon H.M.G. to proceed with the necessary action.