

DRAFT AMENDMENT TO DEVOLUTION REPORT

In the current climate of violence ^{Some would question} ~~it is necessary to consider~~ whether it is not premature to be ^{considering} ~~preoccupied~~ ^{with} political issues such as ^{the} arrangements for the Future Government of Northern Ireland. There are probably 3 perspectives from which the turbulent state of Northern Ireland may be viewed. First, that it is essentially a 'law and order' or 'military' situation which can only be solved by repressive measures and military means, and ~~will~~ ^{until} a military solution, (ie., defeat of the terrorists,) is achieved politics are virtually irrelevant or impossible. Secondly, that it is essentially a political situation in which constitutional politics are under severe threat from the politics of the bullet and the bomb, and in which there is no solution ^{until} ~~under~~ the credibility and effectiveness of the former is accepted by the community as superior to the ultimate futility of the latter. Thirdly, - and this may simply be another version of the second perspective - that a lasting solution to the Northern Ireland ^{Situation} can only be found through the establishment of a credible and effective ^{system} of constitutional politics commanding the ^{consent} ~~issue~~ of the vast majority of the community as a whole and ^{underpinned} ~~by~~ the firm and impartial promotion of the rule of law.

In the past, particularly during the ^{the creation} period from of the state of Northern Ireland, ~~until~~ the imposition of direct rule in 1972, every threat to the security of the state was dealt with by repressive measures, directed in the main against one section of the community. Successive unionist governments ~~resorted~~ ^{resorted} to emergency powers which for a time brought short term success. But the introduction of direct rule in 1972 became necessary because the traditional repressive measures had failed and the then unionist administration under the late Brian Faulkner (as he then was) and the ^{R.U.C. then constituted} ~~rule~~ as ~~their~~ constitution had lost credibility and

control in the community. The loss of control followed a ~~back~~ ^{back}lash from the minority communities ^y against the introduction of internment without trial in August 1971, and it took only 6 months of the repressive measure to demonstrate that government by such means was counter-productive. Even ~~still~~ ^{now}, there are calls to the Westminster government from the ranks of unionists to re-introduce Internment without Trial to deal with IRA terrorism, ^{this} ~~which~~ suggests that little has been learned from the lessons of the past. What is worse is that these calls are raised at a time when there has been an almost complete abandonment of constitutional politics.

On the other hand, fundamental to the minority's grievances against successive unionist administrations was the assertion of the right to participate in the government and administration of Northern Ireland. If this right has any validity, it must be seen in terms of the kind of government to which those asserting the right wish to contribute. Surely the right is devalued ^{unless} ~~until~~ it is to be exercised to help create a system ^{of} ~~for~~ government which is likely to command acceptance by the great majority of the community. Without this community-oriented objective the so-called right to participate in the government and administration of Northern Ireland is reduced to political posturing. Thus SDLP's ^{recent} ~~current~~ private discussions with Sinn Fein must be seen as counter-productive. Contrary to the views of Official Unionists and DUP, Sinn Fein is entitled to be treated as a political party to the extent to which it has a political mandate; but Sinn Fein forfeits the right to the extent to which it seeks to attain ^{and so} ~~and~~ ^{advocates} ~~supports~~ the attainment of political objectives by violent means. The right to be treated as a political party means that it must be open to political attack, and, especially when it qualifies its own position by adherence to a campaign of political violence, it is vital that any political ^{communication} with an attack upon it should be conducted openly.

Communication

Otherwise the participants endanger their ability to contribute to the creation of a system of government likely to command widespread confidence and support. Moreover, Sinn Fein and provisional IRA's commitment to violence is grossly and ~~naively~~ ^{inadvertently} underestimated if anyone thinks that they can be ~~permitted~~ ^{persuaded} to abandon it in the present circumstances. Sinn Fein's voluntary abandonment of its commitment to violence, if this is possible at all, because there must surely be a very large question mark over its capacity to cope with and make a constructive contribution to the full range of social and economic issues. The very oxygen of constitutional politics would be more significant if it were to occur in the context of developing constitutional politics in Northern Ireland issued aimed at achieving an acceptable system of government.

It is an alarming speculation that SDLP may have embarked on its talks in the hope that this would effectively prevent the ^{emergence} of any positive moves to develop constitutional politics. But it lends weight to the ^{suspicion} ~~that~~ ^{that} SDLP's enthusiasm for the Anglo-Irish Agreement was due to its belief that the Agreement would help to relieve them of any responsibility for achieving acceptable devolved government for Northern Ireland.

In these circumstances Alliance Party sees constitutional politics as under grave threat and that this problem endangers the viability of NI even more than the continuing violence. If the prospect of effective conditional politics is undermined and destroyed, it would take more than the long suffering security forces and the amazing resilience of the enduring people to rescue the community from a fate even worse than the current ^{level} of terrorism. This is why the Alliance Party views the current situation from the stand-point of the ^{UK} ~~UK~~ perspective and considers it is vitally

important to make a contribution to the development of constitutional politics in terms of proposed arrangements for future government and proposed measures for strengthening the rule of law ^{with} to make it a more effective instrument for regulating and safe-guarding society as a whole and its unlimited members and to protect it from political or other interference.