

*Secure the Union
Build your future*

The **Ulster Unionist Party**
General Election Manifesto 1st May 1997

Secure the Union

Build your future

The Union lies at the heart of our vision for the future. We are determined to maintain it so that its benefits can be enjoyed by all.

We are dedicated to strengthening and broadening your Union. Our parliamentary efforts are aimed at repairing the damage done to the fabric of the United Kingdom by the Anglo-Irish Agreement and ensuring that no future government repeats the follies of 1985 and 1995. This requires a positive approach. The damage to the Union cannot be repaired by merely sitting on the sidelines shouting slogans. So the Ulster Unionist Party has tried to engage positively with government, to take every opportunity of turning policy towards strengthening the Union, and to persuade as many as possible that the Union truly is the best outcome for all.

Unlike other unionist parties, the UUP has taken our message beyond Ulster. The need to inform the world's policy makers of the truth about 1990's Ulster has led to an Ulster Unionist presence in both Washington and London. In September 1995 our North American Bureau opened in the US capital and in July of the following year the Unionist Information Office was opened in London. We are continuing the task of educating the world about Northern Ireland. Republican propaganda no longer goes unchallenged through lack of information. Ulster Unionists have not allowed our message to go by default.

But political parties do not thrive on single issues. Taking the Union as our baseline, Ulster Unionist MPs dedicate themselves to working for all the people of Northern Ireland on the issues that matter. From BSE to fishing quotas, from unjust taxes to inequitable power costs, the UUP has worked tirelessly for our Province. We are a broadly based party, representative of every section of Ulster society. We will not forget our community links.

The Ulster Unionist team returned by you to Westminster will work to reinforce what has already been achieved. Where necessary we will draw upon sections of Ulster society for help - the business community, the Trade Unions and those who work in the community. Our party and our vision has a place for all those dedicated to peace and democracy.

I ask for your vote for the Ulster Unionist Party on 1st May. We stand four-square for the United Kingdom that guarantees economic well-being for all of us. But, beyond economics, our membership of a pluralist democracy offers the people of Northern Ireland the only basis of real peace and fair play.

We will not betray your trust.

David Trimble



Constitutional Affairs



Constitutional affairs seem destined to play a more prominent role in the lifetime of the next Parliament. Ulster Unionists will play a full part in any wider constitutional debate. Indeed in the light of our experience in Northern Ireland, we are uniquely qualified to do so.

We are concerned that proposals for devolution in Scotland and Wales could adversely affect the fiscal unity of the Kingdom. We are convinced that any proposals for devolution in Scotland and Wales should more closely reflect our proposals for Northern Ireland, which do not threaten the Union.

For Northern Ireland our objectives are to repair the damage done to the Union by direct rule and the Anglo-Irish Agreement and to a build stronger, broader based Union.

The Ulster Unionist Party remains four square for the Union because the Union offers the best future for all our people, whether unionist, nationalist or neither. It offers everyone the best prospect for peace and fair play because it links us to a genuinely plural, liberal democratic state capable of accommodating social, cultural and religious diversity.

We wish to see the failed Anglo-Irish Agreement replaced. Any new Agreement must be based on the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland - the principle of consent. It must respect the wishes of by far the greater number of the people of Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom and to share fully in their British citizenship. The Agreement must also enable everybody in Northern Ireland to participate in local administration on an equal basis.

Consequently, we want to build a new and more accountable democratic system in Northern Ireland which will ensure that “faceless bureaucrats” and their unrepresentative Quango nominees will no longer rule us from behind closed doors. Ulster Unionist proposals for a Northern Ireland Assembly are based on the principle of proportionality; elected representatives will be able to participate at all levels and at all stages in proportion to their electoral strength.

We wish to see the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms incorporated into UK law in order to protect the basic civil and political rights of everyone. The standards and procedures set by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe Convention on Minority Rights could be adapted as a possible role model for the group rights of all the minorities in Northern Ireland.

These and other international standards condemn the Irish Republic’s constitutional claim on Ulster. We would welcome genuinely beneficial co-operation with our southern neighbour: but that must be based on mutual respect and recognition.

