



Northern Ireland Region
30 Floral Gardens Belfast BT36 7SE
Telephone/Fax (0232) 772436

John Alderdice
The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
88 University St
Belfast.7

15th July 1995

Dear John

Now that the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation is in summer recess I thought it would be useful that party-to-party talks take place to assess the political situation relating to Northern Ireland.

In furtherance of this Democratic left invite the Alliance Party to meet at an early opportunity to discuss an agenda which would include:

(a) Framework Documents and responses to same, I enclose DL's position as given at the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation which we are currently editing into pamphlet form;

(b) A critical review of state / nature of the para-military ceasefires and the potential for a resurgence of politically motivated violence;

(c) The role and responsibility of the British Government in relation to Northern Ireland;

(d) Constitutional change in the Irish Republic.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive agenda but focuses on key areas of political contention as we view them.

Our Party leader, Prionsias De Rossa will be available to participate in such talks Week Commencing Monday 7th August and it would be useful if you could schedule a meeting for this week so that Prionsias might be present. If this is not possible then I would be grateful if you could indicate alternative dates during the month of August. It would be best to contact me personally by telephone to make arrangements.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Paddy Joe

Paddy Joe Mc Clean
Chairperson, Democratic Left, Northern Ireland.

Phone 06627- 58343

Forum for Peace and Reconciliation

Response to Joint Framework Document

by Seamus Lynch on behalf of Democratic Left

3 March 1995

THE MANNER in which the Joint Framework Document is interpreted in Ireland over the next few weeks will determine whether meaningful talks will take place within the parameters it sets out.

The document is balanced, but the balance is seen by many as being tilted towards nationalism. Accordingly, it has united elements of both unionism and nationalism who see it as blueprint for a United Ireland.

Nationalists will claim that this is their due and merely redresses the balance that obtained during 50 years of unionist rule.

However, this is to miss the point. As Proinsias De Rossa pointed out in Dail Eireann

This document is an enabling document not a straight-jacket. It says to the political parties of Northern Ireland that it is possible to resolve the problems of Northern Ireland in an exclusively peaceful and democratic way and a way perceived to be fair by all the people of that society. But it addresses itself to those political parties by saying *people* must participate in this decision-making. Not to do so, whether through attachment to an absolutist position which accommodates violence as a mean to an end; or through an unwillingness, bordering on unreason, to recognise that Northern Ireland is a very singular place 'more British than the British, more Irish than the Irish' is a failure of judgment and of nerve and is certainly a failure to show leadership. What this document guarantees is that nobody in Northern Ireland will be less British and nobody will be less Irish.

This last point is crucial. The framework document does not deny the national allegiance of anybody in Northern Ireland. It recognises the rights of all and fully endorses equality of citizenship. And it accepts the rights of self-determination by the people of Northern Ireland.

Yet the document is unacceptable to the major unionist parties. They see it as a threat to the union and feel excluded from the future it envisages. They feel betrayed and isolated.

Unionist discomfort has been a cause of satisfaction in some nationalist circles. President Robinson cautions us all to note that

We have to build trust. We have to listen to, understand and respect, respect the fears. When fears are as genuine and deep-rooted as that, if we don't respect them, we have not understood.

The fear is very genuine. The fear of the ground shifting, the fear of a takeover, is undermining a sense of security

Understanding is an essential precondition of reconciliation. Likewise, reconciliation involves both a recognition and acceptance of difference. And nationalist and unionist differences are deeply rooted in history and have been reinforced by 25 years of violence.

These differences won't disappear at the drop of a constitutional claim. Neither will 300 years of grievance be overturned by the legal recognition of nationalism in Northern Ireland. But such steps will help build security and confidence among all the people of Northern Ireland. This in turn will facilitate agreement within Northern Ireland, and between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

This will take time and will require patience. The 'long war' is still fresh in the

memory of those who were the target of a sustained terrorist campaign. Others have suffered at the hands of both agents and 'defenders' of the state. Now that the paramilitary campaigns have been suspended, it is easy to see the futility of political violence. It is another thing to complete the journey from fragile ceasefires to a permanent peace and to agreement between all parties.

The cause of peace is badly served by claims that victory is in sight and that a United Ireland is around the corner. A policy of 'compulsory Irishness' is doomed to failure. This is a purely territorial concept that takes no account of the conflicting, but legitimate, political allegiances of the people of Northern Ireland.

