

NORTHERN IRELAND

Our policy sub-committee have held a recent meeting to consider what should be our approach to the current political and security situation in Northern Ireland. They have taken into account the talks which we propose with the Security Forces and Northern Ireland political parties during the Summer recess.

Constitutional

1. On constitutional and political questions we should continue to adopt a broadly bipartisan approach wherever possible.
2. While there may be no early alternative to direct rule, we should press for every step to be taken to make it less bureaucratic and more accessible to local opinion.
3. We should co-operate with those Northern Ireland Parties who are searching for a stable constitutional system and encourage talks to pave the way for an agreed form of devolved government.
4. We agree that Northern Ireland has too few seats in Parliament, but this is a question to be discussed in the context of representation of all parts of the United Kingdom.
5. The policy sub-committee do not advocate a further re-organisation of local government in Northern Ireland at present, since it is not known what form of devolved Assembly will ultimately emerge.
6. We feel most strongly that political and constitutional solutions in Northern Ireland cannot be hurried and that there is a long period of deliberation ahead.

Security

7. There is no real prospect of constitutional progress until the present weak Security policy gives way to a determination to destroy terrorism. Attempts to "contain" it inspire no confidence.
8. We should continue to urge joint Security measures with the Dublin Government.
9. There are no additional legal powers in place of detention to assist the Security Forces to catch the "Godfathers of Terrorism". Michael Havers advises us that the law should be amended to create a single offence of committing an act of terrorism to apply to the whole United Kingdom. It would cover organising, recruitment and incitement. We are also studying the difficult problem of the protection of witnesses from intimidation.
10. Of all the steps to be taken in Northern Ireland, the most vital is to restore confidence in our will to win and that we will not withdraw our Security Forces until they are no longer needed.