The broader Agreement must look to the totality of relations within the British Isles which is the natural social and economic unit. The interactions on an

East/West axis between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom and also between the Irish Republic and Great Britain are greater in relative and absolute terms than those on a North/South axis between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

A genuinely British Irish Agreement should replace the flawed Anglo-Irish one. An appropriate cross frontier relationship could be located within this, based on pragmatic considerations of mutual benefit and not on a political agenda. Such a relationship would not pose a threat to either jurisdiction and would, unlike the present arrangements, correspond to the real needs of all the people.

We have achieved significant reforms to direct rule. It was the Ulster Unionist party that was responsible for

- gaining fairer representation at Westminster
- creating the Northern Ireland Select Committee
- obtaining more powers for the Northern Ireland Grand Committee
- diminishing the use of Orders in Council by more frequent inclusion of Northern Ireland in normal legislation.

We will continue to press for reformat Westminster so that Northern Ireland matters there are given the same degree of attention as all other matters. In particular we will continue to call for legislation by Bill rather than the inadequate Order in Council procedure.

The Ulster Unionist Party has a greater degree of experience and understanding of the complexities of Northern Ireland's security issues than any other party in the United Kingdom

Countering the IRA/Sinn Fein strategy

It continues, therefore, to be our primary responsibility to ensure that the Government is fully aware of the strategy of IRA/Sinn Fein, to discourage retaliatory violence by Loyalist terrorists and to promote the need for cohesive and adequate counter-terrorist policies and activities.

IRA/Sinn Fein is inextricably wedded to anti-personnel, social and economic terrorism and intends, in line with Mao Tse Tung's strategy for insurrection, to pursue this approach through into the next millennium. It is intent on establishing a ghetto mentality between the two traditions in order to provide a basis for an ultimate Bosnia type civil conflict.

Hence, the battle against any further breakdown in the structure of our society must be addressed at all levels. It is necessary, not only for the RUC and Army to protect the law-abiding community against the gun and the bomb, but for both traditions to actively pursue a policy of co-operation on the social and economic front and for the Government to clearly eschew any temptation to accommodate terrorism within the political process.

Security and Home Affairs



An effective broadcasting ban

We note that most broadcast journalists are unable to meet their promised commitment to challenge effectively the actions and morality of those who promote or endorse terrorism. We propose, therefore, to press for the introduction of effective measures to ban IRA/SinnFein, or any other advocates of terrorism, from the airwaves.

Terrorist disarmament

We believe that the campaign against terrorism must be carried into the international arena. Efforts to establish a Disarmament and Verification Commission comprised of members of international standing must continue in order to maximise the awareness overseas of the threat posed by the deadly arsenals of weaponry in IRA hands.

Protecting democracy

It is increasingly clear that IRA/Sinn Fein will only use political talks to consolidate its terrorist base and advance its objective of a United Socialist Ireland through violence. In that knowledge, we will maintain our firm commitment to defend the democratic process against contamination and distortion from any source.

Parades

We believe in civil and religious liberty for all. We will continue to support the rights of the loyal orders to march lawfully on the public highway in Northern Ireland and in freedom of access to places of worship for all. A solution will only be found when the police and the government have the courage to prevent the manipulation of this issue by Sinn Fein/IRA to create tension in the community.

We regret the failure of the North Committee to address this aspect of the problem or the necessary changes in legislation. While there maybe a role for a conciliation or mediation body, it would be wrong to give that body statutory powers over parades. There is a distinction between mediation on the one hand and policy making or adjudication on the other. These roles are incompatible.

Religious and Civil liberties and International Human Rights

In line with domestic law, the European Convention on Human Rights, the United Nations International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, we oppose any denial of the religious and civil liberties of groups and individuals.

Economy



Northern Ireland is one of the fastest growing of the eleven regions of the United Kingdom. Only East Anglia and the South West of England have grown faster over the last ten years, and both of these regions benefited from jobs moving out of London. 71,000 extra jobs have been created since 1993 and since 1985 output here has grown by 27% compared with 18% in Great Britain. However, much can be done to improve the performance of our local economy.

Research and Development

Our traditional industries are facing increasingly stiff competition from low wage countries. Levels of Research and Development and product innovation remain low, at only a quarter of the German level and one fifth of the Japanese. We will continue to encourage increased and improved Research and Development.

Competitiveness

We believe that much can be done to assist businesses to become more competitive, and we will work to achieve major improvements. Economic thinking in Ulster has become too cautious, partly because NIO Ministers are not directly answerable to local electors, their appointments are short term and they spend little time in the region.