Unfortunately the Joint Framework Document is also weak on this score. The constant references to 'two communities' ignore the reality of a growing secularist, pluralist tendency in Northern Ireland that does not subscribe to the old loyalties and is not bound by the old prejudices. This emerging 'third strand' will be crucial to arriving at an agreement and must be fully engaged in the search for a settlement.

Little attention has been paid to the British government's Framework for Accountable Government in Northern Ireland. The lack of any stated commitment to a Bill of Rights is a grave disappointment. Democratic Left has argued for a Bill of Rights that would meet the concerns of all sections of the community. A new constitutional framework for Northern Ireland must contain cast-iron legal protection of communal and individual rights.

The proposal of a Panel, which has already been dubbed 'The Three Wise Men', could give rise to problems in that it has the potential to further institutionalise

sectarianism. This is to be avoided at all costs.

Sections of the internal document are said to build on areas of agreement reached in 1992 in which case the DUP should be on board. But what of Sinn Fein? The party's attitude to participation in a Northern Ireland assembly is ambiguous to say the least. A democratic mandate carries with it responsibilities as well as rights and these will not be met by abstentionism.

Similarly, something other than abstentionism is called for from the unionist parties. As a contributor to the current issue of *Fortnight* who was involved in brokering the loyalist ceasefire writes

'Ulster Says No' can not forever ignore the fact that at least 40 per cent say yes. If unionism is to be properly represented, the onus is on the UUP and the Democratic Unionists to recognise this, and to respond to the challenge of the Framework Document - by entering talks with the representatives of this 40 per cent. Anything less would be a denial of reality and, once again, an abdication of responsibility fully to represent the views of those who elected them.

Unionists should note that 79 per cent of Protestants in Northern Ireland say that unionist parties should take part in talks based upon the document. Likewise, the nationalist parties, north and south, should note that a substantial majority in the Republic backs reform of Articles 2 and 3. And an overwhelming majority say it's time for the paramilitaries to give up their guns.

The people are giving a lead that the politicians would be foolish to ignore. Politicians in the Republic are ill-advised to play to the gallery on Articles 2 and 3; reconciliation, like harmonisation, cuts both ways. All of us, as political representatives, should acknowledge and respect the views and aspirations of those with whom we differ. When we talk about change, we must accept that it means change for all of us and be

prepared to live up to the challenge that implies.

For these reasons political leaders in the Republic must disavow any triumphalist reading of the framework document. Last week's remarks about 'A Nation Once Again' by the leader of the main opposition party in the Republic reflect an insular and exclusive nationalism which echoed the previous leader's dogmatic assertion of 'The One Nation Theory'. Such remarks only serve to fuel unionist fears not alone about Fianna Fail intentions but about the ambitions of the framework document.

If the document contains any aspects which are threatening or triumphalist, or which are so construed, then it is up to political leaders in the Republic to empty them of any such content. There is a protracted period of negotiation ahead and, if agreement is to be reached, parties in the Republic must play a cooperative and constructive role informed by wisdom and sensitivity.

Forum for Peace and Reconciliation 5 May 1995

CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

ARISING FROM THE JOINT FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT

Democratic Left statement by Seamus Lynch

Check against delivery

The Joint Framework Document proposes:

a new beginning, founded on consent, for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands (*JFD* Article 2)

This will involve

the search through dialogue with the relevant Northern Ireland parties for new institutions and structures to take account of the totality of relationships and to enable the people of Ireland to work together in all areas of common interest while fully respecting their diversity (*JFD* Article 11)

Substantial change is called for in order to tackle 'a fundamental absence of consensus about constitutional issues'. The document repeatedly stresses the need for 'consent', change by 'exclusively democratic, peaceful means' and for any settlement to be 'based on full respect for, and protection and expression of, the rights and identities of both traditions'. The commitment to constitutional change to the status of Northern Ireland is wide-ranging. The British Government 'reiterate that they have no selfish, strategic, or economic interest in Northern Ireland' and they will exercise 'their jurisdiction there' on the 'principles' of the 'full and equal legitimacy of the identity, sense of allegiance, aspiration and ethos of both the unionist and nationalist communities' (*JFD* Articles 19 and 20).

