

New voices, new choices—

Women for a change



Vote

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Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

on May 1st

Women for a change

Challenging existing politics

- 94% of people want a negotiated settlement.
- Only 4 out of every 10 believe their party is doing a lot to reach a political settlement.

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition believes that a settlement can be reached if there is a genuine will to do so. The problem is that many political parties bring a fixed and outdated agenda to negotiations. It is time for a change. We want to help create acceptable constitutional arrangements which protect and respect all our traditions and identities. We believe the government must show strong leadership to ensure that an agreed accommodation is achieved in the near future.

Harnessing community energy

- There are over 5000 community groups in Northern Ireland.
- Over 95,000 people are involved in community work.

The Women's Coalition believes that we should shape a political system that can reach beyond the elected politicians and draw on the expertise of the many other interests in our society. Community groups; women's organisations; church groups; business; trade unions and farmers' organisations must have the opportunity to engage actively in a politics of participation and openness. A Regional Economic and Social Council would bring people together in a creative social partnership. We support membership of the European Union, but we want more autonomy for regions like Northern Ireland. And following the European "peace package", community groups need sustained support to develop the valuable role they have played over the past dec-

ades of disadvantage and division.

Asking the right questions

- Over 50% of people live in areas which are more than 90% Protestant or 95% Catholic.
- More than 3,000 people have been killed by politically motivated violence since 1969.

What kind of a society produces such violence and division? The Women's Coalition believes we must challenge all who use violence for political ends, but also those who plant the seeds of violence by bigotry and speeches of hate. We are working for a tolerant society based on respect and equality for all. The Women's Coalition is committed to the immediate incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights and to the development of a Bill of Rights. We call for a comprehensive review of the criminal justice system, policing, and the position of both prisoners and victims of violence. We believe it is a basic right to live free from the fear of violent attack. We call for a reinstatement and maintenance of all ceasefire and no recourse to violence from any quarter.

New social priorities

- There are fewer childcare places in Northern Ireland than in any other U K region.
- Over the next 10 years there will be an increase of nearly one third in people over 75.

We deplore the lack of affordable and available childcare in Northern Ireland and will press hard for more provision. Many issues of concern to women are ignored. Strong action is needed on domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, cancer screening, accessible public transport, the environment and other matters which affect the quality of *all* our lives. We are committed to the restoration and development of the National Health Service. We want community care based on genuine need—with adequate home help provision, support for carers and free residential care for those who require it. An adequate safety net of welfare is the basis of any caring society.

Guaranteeing women a voice

- Northern Ireland has 17 MPs at Westminster and 3 MEPs in Europe—not one is a woman.
- Only the Women's Coalition guarantees female representatives at the Talks.

Over the years the political parties in Northern Ireland have been challenged to address the virtual exclusion of women from decision-making; they have largely failed. Our emergence has encouraged some parties to take the position of women more seriously, but the pressure must be kept up. A vote for the Women's Coalition is a vote for more women in politics. It is a vote for broader representation of Northern Ireland's diverse voices. The Women's Coalition believes the whole society is poorer for the lack of representation by women.

Economic development

- 1 in 3 children in Northern Ireland lives in poverty.
- Economic investment is directly affected by political instability and violence.

The Women's Coalition recognises that people are our fundamental resource. We must maximise local and international investment with a grant package as attractive as in any other region of the United Kingdom or Ireland. The aim must be to provide secure employment, with decent wages and working conditions, and to build the competitive base of our economy. We want to end the poverty trap of low wages, inadequate welfare benefits and, in later life, miserable pensions.

Supporting equality

- The average pay gap between men and women is over 20%.
- There are over 200,000 people with a disability in Northern Ireland.

The Women's Coalition wants progress towards elimination of discrimination by gender, race, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation. We want stronger equal pay legislation, and support for small and medium sized employers to put their equality obligations into practice. But legislation is not the only tool: a culture of rights must be underpinned by education and information.

About the Women's Coalition

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition is a cross-community political initiative:

- Representing all walks of life and all shades of political colour;
- Working through common sense, honesty and respect;
- Welcoming women and men and working for the future of our children;
- Holding as our fundamental values human rights, inclusivity and equality.

Our Analysis

We have seen how politics highlights divisions and feeds on fears. The Women's Coalition believes that things can be different. We practise a different politics—a politics of accommodation rather than confrontation. For decades our politics has been cast in the harsh mould of antagonism—help the Women's Coalition to shatter the mould.

Our Vision

Our vision is of a society where all citizens have a sense of belonging. We want all viewpoints heard; we want to reach an accommodation; we want negotiations to succeed. We want peace.

Our Aims

- Achieving a political accommodation based on equality and social justice.
- Building a peaceful society that provides social and economic opportunity for everyone.
- Increasing public and political representation for women.

Our Support

Our support is you, women and men alike. We need your vote and the votes of your friends and neighbors. Use your vote to break the pattern.