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Strand 3, Submission from LABOUR, (5)

1. Strand 3 deals with the relation between the British government and the Irish government.
2. Our view is that there should continue to be a standing Intergovernmental Conference supported by a secretariat, with, for the moment, a continuing significant remit to consult over affairs concerning Northern Ireland.
3. We think that the Conference should extend its remit and take on the general task of assisting and supporting the development of "east/west" relations.
4. We think that the role of the Conference in relation to Northern Ireland will decrease and "wither away" as new arrangements stabilise and as the era of communal politics fades away. Assuming that we agree on an effective and balanced solution.
5. The problem with reaching agreement on any proposals for Strand 3 comes from disagreements over the role and contributions of the two sovereign governments. It is one thing for the British government to impose an arrangement. It is going to be something entirely different to reach an agreement that we can all sign up to.
 - a) The extreme unionist position regards the Irish government as an enemy with the ulterior motive of taking over Northern Ireland by fair means or foul,
 - b) The extreme republican position does not accept that the British government has a role to play anywhere in Ireland and believes that the British government's interests are purely selfish.
6. The following points are made to try to clarify the role of the two governments and their importance as part of any proposed solution.
7. The political leadership as a whole within Northern Ireland has not shown itself on its own to be incapable of resolving the problems. The problems we face are being highlighted by the continuing absurdity at these talks whereby, some are not present, some are not speaking, and there is a nonsensical refusal of many participants to make practical proposals for the future.
8. The British government working alone has repeatedly failed to appropriately intervene in Northern Ireland. The various efforts that have been made in the last 27 years have been partisan, or have perceived to have been partisan by one side or both.
9. The reality is that a crucial part of the successful formula that has brought us to this point has been the establishment of formal, structured and regular contacts between the UK and the Irish governments.
10. Out of this has come a series of papers, leading to the formulation contained in the Framework Documents. The formulation, in our opinion, makes basic proposals that when developed could resolve the present impasse and allow for a new and fair agreement within Northern Ireland, and between Northern Ireland and its neighbours. Whilst the Framework Documents were written and presented by the two governments, we believe they bring to a high point the collective wisdom and input of all the parties and interested forces. We particularly highlight the input that the trade union and community movement has made by example and by its representations.
11. We do not agree with the view that the Republic has the intention of taking over Northern Ireland by fair means or foul. We do not see their participation as a cynical exercise. We

- accept their statement that they intend to introduce and support proposals for a change in the Irish Constitution.
12. We say this because of the behaviour of the southern government over the recent years and because of our direct knowledge, mainly through the trade union movement, of the people in the south.
 13. However, we think that the Irish government should not use Articles 2 and 3 as a bargaining weapon. Either it is right or it is wrong today for the republic to claim the territory of Northern Ireland. It is clearly wrong. The Irish government has repeated again and again that the people of Northern Ireland alone have the right to determine their political future. Therefore the Irish government should, in our opinion, commit itself to supporting a change in the Irish constitution no matter what the outcome of our deliberations. It should specify the changes it proposes to make so that people in the north and the south can consider the details and give their views. This does not contradict the proposal for the Irish Constitution to be changed as part of a complete package that gains the simultaneous support of a majority in both the north and south.
 14. We disagree with the idea that joint north/south bodies with executive powers will move political authority out of Northern Ireland. Fundamental political authority in Northern Ireland will either be within Northern Ireland and the UK, or within a new united Ireland including the present Northern Ireland. It cannot be shared. In the present situation the only possibility that will achieve broad acceptance in Northern Ireland is one that keeps the union with Britain.
 15. The next stage has to include structures with what is known as executive powers. Mere consultation is becoming increasingly inadequate to cope with the new reality and potential that comes from the two parts of Ireland functioning in a co-ordinated and mutually supportive manner. Any new joint bodies will be subordinate to the two governments and cannot develop policy or programme outside of the parameters mutually agreed by the elected representatives in the two countries. We have elaborated further on these ideas in our Strand 2 submissions.
 16. It may be a way of getting votes for some politicians to oppose each and every extension of the links north and south, but it is fanning communalism, and it is based on simplistic distortions of what is being proposed. We suspect that some of those opposing the developments in this area are actually using the question as a bargaining tool, in much the same way as we have expressed a concern about the Irish government's position on the constitution. They are not really opposed to the ideas, but they do not want to openly make proposals except as part of a complete package.
 17. We believe that the Intergovernmental Conference should be able to consider all issues within Northern Ireland. The Conference has no administrative role within Northern Ireland, but has the effect of insuring a balanced appraisal of controversial issues, and in particular that the interests of all the people are more fairly heard. The Conference in particular will play a positive role in assisting the smooth development of new north/south bodies, helping to ensure that they are effective and that difficulties, as people work together in a new way, are overcome quickly.
 18. We see the role of the Conference within Northern Ireland declining and disappearing as stability develops. It is inappropriate for the present arrangement to continue past the time when there are no threats to minorities. As part of confidence building, and as a recognition that this is understood and accepted, we think that the Irish government should make clear its agreement with this proposal.

19. The Intergovernmental Conference, logically should take on an increasing role in relation to the overall development of closer economic and practical cooperation and links between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Resolving the conflict in Ireland will naturally lead to the potential for greater and greater cooperation and harmony within these islands. The proposal to increase the involvement of this body with such wider issues will help to increase its acceptance by the majority community in Northern Ireland.
20. We think that there should be, in relation to Northern Ireland, formal involvement of politicians and social partners in the work and deliberations of the Conference. This would be of a consultative nature in the first place. We need to have openness and transparency and remove bit by bit the basis for suspicion and distrust of such things as the Intergovernmental Conference.
21. We support the broad idea of a Council of the Regions, as part of measures to increase cooperation within these islands.
22. We support the idea of introducing simultaneous and equal, civil and human rights legislation, in the north and south. We think that as far as possible this should be legislation rather than simply a Charter or Covenant as proposed in the Framework Documents. We are aware of the perception in the north that the catholic church dominates society and that the protestant minority in the south is discriminated against and has been deliberately decimated.
23. There should be an impartial review of civil rights and of the role and influence of individual churches in the Republic. This would help end the present ability of those with different points of view to quote facts to serve their argument. It would assist the introduction of directed and effective legislation. It would be one of perhaps many steps that should be taken by this body to exert an equivalent influence on the south, and reverse the one way preoccupation with our difficulties in the north.
24. There should be an inter-parliamentary liaison committee with representatives from the Irish Dail, the British Parliament, and from the proposed new Assembly.