

ALLIANCE PARTY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

REPORT ON THE JOINT CENTRAL EXECUTIVE/POLITICAL STRATEGY COMMITTEES,
ROYAL HOTEL, BANGOR, SATURDAY/SUNDAY 22nd/23rd AUGUST 1987

SESSION 1

(A) PARTY FINANCE

- (i) It was recommended that the Administration and Finance Committee research the whole area of membership subscription, levy with a view to improving the collection and amounts of both e.g. the question of a minimum subscription and the minimum amount of levy to be increased from £336 to £500.
- (ii) It was agreed that a system of central membership should be instigated as soon as possible and other categories of membership e.g. life membership or party supporter should be investigated. Alternative forms of payment e.g. credit cards should also be researched to improve subs collection.
- (iii) It was further agreed that a Press Officer should be appointed as soon as the detailed investigation into finance necessary and the specific remit of such an appointment is carried out. This would be dealt with by the Administration and Finance Committee and their report would be submitted to Executive Committee and Council when completed.
- (iv) It was recommended that the whole system of new membership notification should be looked at with a view to improving the initial contact of a new member with the party. It was agreed that a new membership pack for example containing certain basic information should be sent out to new members with their membership card. General Secretary will liase with Associations re this.
- (v) It was agreed that an article on Party Finance and the cost of running the whole organisation should be written by Hon. Treasurers and presented in Alliance newspaper.

(B) PARTY ORGANISATION

- (i) It was unanimously agreed that it would not be practical at present to re-organise the party to form 17 Associations in line with the 17 Westminster Constituencies
- (ii) It was agreed that members should endeavour to ensure that all Party members throughout the Associations should help in the many different duties that are necessary for the efficient administration and running of the whole party structure. A Sub Committee of the Political Organisation Committee will be looking into the area of co-ordinated co-operation.
- (iii) It was agreed that it was vital that we start immediately appointing Party Agents and identifying candidates for every electoral area in preparation for the Local Government Elections of 1989. A Sub Committee of Political Organisation is also looking into this, and it was further agreed that it should be announced at Council that the candidates list for these elections would be opened and members should apply if they wish to be considered for selection. An analysis of our Local Government Strategy will be undertaken with research on 1985 Local Government results etc by the Political Organisation Committee and possible provision for training for potential Councillors must be investigated.

- (v) It was agreed that political meetings throughout Associations must be encouraged and a list of speakers drawn up and issued to Association Secretaries with a letter asking them to select speakers and arrange meetings as an ongoing function so that Associations do not devote their time solely to fund raising projects.
- (vi) It was agreed that, in order to increase the public profile of the Party, that members should write to newspapers more regularly about current political topics and the Alliance stance thereto. This matter will be raised at September Council with an invitation to join a group of letter writers which will meet initially in Headquarters at 5.30 each Monday evening and will be convened and organised by Party Leader. The need for a Press Officer in this and other related matters was raised at the juncture also.
- (vii) Howard Johnston reported that a small computer system will shortly be in use for Party Headquarters and should help in the general efficiency of administration for example, keeping records of Party submission and minutes of Party meetings and also holding membership and financial lists.

(C) DEVOLUTION AND THE ANGLO IRISH AGREEMENT

Party Leader delivered a very thought provoking paper and speech on this topic and it was agreed that further discussion, within the terms of the Resolution for Council "That this Council recognises a desire amongst the people of Northern Ireland for political progress, believes that the Alliance Party cannot wait for the initiative to be taken by others, and therefore announces its intention of launching a province wide campaign to present again our policy of powersharing devolution" would be worthwhile so that a complete analysis of our current stance on this topic could be made.

(D) SINN FEIN - OUR ATTITUDE

Seamus Close presented this well thought out paper and it was agreed that a Legal Affairs Sub Committee be convened by the Legal Affairs Spokesman Dan McGuinness to research the question of the viability of various measures of dealing with Sinn Fein especially within the Council Chamber. Although it was Party Policy to approve UDA proscription, it was unanimously agreed that straight forward proscription was not the answer to Sinn Fein and a document will be drawn up by the Committee who will also seek a meeting with the appropriate minister to discuss the findings of their considerations on this matter. The document will be presented to Council for approval under the aegis of the Resolution as set out in the agenda, "That this Council approves the document prepared by the Legal Affairs Sub Committee".

(E) C.E.C. - THE PARTY'S ATTITUDE

Patrick Bell presented a very comprehensive paper on this point and after much discussion it was agreed that this was an area that would require careful monitoring in the coming months and watch must be kept on any moves by Mr McCartney and his colleagues. It was further agreed that this was one topic that could be tackled quite successfully by a sustained letter campaign by us which would match the constant flow of letters published, especially in the Newsletter columns, that have been coming from members of the C.E.C., and other like minded people. This would be taken up by the letter writing group, convened by the Party Leader, already mentioned under Party Organisation section vi, The Resolution concerning Devolution, which will be debated at Council could also cover this area during the course of the discussion.

(F) THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICAL ARENA

The Deputy Leader Addie Morrow presented this paper which contained many interesting ideas about the question of whether or not Alliance should publicly applaud or criticise statements or action by Church Leaders. Opinions were expressed by most members representing many of the main churches. It was felt that it was worthwhile to hear members views on this complex, but it was finally agreed that we must be very careful with our comments or criticisms of statements from the churches. Many such statements must be replied to as they usually contained political as well as moral issues and we must respond constructively as the Church in Northern Ireland does have a role to play in ongoing debate about the current situation.

(G) THE U.D.A.

This paper, presented by Siobhan Laird, dealt mainly with our response to the U.D.A's Common Sense Report and our overall attitude to their role in Northern Ireland. There was lively debate on this topic and the conclusion was that our present policy of proscribing this organisation was still valid and while we will consider any articles or opinions they put forward it must be remembered that they are still using violence and intimidation to help achieve their goals.

(H) THE RACKETEERS

Gordon Mawhinney delivered a short account expanding the recent publicity given to the exposé of the racketeering in the UDA and the Workers Party. He circulated a newspaper article which told of the involvement of the Workers Party and it was agreed that the Government must be encouraged to clamp down on these illegal schemes as effectively as possible.

(I) WORKERS PARTY

Following from Gordon's speech the Party Leader spoke about the Workers Party and their recent attitudes on us as a Party, he contended that they were a bigger danger than the C.E.C. and we would need to answer their accusations etc. We must be aware of the danger they present and be vigilant on our defence.