

ALLIANCE PARTY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting held in Alliance Party Headquarters on Wednesday 2nd December 1987.

PRESENT: Bill Barbour, John Alderdice, Mervyn Jones, Dan McGuinness, Derek Bell, Patrick Bell, Alex Caldwell, Jane Copeland, Stewart Dickson, Harry Hutchinson, George Jones, Miriam Judge, Siobhan Laird, Philip McGarry, Eileen Bell, Howard Johnston.

APOLOGIES: Addie Morrow, Eric Bullick, John Haslett, Sean Neeson.

1. CORRESPONDENCE

(a) Chairman read out a letter from former Party Leader, John Cushnahan thanking members for his retirement gift and Presentation Dinner.

(b) Letter from Mechthild Von Alemann, Secretary General, ELDR, giving details of Lignite visit to West Germany as detailed in Political Strategy Minutes. Stewart Dickson stated that he was available to go with Sean Neeson and this was approved by the Executive Committee.

(c) Chairman read out letter giving formal notice that he would be standing down as Chairman from the A.G.M. in 1988 owing to personal circumstances. The Party Leader and General Secretary both expressed regret on behalf of Party members and the Headquarter Staff.

(d) Letter from George Jones thanking fellow Committee Members for their consideration during his recent bereavement.

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

(a) Siobhan Laird asked that her name be added to the list of those present.

(b) It was agreed that under Section 3 (i) the sentence re Gordon Mawhinney's situation on the Executive should read "Party Leader also proposed that Gordon Mawhinney should be invited to attend until positions which are vacant are resolved or at least until the March AGM".

The Minutes, with these amendments, were then proposed as accurate by Howard Johnston and seconded by Siobhan Laird. The proposal was carried.

(c) Dan McGuinness reported on the Conference organised by the C.A.J., on 14/11/87. Stewart Dickson reported on the meeting of Alliance Councillors and stated the Association of Alliance Councillors had now been revived and he was now Chairman with Bill Mathews as Secretary. There will be regular meetings and Stewart will report back on progress.

(d) Howard Johnston reported on the meeting with Magherafelt Association that he and Dan McGuinness had attended. After discussion the Committee agreed that it would be practical to allow the Association to continue on the flexible basis that members would pay subs, newspapers, etc., to Headquarters direct but would not have a formal committee nor have any Official Office Holders. It was thought that the local members should meet at least once a year to maintain local contacts and that Headquarters would be available for advice etc. It was agreed that Harry Hutchinson would report periodically on the situation.

(e) After discussion it was agreed that the appointment of a Jt. Hon. Treasurer would be further postponed until the January meeting. It was agreed that all members should try and ascertain if a willing and suitable person could be nominated.

(f) On the subject of Policy Convenor, Dan McGuinness proposed Patrick Bell and Jane Copeland seconded. This was unanimously approved and Patrick Bell accepted the position. The Party Leader thanked him for his acceptance.

3. PARTY LEADER'S REPORT INCLUDING POLITICAL STRATEGY

The Party Leader reported on the following meetings and current issues:-

(a) His meetings with Seamus Lynch, Leader of the Workers Party, John Hume, SDLP Leader, Alan Dukes, Fine Gael Leader, with Peter Barry and Sean Barrett, Fine Gael Legal Affairs Spokesman and two meetings with the Secretary of State. He also had a long meeting with David Alton and accompanied him in a meeting with representatives from the Shipyard Unions. The Party Leader also reported that he hoped to meet the SDP Leader, Robert McLennan shortly and will be meeting Liberal Leader, David Steel in Paris this weekend. He also hopes to meet Official Unionist Leader, James Molyneaux in the near future as there had been a letter promising an early meeting but he would report back on progress. On conclusion of these Reports on the visits, Party Leader emphasised that he and other Party Members would be seeking further meetings, especially with the Northern Ireland Office on specific issues and submissions.

(b) Party Leader then spoke about the current position of the SDP/Liberal consultative talks and stated that Alliance Party Members would be advised to consider seriously the whole matter of any future relationship between us and them so that when it is opportune for us to talk to them we have a clear idea of what would be best for the Party.