Article 20 of the document leaves no doubt as to the scope of change proposed:

This new approach to Northern Ireland ... will be enshrined in British constitutional legislation ... either by amendment of the Government of Ireland 1920 or by its replacement by appropriate new legislation and appropriate new provisions entrenched by

agreement

This has caused deep unease among unionists as was noted by President Robinson when she spoke of the need to understand unionist fears. We should note also that Articles 46 and 47 further fuel unionist fears. These two articles constitute a major qualification on 'consent' and effectively form an imperative to impose institutions of the type foreseen by the two Governments in both the Joint Declaration and the Framework Document. Thus the Framework Document proposes profound changes in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland regardless of, and indeed superior to, any internal agreement. The proposed constitutional change for Northern Ireland is much greater than that proposed for the Republic. Therefore, the commitment by the Irish Government to 'introduce and support proposals for change in the Irish Constitution to implement the commitments in the Joint Declaration' must be viewed in this light.

Historically, the 1937 Constitution was a child of its time. This was a time when many Europeans believed in the natural frontiers of nations based on the concept that the world was 'geographically constructed to accommodate nation states.' Arthur Griffith invoked a higher authority: 'Ireland cannot shift her frontiers. The Almighty traced them beyond the cunning of man to modify.'

This idea of the Irish nation held sway until recently. However, in the real world there never has been a united Ireland under native rule. But Articles 2 and 3 were never really of this world and were correctly described as 'make believe' when they were first exposed to public scrutiny.

Much has changed since the Irish Constitution was adopted. The Constitution was drafted in the aftermath of a bitter civil war when the memory of what many people regarded as the betrayal by the Boundary Commission was still fresh. The economic war was in progress and Britain continued to occupy a number of Irish ports. The Constitution was put to a vote at a time when many people were of the belief that partition was a temporary phenomenon.

However, the Northern Ireland state - with all its faults and imperfections - proved more durable than nationalist opinion allowed for. And it was never more durable than when under violent assault during the recent 'long war'. This is not to suggest that Articles 2 and 3 provided the ideological impetus to the IRA campaign, but they did provide credence and an apparent moral justification to the dangerous and delusive notion of 'unfinished business'.

There are many good reasons for amending Articles 2 and 3. The most important is that in their present form they are an impediment to permanent peace on this island. Through its Constitution, Ireland remains in breach of the Helsinki Agreement to which it is a signatory by its undemocratic claim to jurisdiction over the territory of an adjoining state. Unionists therefore consider the territorial claim to be menacing and aggressive. To them, it represents not a benign aspiration to unity but a clear intention by the Republic of Ireland to impose its rule on the citizens of Northern Ireland without reference to their democratic rights.

Indeed, the Supreme Court found that Articles 2 and 3 as currently worded constitute a claim of legal right over Northern Ireland. Furthermore, not only has the Irish Government a right to pursue this claim but has a constitutional imperative to do so.

There are those that argue that any amendment to Articles 2 and 3 will be a betrayal of nationalists in Northern Ireland. But can they explain how the present Articles defend nationalist interests? From 1937 to 1967 the values of de Valera's constitution remained intact as did the Unionist regime in Northern Ireland. In 1967, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was founded. Within two years it had made more positive gains for nationalists than decades of republican and anti-partition rhetoric from Southern politicians. Rather than these Articles assisting Northern nationalists they simply mirrored the most rigid and unyielding aspects of loyalism. It can be argued that these Articles have helped consolidate reactionary loyalism while undermining progressive unionism when what needs to be undermined is the negative and sterile confrontation between nationalist rhetoric and loyalist intransigence. In any case, nationalist rights and aspirations are fully catered for in the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Joint Declaration. The charge of abandonment is therefore just another expression of the politics of grievance. For the Republic, a desperate clinging to these Articles on the spurious basis of the 'abandonment' thesis is at odds with stated commitments to compromise and reconciliation.

It is surely ironic that among those most adamant that Articles 2 and 3 should remain unaltered are some who deny the legitimacy of the Irish state and who do not recognise the Irish Constitution - and this includes many who are not bound by its provisions. Extreme nationalism should not be permitted a veto of this kind. The people of the actually existing Republic of Ireland must live with the Irish Constitution; they alone have the power to change it and it is they who must decide if territorial nationalism is in the best interests of the Irish people.

