

NI Women's Coalition

Debate on Departmental Arrangements and Structures

14th September 1998

① Welcome.

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The NI Women's Coalition would first like to thank the First and Deputy First Ministers Designate for preparing this report during what has been a difficult summer for all of us. We would also like to record our thanks to the officials who produced the preparatory documents which helped stimulate our thinking on this important matter.

② Less than democratic system - now we have the right to resp. for a whole more to go into.

② Relied on less than democratic system - now tasked with taking charge.

We welcome the opportunity to debate this important issue. For many years we relied on a less than democratic system of administration, and one of the dividends of the Good Friday Agreement is that we have ^{tasked} charged our selves with taking charge of our own affairs.

③ Problem - good problem to have - mould a new admin.

Not many new governments have the opportunity to mould a new administration in the ^③ manner we have now, and we should be conscious of that.

④ fashion our own unique gov. structures - take advice from others

This is indeed welcome, but we should observe that, no matter how keen we are to fashion our own unique governance structures and methods, there is always merit in taking the advice of others. We believe we should be listening, not just to each other inside this room, but also those outside it - in trade unions, in the business sector, in the farming, voluntary, community and education sectors - who have had, perhaps, much closer interaction with the old administration ^{than we have} and ^{such} have ^{will be} ideas ^{as} part of those implementing the ^{peop. of} ^{govt.}

⑤ Needs
① Strategic Review of the old admin.
② While retaining some continuity To move quickly but to move collectively

⑤ There are two needs, we believe, that need to be balanced in this debate. One, the need for an inclusive strategic review of the old administration, while retaining some continuity and the need to move quickly and collectively to govern our community in an inclusive and fair manner, both of which we are pleased the Report before us notes.

⑥ Taking account of this, we believe that there is little point in creating and allocating arbitrary Departments to quench contemporary political thirst: we need, in a sense, to put

to govern our community in an inclusive + fair manner.

the needs of the community at large before our own party political needs. We must remain focused on those we serve, and what goals we are collectively working for.

The Women's Coalition takes the view that we should not overly fragment the existing departmental structures; there are specific responsibilities to be retained. This does not mean we cannot radically overhaul the administration. We agree with the Report's initial configuration. We favour the upper end of this scale, seeing 10 Departments, five of which would be major operational, high-spending Ministries, roughly contiguous to our current Departments. We also agree that there should be some mechanism whereby policy that cuts across several departmental concerns. We would strongly support such a mechanism being created. Thus our five additional departments would oversee the strategic direction of governance and peace building – in effect implementing the Good Friday Agreement. These Ministries would stimulate and advise on policy formulation, and would play a role in ensuring, as the First and Deputy First Ministers highlight, that the administration can promote integrated policies (para 4.8). These Ministries would be low-spending, policy units. In looking forward we should also be mindful of our past, which could examine not only the hurt of the past, but specifically how we rebuild for our future – and which other places emerging from conflict, as surely they will, can look to for models of good practice. Our first 'policy unit' then would be:

Equality, Human Rights and ^{Reconciliation} ~~Community Relations~~ — Strangers

And the remaining four:

Social Inclusion, Women's Issues and Community Development

Children and Young People

Public Health

Culture, Arts, Heritage and Sport

European Affairs.

①
Producers
+
Consumers

- We see potential intra-Departmental conflicts of interest in the current arrangements, for example Roads and Transport, in the Department of the Environment; or the interests of both producer and consumer being lodged with the Department of Agriculture.
- There are also some Departments, we feel, which do serve people well. The integrated Department of Health and Social Services is one such example, which views the individual and community in a holistic fashion.
- Some of the work of governance is currently executed by quangoes – we need to examine carefully the role of these bodies in the light of our current situation.
- Neither should we be afraid of challenging historically important, and controversial departments. The world is moving on fast: in which department shall we determine our policy on cryptology and other information technology advances? What will our biggest industry be in the first quarter of the next millennium, and how should we provide for it?

We note the significant lobby arguing for the voices of our young people and children to be included in our administration. We proposed in our manifesto, and remain strongly committed to a Minister for Children and Families, in all their shapes and sizes, and we are pleased that the Report highlights a similar portfolio.

