

# Progressive Unionist Party of Northern Ireland

## Confidence Building Liaison Committee

### Principles of Confidence Building in Relation to Social & Economic Development

1. **Confidence Building should address the problems of Structural Violence as well as Sectarian Violence.**

The first principle of confidence building in relation to social and economic development is an acknowledgement that the ethical responsibility for establishing the confidence necessary to build a genuine and lasting peace must not be limited simply to the prevention of violence or to a peaceful resolution of political conflict. **Confidence building, like peace building, must address the absence of structures and conditions that will lead to the establishment of a full and holistic human development for all citizens of Northern Ireland.**

There can be no genuine peace while the wheels of structural injustice impose psychological violence and economic misery on those communities that have suffered the brunt of sectarian and political violence. One has only to look at areas like North Belfast where six of the fourteen wards are regarded as being amongst the most deprived in Northern Ireland and where ninety percent of those most affected by conflict and violence in the area live. The number of conflict related deaths in North Belfast account for almost 23% of all such deaths in the Province since 1969. The six most deprived unionist wards in the Belfast Urban Area coincide with the highest concentrations of paramilitary activity.

The cycle of deprivation, marginalisation, conflict and violence will only be broken when as much attention is given to tackling social and economic injustice as is given to tackling political conflict and paramilitary violence.

Since the cease-fires were announced in 1994 there has been an evident optimism sweeping the business and industrial planning communities. This has been paralleled by a significant drop in the rate of unemployment and a subsequent growth in Northern Ireland's GDP. Undoubtedly, the cessation of violence makes a visible contribution to confidence building in that it improves the mobility of potential employees and consumers, provides the potential of reducing the impact of 'chill factors' and encourages both endogenous and external rates of investment.

However these positive aspects of the peace dividend are not shared by sections of the population on low income. Clearly, there are whole sections of the Northern Ireland community who are socially excluded from the benefits of the socio-economic restructuring that have taken place in recent years. It is

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evident that the decision-making and resource allocation structures currently in place are producing gross inequalities in the distribution of the economic benefits accruing from the peace process. In the absence of any substantial and positive social and economic outcomes for those communities that have been most adversely affected by the 'troubles' it is improbable that any measure of confidence in the peace process will be forthcoming.

The peaceable society that the Progressive Unionist Party aspires to is one in which all of the citizens of Northern Ireland can live a holistic life of material, social and spiritual well being. **It is our wish to see this Liaison Committee identify and recommend to our respective party negotiators suggestions about how the structures and mechanisms for allocating resources and spreading the economic benefits of peace may be made to produce more just and equitable results.**

### 2. **Social & Economic confidence building must address the mechanisms used to measure and define deprivation.**

The variables used to measure deprivation do not give credence to the different forms of deprivation, which affect each community. Progressive Unionist community workers have long argued that because the socio-economic, demographic and job-seeking activities of both the unionist and the nationalist communities are complex the experiences of deprived nationalists and deprived unionists are highly divergent. Nationalists, for example, tend to be twice as likely to be unemployed than unionists are. Nationalist wards tend to experience population growth and as such there are increasing levels of poverty related to demographic growth. This is very well known both in public policy and in academic circles. What are less well known are the socio-economic issues that confront deprived unionist communities.

One central issue is the inequitable measures used to define deprivation. Because of this the level of deprivation affecting many unionist communities is somewhat obscured and consequently ignored, and we can give some disturbing evidence in support of this. No doubt those representatives from the nationalist community are able to provide similar evidence. There is evidence too that many small pockets of social deprivation are hidden within comparatively affluent wards and averaged out. Different plausible aggregations of enumeration districts often create very different geographies of deprivation and these give potential funders a false impression of the levels of deprivation and disadvantage. When, because of these factors, serious deprivation in unionist communities is obscured then it is obvious that those communities will feel that they are being neglected by fundholders and investment agencies. This in turn creates a sense of frustration and can at times promote a low level of confidence in the impartiality of resource allocation.