If change is to advance the cause of peace and reconciliation, a mere change in the

wording of Articles 2 and 3 will not suffice. It is the *meaning* of the articles that must change and it must be seen to change. The dangerous notion of 'unfinished business' must be dispelled while reality must be acknowledged. This reality centres on the need for accommodation and reconciliation.

Unionism is also a reality. It is - like nationalism - a basic statement of allegiance that can incorporate various political philosophies. It commands the support of the greater number in Northern Ireland and this support is not confined to the adherents of one religion. Nationalism must finally acknowledge that unionists do not wish to be assimilated into the Irish nation and formally recognise the reality of the Northern Ireland state which is already given effective recognition by the Republic through the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Joint Declaration.

Political parties in the Republic must realise that a united Ireland has no value in itself and that if unity ever comes about it will only be as the outcome of a long process of peaceful relations. The direction of public policy on Northern Ireland has effectively changed and the Constitution should reflect this. With this in mind, Democratic Left has proposed that

The Republic of Ireland should amend Articles 2 and 3 of its Constitution

- To convert the current territorial claim into an aspiration for the unity of the people of Ireland
- To recognise Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom
- To recognise the existence and rights of the British Irish and Irish nationalists in Northern Ireland
- To incorporate also the principle of consent to future constitutional change

In other words, we should drop the territorial claim and the constitutional pretence of a one-nation Ireland. The principle of consent should be incorporated with no 'ifs' or 'buts' and we should revive the spirit of 'harmony and brotherly affection' espoused by the 1967 All-Party Committee on the Constitution. A recalcitrant, defensive approach to Articles 2 and 3 has no place in the search for peace and reconciliation. In this instance, compromise must be the order of the day.

FORUM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

NORTH-SOUTH STRUCTURES

Democratic Left statement by Paddy Joe McClean

19 May 1995

Democratic Left welcomes the prospect of greater co-operation between the two states on this island. There is both a need and a desire for such co-operation in the Republic and in Northern Ireland as has been expressed in many submissions to this Forum.

Agriculture, health, industry, tourism and education are just some of the areas with great potential for mutually beneficial co-operation.

Democratic Left is particularly concerned that no time is lost in developing North-South economic co-operation. Clear objectives should be set and we suggest the following:

- to double trade between the two states within five years.
- to eliminate unnecessary competition thereby reducing the costs to public funds.
- to develop cross-border local development programmes involving local authorities, business, trade union and community bodies.
- to remove obstacles to trade and mobility in border regions
- to develop North-South co-operation in agriculture
- to develop a joint labour market between the two economies
- to ensure that grants are related to the actual creation of new jobs rather than the cost of plant and machinery
- to provide additional educational resources to upgrade the skills of Northern Ireland's workforce with particular emphasis on unskilled and semi-skilled workers, whether employed or unemployed.
- to develop third-level education linkages.
- to explore the potential for job creation in the development of cultural and arts activities, especially those rooted in community efforts.

However, it must be recognised that there are political problems with the structures

proposed in the Joint Framework Document. The main problem is that after 23 years of Direct Rule such proposals can be interpreted as a move by the British Government towards joint authority with no Northern Ireland input as to the 'whys' and the 'wherefores'.

In relation to the detail of the Framework proposals Democratic Left wishes to make the following points:

Paragraph 24 refers to 'enabling representatives of the main traditions, North and South, to enter agreed, dynamic, new, co-operative and constructive relationships.' Where does this leave the two governments? Is it proposed that the Irish Government will act as a 'guardian angel' to Northern nationalists or is it going to represent its own slowly - and at times painfully - evolving pluralistic society?

Paragraph 26 states that 'specific arrangements would need to be developed to apply to EU matters.' This, of course, makes perfect sense but it can be argued that it lets the British Government off the hook. After all, what makes administrative sense in the context of Direct Rule might mean something completely different in the context of an internal Northern Ireland body.

Paragraph 28 appears to suggest that the two governments have agreed that elected representatives in Northern Ireland shall only be involved in the designation of functions to the North-South body *at a consultative level*. This assigns a mere passive, advisory role to elected representatives and shows scant regard for either the political process or the concept of a democratic mandate. Furthermore, does the phrase 'relevant political parties in Northern Ireland' imply that an arbitrary decision will be taken as to which parties will be consulted?

Paragraph 29 where it refers to the executive functions of North-South bodies reveals a strong bias towards quangos whereby responsibility for performance is devolved while control of funding and power is retained. Where, for example, does ultimate responsibility lie for legislation which may originate within the North-South body?