We are also pleased that the establishment of the Civic Forum has stimulated considerable debate, both within these walls, and outside. We believe it important that the sectors that forward delegates to the Forum establish fair and open arrangements for doing so, and we agree with the Report in that the Forum should be as representative of civic society as possible. This means really hearing the voices of those who are not

Consultative

4

traditionally heard: our young people, women, the disabled, victims of our conflict as well as the more organised trade union movement, the business and education sectors.

The meetings of the Civic Forum should be as open and as accessible as possible, and we believe it would be appropriate for it to sit in different locations from time to time.

It is important that no track of the Good Friday Agreement gets too far ahead of others: all three strands bear equal weight in our view, and we need to be spearheading movement on all three. We are comfortable supporting the progress on the North-South Arrangements and the British Irish Council, though we accept that much detailed work needs to be done, and we are keen to get moving on it.

6 bodies
to action
plans.

In conclusion we would reiterate our thanks to the First and Deputy First Minister Designate and their staff for preparing this report for us today. We look forward to submitting our detailed views on paper to you later this week.

Protect the Agreement.

Bob Mc
Gibney

Ends.

~~Whatever structures we develop, we must not ensure that they not only help us to examine the hurts of the past but especially show us how we can rebuild our future.~~

COMMENTS ON DISCUSSION PAPERS.

1. Departments.

for
Support the idea of 10 Departments - allows more people/parties to buy into the administrative system.

? [Suggest a core distinction is made between Operational Departments (ie. spending Departments) and Policy Departments. The former would have the power to spend and deliver services. The latter would oversee them from the point of view of specific policy areas. The Policy Departments would have the power to input to, and vet, the decisions of the Operational Departments. The Policy Departments would not require the whole hierarchy of civil servants that the Operational Departments would need - hence they would not have the same cost implication.

Separate
Operational Departments -
Agriculture and Rural Development
Health and Social Services
Education
Economic Development
Department of the Environment

Policy Departments
- Children and Youth
Public Health and Environmental Protection
Equality, Human Rights and Community Relations *Reconciliation*
Social Inclusion and Community Development and Women's Issues
- Culture, Arts and Heritage

2. We should accept the idea of a revire of Public Administration - but as a longer term initiative. It should not be hurried and should be inclusive. It would also benefit if we can have more time to build up an atmosphere of trust.

✓ 3. The 1st Minister and Deputy First Minister should share responsibility for the current Department of Finance and Personnel. It will encourage them to work together.

4. Political Point - will the allocation of Ministeries start after the First Minister and Deputy First Minister or does it include them in terms of the parties' allocation.

5. Support 8 (d) - Integrated policies - if it can be achieved. Policy Departments might help this.

6. Suggest that Government Information might be the responsibility of a Committee of the Assembly?

7. Support review of Non Departmental Public Bodies.

NORTH - SOUTH COOPERATION

1. Assembly shgould look at the example of some of the European models contained in the LACE Network information available from the Commission.

2. While we would favour pushing ahead with the areas included in the Agreement, there are many other areas that have been developing on a cross-border model outside of politics - Public Health; Community Development; Civil Liberties contacts, etc. An audit should be made of these and a reflection on how statutory structures can facilitate such development. Look at the lessons of the cross-Border measures of the PEACE Programme (NIVT/Combat Poverty Agency; Cooperation Ireland) and INTERREG.

3. In relation to staffing of new agencies - draw on secondments from the two civil services North and South, but also from other sectors - Voluntary, Private etc.

BRITISH IRISH COUNCIL

1. Need to define matters of mutual interest as with cross-Border area.
2. Many NGO links already exist on this model - build around what is there.

CIVIC FORUM

Agree with 5, 6, 8 and 11 paragraphs.

Question whether the membership should be larger than 54 , Need to identify sectors and then decide of a certain number of seats per sector. Strongly disagree with specifying from the top the people to be selected eg General Secretaries of Trade Unions. Certain principles should be laid down (eg. Gender and Religious and Geographical Balance; System for selection as democratic and open as possible; No direct politicians etc.) Then each of the nominated sectors asked to work up their own section criteria based on these principles. The proposed systems will then have to be agreed by the Minister and Deputy Minister.

Agree possibility of using support of other organisations to augment secretariat of Civic Forum.

Avila

Sorry can't be with you !