Locally owned businesses

Locally owned businesses, including small businesses have performed particularly well in recent years. We will ensure that every assistance is given to support the development of this sector on which the future of the economy primarily depends.

One agency for business support

We believe that the various agencies dealing with indigenous business - LEDU, the IRTU, the home division of the IDB and those parts of the Training and Employment Agency which are enhancing skill levels within companies - should be merged to create an efficient one stop shop for business support. The new agency would contain a monitoring division to ensure that assistance is delivered with maximum efficiency, and with the minimum of bureaucracy, to ensure proper administration of public funds. Major focuses of support will be in raising levels of innovation in new products and in raising levels of vocational skills. The new arrangement would allow the IDB to focus its efforts solely on the task of attracting external firms, thereby utilising its financial resources more effectively.

Service industries

Northern Ireland must begin to develop its tradeable services industries otherwise it risks being left out of the services revolution. Sectors as diverse as finance, insurance, advertising, film making and consultancy are all underdeveloped in Northern Ireland. We believe that now is the time that Northern Ireland should be developing a long-term strategy for competitive service sector firms.

New retailers

We believe in maintaining a balance in the local economy which supports local businesses but does not allow them to stagnate through lack of competition. We welcome new retailers to Northern Ireland but not to sites which undermine existing town centres. We will continue to encourage the economic vitality of town centres.

Maximising exports

We want to see Northern Ireland build on its current export success to become a high export economy. While many of Ulster's large and externally owned companies need no lessons in expelling, smaller and locally owned firms can be helped to achieve more.

Employment



Trade with the Irish Republic

Much of the pressure to develop trade between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic has been shown to be politically rather than economically motivated. Cross border trade has been increasing and there is no need for exceptional action. We are as keen to promote trade with the Republic as with any other area. We will actively facilitate business opportunities and develop them whenever they benefit the people of Northern Ireland. We will not, however, invent bogus collaborative projects when the stimulus is political and the economic benefits are not commensurate with the cost.

Job creation and job security in Northern Ireland must be a Government priority in order to develop the economy and improve the outlook of everyone who lives here. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that this is particularly important in respect of our young people, too many of whom are continuing to leave Northern Ireland in search of better long term prospects in Great Britain.

Safeguarding jobs

We will continue to demand increased assistance to safeguard existing employment and continued encouragement for new employment creation opportunities.

Training Schemes

There is a continued need for training and it must be available to applicants from all areas. We therefore call for a reversal of the proposal to close Dundonald Training Centre.

ACE Scheme

We acknowledge the benefit which the community derives from the ACE Scheme and wish to see adequate funding for ACE posts maintained.

Fair Employment/Equal Opportunities

As a modern, pluralist party, we support equality in employment. We believe that, in trying to achieve fairness and equality, it is essential that the highest value is placed on equality of opportunity irrespective of race, gender or creed. It must never be thought that equality of opportunity can be sacrificed in order to achieve a supposed equal outcome - the merit principle is crucial. For this reason we oppose so-called positive discrimination. The best way to achieve the goals of fairness and equality in employment is by developing the economy in Northern Ireland to such an extent that there are jobs for those within the community who are actively seeking employment.

In pursuit of fairness we advocate the total restructuring of the various Agencies and Tribunals currently servicing this area, namely the Labour Relations Agency, the Fair Employment Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Race Relations Commission. The role of the Fair Employment Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission should not be to advise on rights and then enforce those same rights. Accordingly we wish to see two Agencies, one to act in an advisory

manner with regard to all employment issues, the other to deal with the enforcement of the legal codes on discrimination with a unified employment rights tribunal and a proper appeals procedure.

Job Seekers' Allowance

We believe that the Job Seekers' Allowance should be reviewed at the end of twelve months of operation.

For two decades the Ulster Unionist Party has consistently opposed fixed exchange rates and British experience has vindicated our position. The inevitable withdrawal from the Exchange Rate Mechanism, followed by savage devaluation of some currencies, was the most convincing evidence of flaws inherent in common currency arguments.

We will deter any future Government from repeating follies which increased the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement, led to higher unemployment, reduced financial support for public services, and dictated rises in taxation.

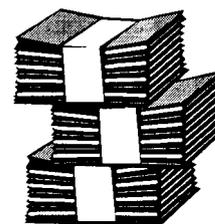
Only when Parliament is fully in control of the nation's housekeeping can the future be secure. That basic truth is confirmed in the stated positions of both main parties in Parliament, where policies are steadily converging.