Paragraph 32 takes a purely Civil Service view of co-operation which is depicted as more a matter of administration than of political judgment. It is difficult, therefore, to see how people-based activities such as community groups, women's groups, travellers etc. would be facilitated in such a scenario.

Paragraph 33 gives practical examples of co-operation in various areas. Health promotion and education should be included in any such venture. Why not take on the tobacco giants in advertising while assisting the tobacco industry to diversify into other areas? Furthermore, the

maximum use should be made of medical technology on a co-operative basis in order to prevent duplication.

Paragraphs 36-38 refer to a Parliamentary Forum 'with representatives from agreed political institutions in Northern Ireland and members of the Oireachtas, to consider a wide range of matters of mutual interest.'

It is not clear how such a body would 'help heal the divisions among the communities on the island of Ireland.' It might be a useful exercise in 'getting to know you' for the participants and would allow for inter-departmental secondment. Beyond that, expectations of 'healing divisions' might be set too high.

The references to 'respective identities' and 'two major traditions' on the island seem to imply that Northern Ireland is almost exclusively unionist. Are they designed to placate unionists during a transition to a United Ireland? These references further imply that northern nationalists and southern nationalists are identical political twins, something that is no longer the case if, indeed, it ever was.

Notwithstanding the welcome joint initiative on economic and social issues by the SDLP and Ulster Unionist Party, the absence of discussion and agreement among, and by, the Northern Ireland political parties casts doubt over the proposals for North-South structures. Furthermore, paragraphs 46 and 47 of the Framework Document represent a major qualification on the notion of consent and effectively constitute an imperative - *in a fail-safe situation* - on the two governments to *impose* the proposed structures. If this should come to pass, true co-operation will prove impossible.

Unionist reaction to the North-South proposals fall into two broad categories. One view, articulated by Nigel Biggar (*Fortnight* April 1995), suggests that 'the framework document leaves unionist with everything to play for.'

It gives them the power to secure the union and peace by making it possible for northern nationalists to feel that they too own the institutions of government in Northern Ireland. The cost would be unionist endorsement of a North-south body, designed to foster practical co-operation between the two politically distinct parts of Ireland, and accountable to a Northern Ireland assembly in which unionists would hold a majority.

It is a price they can surely afford to pay. And it is in their own interests - not to

mention the interests of justice and peace - that they should.

The other view suggests that while unionists may be wrong to see the North-South body as the engine of 'rolling integration', and while they may be wrong to assume that it represents a victory for republican violence, yet there is sufficient evidence to suggest that it is both these things and recent experience has obliged unionists to believe the worst. The emergence of a modernising tendency is thus frustrated. It is true, as David Ervine has said, that a mood exists among unionists to find 'something to say "yes" to' but the structure of the North-South body would appear to put unionists in a position of always saying 'no' to the dynamic which both governments require such a body to have. It is, of course, an 'agreed' dynamic but it would be unionists who would, yet again, frustrate 'agreement', leaving themselves open to over-rule by the new Intergovernmental Conference.

While both views must be taken account of, the latter view is - like it or not - the predominant one among unionists. This does not necessarily mean an end to the prospect of North-South co-operation; it does mean that it may have to be arrived at by a different route. The important thing is that it is arrived at by agreement.

FORUM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

East-West Structures

DEMOCRATIC LEFT STATEMENT

Mary McMahon 9 June 1995

Since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement the main, but not exclusive vehicle for London-Dublin Inter-Government co-operation has been the Inter-Governmental Conference and the Maryfield Secretariat. With the signing of the Downing Street Declaration and publication of the *Framework for Agreement* a continued role is envisaged for these bodies but any new Assembly in Northern Ireland, whatever its powers, will surely have to be considered as a potential partner and participation in East-West relations.

The most glaring omission from the Frameworks is any suggestion of an East-West body that our shared humanity and close geographical proximity demands: an environmental protection agency. Is this because Britain does not want to be subject to Irish Government, and Northern Irish concerns, over Sellafield? Is it due to the fact that Britain has nuclear energy, whereas Ireland does not? Whatever the reasons it makes common sense to Democratic Left that such an agency created by the two Governments in conjunction with a democratic assembly in Northern Ireland should be a feature of the political landscape for the foreseeable future. It is an East-West structure that cannot be left to the goodwill or indifference of individual Government Ministers.