(c) The current situation was then commented upon, especially in regard to the Extradition issue and its possible effects on the Anglo Irish Agreement. It was agreed, after discussion, that our Policy on the Anglo Irish Agreement was still the correct one and we should impress the N.I.O. and the Secretary of State of the need to have full consultations with Constitutional Parties prior to the review next year. Party Leader stated that the Enniskillen tragedy seemed to have had a greater effect outside Northern Ireland than in the Province and it was regrettable that there appeared to be no constructive shift in movement among the other political leaders. It was agreed that Party Members should continue to work and consolidate the Alliance message and this can be done by carrying on the leaflet campaign, which so far has had a good positive response, as well as starting immediate preparations for the 1988 Local Government Elections. Party Leader stated he would like to see a larger cohort of Local Government Alliance representatives on Councils where we already hold seats and the winning back of seats where we lost seats previously. Our Number 1 priority therefore would be, he said, more Councillors in 1989.

(c) Party Leader then made a few remarks about the Council situation which has been directly effected by Enniskillen, especially with regard to Sinn Fein's presence in the Council Chambers.

(d) Party Leader concluded his reports by stating that he also had meetings with the Deputy Secretary of State, John Stanley and the Chief Constable and future meetings were planned. The Party Leader then answered questions from various committee members on this report and then concluded by stating that he would be making a full report to Council this Saturday and he expected a lively debate on all issues discussed at this meeting. He said that he would like to record his appreciation of the Office Staff and particularly the work done during the week 16/11/87.

4. POLITICAL ORGANISATION

(a) Howard Johnston read the minutes of the meeting of the Political Organisation Committee of 25/11/87/ He noted on the fact that up to date Executive Link Reports have not been completed by the majority of Executive Links.

(b) It was agreed that training sessions, in preparation for the Local Government Elections, will be held on 16/1/88 for the North and South East and on the 30/1/88 for Greater Belfast and West.

(c) It was further agreed that the Local Government Candidates Form should be rectified to include a space for inclusion of the Applicants signature.

(d) It was also agreed that Publicity and Secretaries Hand Books be updated. General Secretary reported that this was already in hand and should be completed before Christmas.

5. ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE

(a) Vice Chairman Dan McGuinness read the minutes of the previous evening's Admin/Finance Meeting and reported on the progress of the work of the Building Sub Committee. He concluded his part of the report by inviting members to a small Christmas Party due to be held in Headquarters on the last day before the premises close for the Xmas holidays i.e. Wednesday 23/12/87. He asked that all members be aware that Headquarters will be closed 24/12/87 to 3/1/88 inclusive.

(b) Mervyn Jones then talked about the Levy and reported on the Treasurers Annual Meeting. He reviewed the Budget 1988 sheet with the Committee and stated that he will be making a full report to Council for their approval but that he anticipated that the Budget will have to be substantially increased to allow for expenses due to Headquarters renovation. He stated that there will be an appeal as well as an invitation to purchase Lagan Properties Shares on Saturday in connection with expected outlay.

Publications

The Editor recommended that the price of the newspaper be increased to assist some way the continuing loss made by the production of "Alliance". This was agreed and a price of 20P was fixed and will be announced at Council. She concluded by saying that she and the Sub Editor will prepare a report for the January Executive Meeting containing considerations for the future of the newspaper generally.

Policy

The Chairman took the opportunity to welcome Patrick Bell's appointment as Convenor and said he would look forward to his report at the January Executive Meeting.

Youth

Alex Caldwell reported on the Young Alliance AGM and also told of some other recent meetings in Strabane, Coleraine and with the Young Liberals. They have a constructive campaign to seek new members and have appointed Karen Caldwell as Membership Secretary. Party Chairman and Party Leader congratulated them on their efforts and the Committee agreed with remarks that it was to the advantage of the whole party that Young Alliance was being energetically revived. The Committee wished them success.

A.O.B.

Dan McGuinness, as Legal Affairs Spokesman reported that he had made, on behalf of the Party, a submission to Mr. Needham's office with comments on the Government's Discussion Document on "Elected Representatives and the Democratic Process in Northern Ireland". This is supplementary to our own paper which had been approved at September Council, copies of the submission will be circulated with the minutes.

MEETING CLOSED AT 11.10 PM