Given Northern Ireland's high unemployment and comparatively low average living conditions, made worse by relatively higher commodity prices, Social Security is more important to the Province than any other part of the United Kingdom. Total Social Security payments for 1996-97 will cost UK taxpayers nearly £92 billion (estimated to absorb around 13% of GDP) and will rise to over £95 billion by 2000-01 or one third of total government expenditure. This at a time when Social Security demands are rising whilst the working percentage of the population is falling. Indeed by 2000-01, 36% or £34 billion of the total Social Security payments will be needed to pay retirement pensions. Already a growing number of people are spending more time in retirement than they did in the labour market. The ageing population's impact on public finances is further complicated by the increasing number of very elderly pensioners requiring intensive health and community care provision.

A fundamental review

In view of this situation and the close scrutiny being given to the cost of social services, the Ulster Unionist Party believes that the time has come for a fundamental review of the whole Social Security system, which would address every aspect of social welfare, including contributions, benefits and pensions, evaluate all sensible proposals and make recommendations based on need rather than economic dogma. We would like the review to consider the following:

Treasury



Social Security



1. Automatic supplementary pension for pensioners who were too old to enter the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS).
2. Exemption from electricity and telephone standing charges and the TV Licence fee for poorer pensioners living alone. Travel concessions enjoyed by pensioners in Great Britain should be implemented in Northern Ireland.
3. Take account of the great changes in the labour market which now has many more temporary, casual and part time workers, adapting the National insurance Scheme to include these people and bringing them into a suitable pension scheme.
4. Assess the concept of mixed pension provision involving adequate state, occupational and personal pensions with improved statutory legal protection of funds coupled with greater membership participation.
5. Examine the many suggestions for reducing dependence on means tested assistance which because of the continuing lack of long term employment can have a totally destructive effect on personal and family life.

Targeting

We will work to ensure that the wealth of the nation is used to the advantage of the whole population. We consider it vital that the entire range of social service provision is properly targeted to those most in need and will campaign vigorously to see that the disadvantaged are able to lead a full satisfying life.

Local Government



The restoration of real local Government remains our objective. The vacuum created in 1973 has become more dangerous through the creation of agencies for which there is no ministerial accountability.

For 24 years the Department of the Environment has encouraged the general public to blame Councillors for its incompetence in the fields of planning, roads, street lighting and water services. It must be remembered that in 1973 Central Government took over all these functions which historically and traditionally were the responsibility of six County Councils, two County Borough Councils and seventy Urban and Rural District Councils. The time has come to find a way to enable some of these local functions to be exercised by local councils.

The success of local councils in promoting local economic development shows how the increase of the powers of councils with regard to purely local issues can have a positive impact not just on the local service in question, but also on relationships within the council.

That 'Democratic Deficit' has been aggravated by bureaucratic complacency, insensitivity and apparent arrogance displayed by a minority of Central Government purveyors of what ought to be Local Government services.

The Select Committee on Northern Ireland affairs has accepted the principle

of democratic control over various agencies and we strongly support that conclusion which will increase the influence of elected councillors and restore public confidence in the authority of the Ballot Box.

We have achieved a commitment to extend rate relief for shop and premises for community use in small villages to Northern Ireland.

The revaluation of non domestic properties has been a major blow to locally owned retail outlets.

The transitional relief on these very large increases should be more generous and apply to a wider range of businesses.

Northern Ireland's geographical position on the periphery of the United Kingdom and Europe leaves the Province with a distinct disadvantage in the transport field. The Ulster Unionist Party has long advocated an integrated transport strategy to counteract this situation. Air, sea, road and rail should provide competitive services which are also complementary to each other.

Belfast Area Light Railway

The lack of an adequate railway system results in extra congestion on our roads and a Belfast Area Light Railway would vastly improve the traffic flow, with fast connections possible between the City and International airports.

Major road improvements

We welcome the proposed improvements to the West Link and A26 between Antrim and Ballymena. The upgrading and dualling of the A8 Lame to Belfast road, which is a designated Euroroute, must be addressed urgently.

Travel for disabled people

The Ulster Unionist Party welcome the prospect of better travel for the disabled. Every effort must be made to ensure that disabled people enjoy as full access to public transport as able bodied people.