Progressive Unionist community workers have reminded us too that the measures used to detect deprivation do not fully take into consideration the inverse nature of the demographic profile in deprived unionist communities.

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Nationalist communities tend to have a growth-oriented demography that means that more families are dependent upon social welfare and other payments. However, in unionist communities, due to high levels of out-migration occasioned by social mobility, urban housing strategies and a low birth rate deprived unionist communities have twice as many pensioners as a share of the total population than is the case in nationalist deprived communities. Moreover, the main funds utilised in order to remove deprivation are generally tied to job creation strategies, a feature of funding which clearly excludes those of pensionable age and in turn fuels the suspicion that too little is being done to counter a form of deprivation which is tied to the age profile of unionist communities.

In order to build confidence within both communities it is essential that structures are put in place that will allow for community representation and community participation in decision making and resource allocation processes.

**We would submit that confidence in the social and economic component of the peace process would be greatly enhanced if the structures and mechanisms used for measuring and defining deprivation were revised and made more equitable.**

### 3. **Social & Economic confidence building must address perceptions concerning discrimination.**

In a society riven with cultural division it is obvious that there is concern within both nationalist and unionist communities that funding emanating from the various bodies and agencies - such as the Government, IFI, SSPPR, EU, NIHE, MBW, LEDU, IDB - is not distributed equitably and according to need. Very often statutory bodies are quite happy to play nationalist and unionist communities off against each other with a view to creating a situation in which they are happy to do nothing for either.

All too often the effects of the inequitable measures used to define deprivation inflame sectarian tension with one community 'seeing' the other community as being treated more favourably. Thus the "you win, I lose" scenario becomes an integral part of the community and economic development process. This in turn often fosters an unhealthy spirit of inter-community competition rather than the spirit of inter-community development and participation that ought to be the motivating factor for all - especially for those of us who aspire to the development of a genuine social democracy.

Irrespective of the cultural diversity that springs from our different constitutional aspirations and sense of identity, the one aspect of culture that does unite many of us is the *culture of poverty and disadvantage*.

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4. **Social & Economic Confidence Building must address the adverse effects of the alteration and modification of traditional labour market structures.**

Flexible labour modes, de-industrialisation and increased feminisation have each modified the symmetry of local labour markets throughout Northern Ireland and in so doing have assembled an inequitable dispersal of material affluence and social welfare.

Local labour markets dependent on male manual workers have been effectively eroded through transformations within technology, de-industrialisation, underemployment, the growth of economic activity, the de-skilling of productive labourers and the accentuation of educational requisites by employers. This alteration and the modification of traditional labour market structure has, in turn, created an expressive disjunction between middle income technical and professional employees and a low income employment sector whose wage rates and employment conditions have declined dramatically. The segmented nature of emerging labour markets indicates not only a polarisation in employment and wage conditions but also an increasing gap in social rank and socio-economic opportunity.

This is a feature of the labour market that affects both communities. However, lower levels of educational attainment are also adversely affecting low-income unionist communities. The 11+ pass-rate in deprived unionist communities, in Belfast, is 58% lower than in deprived nationalist communities. This is problematic, as educational attainment is directly linked to socio-economic mobility. It is possible that the majority of those who will join the labour market in the next ten to fifteen years and who are under-educated will be drawn from low-income unionist communities.

We would submit that the above noted trends, if not heeded and addressed, will undermine confidence in the ability of the political process to deliver positive social and economic outcomes for those living in low income communities.

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### Closing Comment

In regenerating the economy it is vitally important that the benefits of success are spread throughout each community. Unless community and economic regeneration provides jobs and hope to the unemployed those people who remain excluded from the mainstream of social and economic life will have little confidence in a process that appears to be passing them by.

Any programme for social reconstruction should have clear criteria, including active community and inter-community involvement, priority for areas of highest deprivation, cross-border and border-region projects, new and innovative programmes for community development, a major programme to tackle long-term unemployment; and special programmes aimed at those who have suffered directly from the conflict.