In general, the proposed East-West structures seem to be something of an afterthought - an appendix to the main focus of the Document which is North-South. This is in contrast with the 1991-92 talks which were supposedly concerned with the replacement of the existing East-West structure - the Anglo-Irish Agreement - which it is not proposed to alter. On the contrary, a 'new and more broadly-based Agreement' is envisaged.

The focus will remain centred on Northern Ireland and its relationship with the Republic with little attention to relations between the Republic and the United Kingdom. Paragraph 42 simply

restates the proposition contained in the Anglo-Irish Agreement which unionists found most objectionable, namely that the Irish Government not alone has a 'recognised concern' in relation to Northern Ireland but that it also has a recognised 'role'. Will this role continue to be, as it has been, to act solely in the interests of nationalists?

The British Government's acknowledgement of this role for the Irish Government continues with an approach that unionists have challenged since 1985. The only difference this time around is that this new agreement is to be arrived at 'through direct discussion between the two Governments and the other Talks participants' and that Northern Ireland representatives will 'play a greater part in it than at present.'

The Framework proposals again echo the Anglo-Irish Agreement in that they are almost exclusively concerned with the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. Paragraph 44 seems to suggest that policing in Northern Ireland will be a matter for the two governments. Is this to suggest that a future Northern Ireland assembly will have a role in overseeing the Gardai? Paragraph 47 - the so called fail-safe mechanism - asserts that if the devolution proposals fail, the British Government would ensure that the North-South structures would remain in place. This further serves to confirm the view of the proposed East-West structures as an extension of the North-South structures.

Paragraph 39 refers, in a phrase borrowed from the Anglo-Irish summit of 1980, to 'the totality of relationships between the two islands'. This phrase goes some way to acknowledge the wider social, cultural, and economic interconnections between Britain and the island of Ireland. It is worth noting that this concept found expression in the Ulster Unionist Party contribution to the Mayhew talks when the UUP advocated a Council of the British Isles consisting of representatives of the two governments and a devolved administration in Northern Ireland. However, the Framework Document does not expand on the concept and the focus remains firmly on the island of Ireland.

Paragraphs 46 and 47 are widely regarded as fail-safe clauses. Paragraph 47 states that if devolved institutions cease to function, and Direct Rule was reintroduced, 'the British Government agree

that other arrangements would be made to implement' co-operation 'at all levels' in Ireland. It would also ensure that the co-operation that had been developed through the North-South body be maintained.' Does this not open up the possibility of a nationalist faction, having secured the North-South body, seeking to disrupt an assembly so that it could not function? Furthermore, Paragraph 47 dramatically re-inforces the radical Anglo-Irish control mechanism for policing agreement in Northern Ireland proposed in Paragraph 46.

If the East-West dimension is regarded as strictly one-dimensional how then can a Northern Ireland Assembly ever be part of it? Will it be sufficiently flexible, and dynamic, to permit such a body's participation at a future date? It cannot and should not be assumed that Northern Ireland's interests will always be identical with London's. Unionists no longer trust London and Northern nationalists are going to have learn (and signs are that some *are* learning), that they have little in common with Southern nationalism. While Belfast-London relations might be regarded to be covered by whatever the new constitutional arrangements are, these are not, and cannot be, tablets of stone: they are merely mechanisms for good governance capable of change as circumstances change. Similarly a Northern Ireland Assembly might well have a unique perspective on a matter which the two Governments regard as 'their' territory which should be taken into account.

In conclusion, the proposals on East-West structures need to be clarified. As they stand, their focus is too narrow and they pay mere lip-service to 'the totality of relationships'. And while ambiguity may be a normal part of the language of diplomacy, it is not a sound foundation for the democratic political agreement that is required.

FORUM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

DEMOCRATIC LEFT STATEMENT BY PROINSIAS DE ROSSA TD

BLOOMSDAY 1995

The British Government's proposals for the internal governance of Northern Ireland have so far received little attention. It is claimed that it builds on the agreement reached between the parties up to the 1992 talks. If so, one wonders why so few of those subscribing parties have shown the slightest interest in its contents. Does this perhaps, reflect an unwillingness to address that part of the settlement without which there is no settlement?