Road Safety

We again draw attention to the unacceptable level of death and injury on our roads and pledge our full support for measures to improve the situation. We congratulate the RUC, schools, Road Safety organisations and Road Safety Officers for their good work in this field and hope that the resources required for these measures are maintained at a high level.

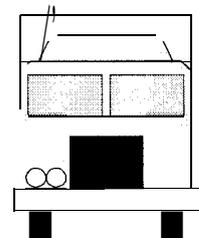
Roads gritting

We continue to call on the Department of the Environment Roads Service to recognise that road gritting is an essential safety measure, not an optional luxury.

Tax on transport

VAT on vehicles in addition to Petrol duties and the Road fund licence

Transport



Environment



provides huge financial resources for the Exchequer. A greater proportion should be used to provide better and safer roads.

We remain opposed to the increase in airport tax. Airport users living on the periphery of the United Kingdom are particularly badly affected by increase in the tax. We led the joint efforts of the opposition parties in Parliament to have the increase scrapped. We will strongly oppose any further increase.

Freight transport

The morale of the freight transport industry would be improved if the system of operator licensing was brought into line with Great Britain to include continuous licensing and the licensing of own account operators.

The setting up of a statutory review body similar to the Transport Tribunal in Great Britain to handle operator licensing appeal procedures would be greatly appreciated.

We want consideration to be given to the reduction of damage to roads and the environment by freight transport. Forty four tons on six axles rather than the current limit of forty tons on five axles would help to reduce the number of lorries on the roads and spread loads more evenly.

The Ulster Unionist Party is most active on environmental issues. We caution against the tendency to consider the environment as a single issue. To do so is to isolate it from related political, social and economic concern. We continue to address environmental issues in the broadest possible context having regard at all times to our obligation to protect the health of our planet.

Environmental protection watchdog

The Ulster Unionist Party is critical of the Government's failure to implement the Rossi Report in full with particular reference to the absolute necessity for a powerful independent environmental watchdog body.

Similarly we remain critical of the planning arrangements which have not curtailed the so called 'bungalow blight' affecting many rural areas. We do not believe that Agentisation addresses core environmental issues, but will render vital public provisions less amenable to elective control while increasing costs to the consumer.

Noise pollution

We support measures designed to counteract the growing problem of noise pollution. We welcome the Noise Act 1996 and call for the early adoption of this legislation by the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland.

Environmental Audit

We note the continuing demands of an expanding tourism industry, and we believe insufficient account has been taken of the necessity for environmental audit in respect of the increased demands upon infrastructure.

Inland Waters

We welcome the recent allocation of money for angling and demand that the

Department of the Environment improves its own performance in relation to the pollution of inland waters which need to be kept pure, not only for the benefit of angling and commercial fishing interests and the associated tourism, but also because that same water is essential for human consumption and the needs of industry.

The Ulster Unionist Party stands on a long record of support for the continued provision and preservation of a good quality of life for occupiers.

Housing Executive Accountability

We are concerned with current trends which seemingly increase the lack of accountability of the Housing Executive to both elected members and tenants. We oppose such development as contrary to the interests of the public.

Sustainable development

While encouraging private ownership we remain concerned with the constant demand for green field development which has a detrimental effect upon the rural landscape and ignores the need to address the core issue of sustainable development.

Review of demographic changes

We are concerned about the effect of demographic change which has resulted in half of the population now living in the greater Belfast area. The impact of this has not yet been evaluated adequately and the Party advocates a high level review of the likely effects upon other areas.

New build and Housing Associations

We are concerned at the virtual withdrawal from new house building by the NIHE. We welcome the greater role of Housing Associations on this matter, but unlike the Housing Executive, Housing Associations do not have statutory powers such as vesting powers, which are necessary to complete major redevelopment schemes and consequently the NIHE must work closely with Housing Associations.

The passing of the Broadcasting Act has highlighted the vast changes due to take place in television and radio and the Ulster Unionist Party looks to the appropriate Regulators to ensure that all aspects of television and radio are kept to the high standard expected of British broadcasting not only in the UK but throughout the world.

Multiplex licences

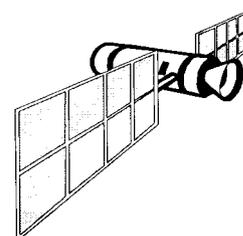
We are disappointed that the Independent Television Commission cannot take account of quality when awarding multiplex licences and will work for this to be changed.

