

STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AIMS

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

The formation of a multi-Party Executive requires, inter alia, prior agreement on a social and economic programme to be implemented whilst in office. We are agreed that the basic objectives of such a programme should be to achieve rising standards of living, sustained full employment and the greatest possible measure of equality of opportunity and social and economic justice. We are also agreed that the first step towards achieving these is for the Executive to establish a comprehensive social and economic plan for Northern Ireland, backed by a central planning unit, which, in the light of detailed analysis of the full range of economic and social problems facing the community, will establish clear-cut and realistic economic and social goals. The plan will also determine the detailed policies and public expenditure programmes needed to achieve these agreed objectives over the years to come. It will include clear-cut targets in the fields of income and employment levels and the consequent investment programmes for infrastructure, social investment including housing, education and training, and State and private industry. We appreciate that the preparation and execution of such programmes will involve the full measure of freedom of decision which Westminster agreed to devolve to the new Executive. We also realise that the achievement of our basic objectives may require us to discuss with Westminster the necessity for some further Executive responsibility over taxation in Northern Ireland.

2. The following sections elaborate the general statements contained in the preceding paragraph and describe in general terms a number of the measures which, we are agreed, seem likely to appear in any comprehensive Social and Economic Programme for Northern Ireland.

GENERAL ECONOMIC POLICY

3. In order to achieve our basic economic objectives it will be necessary to examine various problems that underlie overall unemployment figures in order to produce a more effective reduction of unemployment. Enterprise Ulster in the short-term must be given a new and strengthened role having regard to the employment position in particular areas. It will also be important to seek methods of increasing Northern Ireland participation and influence in EEC.

GENERAL REGIONAL PHYSICAL STRATEGY

4. We agree that it will be important to develop a policy of Growth and Key Centres, both for industrial promotion and for economy in services. These must include Londonderry as a centre of accelerated industrial growth and Strabane, Enniskillen, Omagh, Newry and Dungannon as key centres. Secondly, in our physical planning policy, the tradition and character of each locality must be respected and its true potential developed.

HOUSING

5. In order to tackle the housing problem effectively and eradicate the serious lack of basic facilities and services in many areas we need:
- (a) a housing target of 20,000* houses per year once the productivity of the construction industry has been increased;
 - (b) speedier re-development and a bigger housing conversion and improvement programme;
 - (c) measures to render the construction industry more streamlined and efficient and train more skilled operatives;
 - (d) to examine measures with a view to control urban land speculation and prices;
 - (e) to develop water and sewerage services to meet identified needs;
 - (f) to encourage development of voluntary housing agencies such as Housing Associations and co-operatives;
 - (g) to encourage greater tenant involvement in planning, management and maintenance of housing estates;
 - (h) to continue wherever necessary the present policy of public acquisition of houses in the private rented sector;
 - (i) measures to encourage home ownership in every way possible;
 - (j) to promote the growth of integrated housing; and

*The representatives of the Alliance and Social Democratic and Labour Parties were prepared to accept a target of this size at this stage. The representatives of the Ulster Unionist Party, whilst agreeing in principle to the concept of a specific target for new housing construction, did not feel able to agree to any specific target at this stage, in advance of a more detailed assessment of general priorities and their implications for the Northern Ireland construction industry.

- (k) to pay greater attention, than in the past, to the environmental quality of housing estates, public and private.

These proposals will involve a radical re-examination of the whole system of housing finance in Northern Ireland.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

6. It should be made clear at the outset that every aspect of the Northern Ireland problem involves community relations. All members of the Executive will be actively concerned to improve community relations, whether or not there continues to be a separate Community Relations portfolio. A reappraisal of the existing institutional arrangements in this field will be a priority task.

AGRICULTURE

7. Agriculture is of paramount importance to Northern Ireland. Whilst recognising the role of the EEC in the formulation of agricultural policy, we agree that the Executive must strive to take all necessary steps to increase the prosperity of Northern Ireland's agriculture. In particular, we believe we must make full use of grass, our major natural asset. The intensive livestock industry must also be assisted to surmount the major problems which it is facing from the rising costs of imported feeding stuffs. The Executive will also take steps to improve the viability of small farms, including those in horticulture. If agriculture in Northern Ireland is to contribute to the achievement of our overall social and economic objectives, it will be necessary to devise programmes to encourage co-operative farming, food processing and timber based industries. A thorough investigation of our fishing potential will be set in hand and steps will also be taken to encourage fish processing and boat building.

TRANSPORT

8. There is need for a detailed re-examination of the entire transport system including the administration of harbours and a detailed review of the role of the NI Transport Holding Company. As part of the policy of more balanced development there should be development of port and airport facilities in the North West. Using the latest techniques, we shall also wish to study the interplay of public and private transport and to assess the social and economic value as well as the financial costs of roads, buses, railways

and car parking. We are also agreed upon the need to open discussions with Westminster on our powers in relation to shipping and air services - both freight and passenger - which are crucial to the future development of the economy of Northern Ireland.

CONSERVATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

9. There is a need for encouragement and re-inforcement of the new arrangements in Northern Ireland relating to conservation in order to marshall all the necessary resources and to harmonise management policies and legislation.

TOURISM

10. We are agreed on the need to explore the possibilities of providing facilities in advance of need in order to pioneer markets for the future.

EDUCATION

11. The ideal of equal educational opportunity for all and the primacy of parental rights are the principles on which our educational system should be based. In the present context the following changes will be required:
 - (a) the introduction of a policy of universal nursery education;
 - (b) the radical re-examination of the present selection procedures for secondary education and the consequent re-organisation of secondary education;
 - (c) recognition of educational priority areas based on social need;
 - (d) the creation of machinery in the tertiary sector so that our considerable resources can be co-ordinated in the best interests of the community as a whole; and
 - (e) a detailed investigation of the role of education in the promotion of community harmony and the development of pilot experiments, after consultation with interested parties, in integrated education.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS

12. We understand the need for sensitivity and care in these fields but believe that every effort should be made to promote further understanding of the variety of our culture and traditions.

PRICES AND INCOMES

- 13. This is largely the responsibility of Westminster but the Northern Ireland Executive should co-ordinate Government agencies here and create adequate price policing methods as well as giving positive encouragement to the development of voluntary consumer associations.

INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

- 14. Studies and research leading to legislation to develop the concept of greater worker participation in the management of industry should be set in train.

POVERTY

- 15. There has been little research in Northern Ireland into the extent of poverty, the extent of disability, the extent of unmet need for community welfare services and the evaluation of services received. Such research should be a priority of the Executive with a view to reforming the entire system of social services so that it can more adequately fulfil its objective of eradicating poverty. Without prejudice to the principle of parity with Great Britain, consideration should be given to the creation of Northern Ireland as a pilot area for reforms in the whole field of family allowances, supplementary benefits, and the rationalisation of means tested benefits with a view to using the resources of the social services to make the most effective possible attack on poverty.

R D McConnell
 Derrick & Brothers
 Stephen Wilson
 John Ferguson

[Handwritten signature]
 R. G. Coyle

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