

## Plenary Session - 29 April 1992

1 The Ulster Unionist Party re-tables the Presentation of last spring, but in doing so, we are very conscious of the considerable movement which has taken place in the meantime. We state in that paper that "the constitutional affairs of the United Kingdom are in a state of flux", and repeat this in our Election Manifesto. This has become more evident than ever and the arguments on the structure on the nation continued through the election campaign, and had considerable impact on it. These arguments will continue to feature in the political agenda for the foreseeable future.

2 We have noted the Prime Minister's adherence, expressed in various speeches throughout the election, to the unity of the Kingdom, and the importance of preserving that unity. We have further noted that in discussing the integrity of the Union, the Prime Minister has been at pains to name all four parts of the Kingdom, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

3 Within that Union, there can be, indeed there should be differing systems of administration to suit the differing circumstances which exist. As Douglas Hurd, having warned against "foolish ideas for the mechanical separation of institution", said last October:

".....the governance of the different parts of the kingdom has to be different in style and flavour and we should welcome and act on these differences"

4 Secretaries of State over the last two decades have inflicted various grandiose schemes on this province. In contrast, we are more concerned with the simple and practical return of democratic structures of governance to the Ulster people. Where democracy is denied at a level which the people feel is within their compass, then that democracy atrophies and dies.

5 Power must be returned to the people through democratic institutions, but in doing this, certain principles must be observed.

5.1 The system of governance must be workable.

5.2 It must be durable.

5.3 The experience of the various failed initiatives illustrates the need for the above two principles, but to these we must add a third. It must be compatible with systems elsewhere in the Kingdom, or else all the strains which lead to division will become manifest.

6 This compatibility works in both directions. If some exotic scheme is tried here, it will certainly cause strains in our constitutional position, but in addition the knock-on effect in Scotland, and perhaps Wales, could be considerable. The separatist movements in those parts of the Kingdom are comparable in strength to that here, and such a "solution" here would stimulate in them further efforts to divide the nation.

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7 In short, the principle of common sense must be followed, and the wilder flights of fancy resisted. To this end our Party has prepared models of structures of governance for Northern Ireland which meet the above criteria, and we shall be happy to table them when appropriate.

8 Our recent Manifesto, in the section headed "Constitutional Position", sets out our present stance, which is further amplified in the Leader's foreword to that Manifesto. We are ready to participate in the continuing debate on the United Kingdom's internal structures, and also its wider relationship with Europe. Above all we will spare no effort in ensuring that this part of the Kingdom is well governed within the Union.