While most parties around this table accept that an internal agreement alone is not sufficient, is there anyone here who believes that a settlement is possible *without* an internal agreement? An answer to this question is necessary because failure to answer by those of us participating in this Forum will confirm unionist fears that this whole process has only one possible outcome: a United Ireland.

Even the most die-hard unionists accept that the Union that was constructed in 1921 has gone forever. This is not only because of the collapse of the internal functioning of the Northern Ireland state but also because of the nature of change in Britain itself. The old Imperial Power is a thing of the past. It has been replaced by a struggling democracy, an equal partner among others in EU. The nature of British society is changing: the monarchy is in danger of collapse; the multi-cultural and ethnic nature of its citizenry is increasingly evident.

It is against this background that Northern Ireland unionists have to construct a new relationship with Britain and the Republic of Ireland. It is evident that it cannot be constructed on past prejudices. If a new Northern Ireland is to emerge as a positive political gain after years of conflict then it will have very distinguishing characteristics that might also usefully be adopted by the Republic and Britain itself.

- It must be pluralistic: it must command the allegiance of both Ulster unionists and Northern nationalists: not as a repository of dreams and illusions but as a ~~compromise~~ between total integration and unification. It must leave space for, and indeed foster, the development of other political identities - in particular the emerging Third Strand ~~which~~

has been suffocated by sectarian politics but which will play a crucial role in the development of democratic politics in Northern Ireland. The Third Strand comprises those individuals, groups and parties who do not subscribe to either unionism or nationalism and whose political motivation stems from intellectual conviction rather than religious background. It is not a party but a movement for pluralism. It is Democratic Left's view that a strong Third Strand is the key to a democratic Northern Ireland.

- It must be participative. Every citizen must feel that the state belongs to them and is not simply the construct of political elites.
- It must allow for future generations being able to improve upon our best efforts; it must in itself be a vehicle for change.

Set against these criteria, the Framework document disappoints. Northern Ireland is to be governed by 'more of the same' type of legislative assembly as exists elsewhere. That will not do. Furthermore, the notion that the good governance of Northern Ireland can be handed over to three persons is alien to our concept of democracy.

There has so far been a deafening silence on the internal proposals. The system of governance by quangoism and quangocrats which all parties, ours included, complain about but serve on continues. While some will certainly survive at least the fledgling years of an Assembly, others will not. How are these to be selected and disposed of?

Democratic Left welcomes the recommendation of weighted majority voting for an Assembly as a progressive measure that moves us away from simple majoritarianism and towards pluralism. But more important is the need for structures to facilitate political participation that builds on the merits of civil society demonstrated during the past twenty-five years. Second chambers have their uses: they do not all have to be as awful as the House of Lords. While a Northern Ireland Assembly might not have the full range of parliamentary powers it will nevertheless exist in a unique European context and therefore indigenous solutions may well be the most relevant and apt, not those imported from, or modelled on, actual existing parliaments.

Northern Ireland should have a second chamber. Not a talking shop but a positive means of giving expression to those who have held civil society together when Northern Ireland walked a thin line between collapse into anarchy and communal strife and hanging together by the threads of human decency.

Democratic Left proposes a second chamber as an essential and meaningful body to encourage participation in political life and to take political life to the public. Such a body would, we suggest, in the first instance, comprise various sectoral interests such as women, community and voluntary groups, youth, agriculture, business, trade unions, further and higher education, district councils. Those to be elected from such panels would be so elected on the same basis as directly elected members. There could be a restriction on someone serving more than two consecutive terms to allow for new faces, new ideas. It should have a strict gender quota to positively encourage more female participation in politics. Its remit would be to review the work of the Assembly, perhaps organising debates and discussions on matters arising from its own area of interests, initiating legislative proposals and perhaps undertaking many of the administrative functions now undertaken by Area Boards. Whatever its potential shortcomings it certainly offers a more democratic option than the three sober suited males which is proposed in the British document.

In conclusion, both framework documents send conflicting messages about a Bill of Rights. There is a world of difference between a Charter and a Bill which provides legislatively enforceable rights. While the Forum awaits the work of its own consultants on this matter it should be noted that this is the only area of political agreement within Northern Ireland. If Northern Ireland, having suffered both, can agree on common mechanism for resolution then Britain must accede while we in the Republic of Ireland should insist on these safeguards and prepare to live with the consequences in our own jurisdiction.