We support the concept of a universal Set-top Box capable of receiving all channels.

Housing



Communications



Health



Signing, Sub- Titling and Audio-description

We seek increased Signing and Sub-titling for the deaf and hard of hearing. We also seek increased audio-description to improve enjoyment of television by blind people.

Abolition of the TV Licence Fee

A new departure in broadcasting takes place with the introduction of restricted advertising on the BBC and we consider the time has come for the Corporation to lose its crutch of the Licence Fee and be opened up to the energy of competition, thus allowing it to be judged by its performance and popularity against all other television and radio channels. A new, smaller, dedicated Public Service Channel would replace that part of the output presently handled by the BBC, funded by a levy on the whole industry.

There is clearly a sense of growing crisis in our Health Service. This concern is shared by patients, professionals and others involved in the administration and funding of the service. Such concern does not come from a lack of confidence in the expertise of medical and other professionals. Rather it relates to a combination of inadequate funding levels, increased expectations, an apparently over-elaborate system of administration and an inability to prioritise.

Funding

There must be a reversal of the trend of reduced levels of health service funding in real terms. Unless this happens, the disintegration of the whole service will begin. We are concerned that expenditure on health care in Northern Ireland has now fallen behind the levels in Scotland and Wales and that the gap with England is narrowing.

Administration

A close examination is needed of the effectiveness of the often overlapping administration structures which have been created in the Health Service.

Partnership

A greater emphasis on partnership between the various groups is required rather than what appears to be an increasing amount of competition between them.

Priorities

There must be a greater concentration on establishing agreed priorities and an overall strategy related to those priorities. The professional expertise which exists within the health service must be harnessed to help agree these priorities in the light of the needs and circumstances of Northern Ireland particularly with regard to predominately rural areas.

Rationalisation

There must be a willingness by all concerned to take some hard decisions on rationalising provision related to overall priorities and on centralizing

specialised services and provision.

Health Education

There must be more emphasis on a co-ordinated health education programme.

Belvoir Park Hospital Cancer Unit

We support Belvoir Park Hospital's request for a second simulator to locate tumours and plan treatments. Belvoir Park's invaluable service to the treatment of cancer in Northern Ireland must not be jeopardised.

Dental and Optical Services

We continue to support the concept of free dental and optical check-ups.

Medical Sports Centre

With the increase in leisure activity we would welcome the development of a medical sports centre to complement an academy of sport. This could have a mutual benefit to the National Health Service based at Musgrave Park to supplement the fine orthopedic provision.

Prescription Charges

We have opposed the increases on prescription charges in recent years. We want to see reduced charges.

The Ulster Unionist Party is a democratic party where men and women work together as equals.

The merit principle

We have the highest number of women elected representatives in Northern Ireland. Currently 32% of female councillors are members of the Ulster Unionist Party. We support the merit principle regarding selection and promotion, as opposed to a policy of 'positive discrimination' as a means of securing increased representation for women.

Utilising women's skills

We believe that women are entitled to have equal access to the employment market and to opportunities to pursue chosen careers. If we are to utilise all the potential in our community, the training, skills and expertise of women should not be wasted.

New attitudes

Equality legislation, aimed at eliminating sex discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity for both men and women, has changed behaviour, encouraged new attitudes and opened up fresh opportunities for some women. However, progress has been limited. Occupational segregation and the 'glass ceiling' means that many women are still paid less than men, and work in a narrower range of jobs and at more junior levels, with few opportunities for advancement or training.

Women's Issues



Children's Issues



Equal pay for equal work

Remuneration should be based on the criterion of 'equal pay for equal work', with legal safeguards of definition and choice between full and part-time work for both sexes

Training

We believe that women should have access to training compatible with family responsibilities, with courses at appropriate times and places and adequate provision for childcare and daycare.

Family friendly practice

The Party supports policies which promote the reconciliation of work and family life, and we encourage employers with family friendly management practices. Greater use of flexible working arrangements should reflect the changing pattern of family life, recognizing the role of women in combining family responsibilities with paid employment. The provision of better nursery care facilities should be encouraged in the workplace.

Protecting women from violence

We deplore all violence against women, whether in the home or society, and urge the government to simplify arrest, charge and prosecution procedures in such cases. There should be provision of, and increased funding for, rehabilitation and support centres for the victims.

The Ulster Unionist Party has been at the forefront of the battle for improved protection and better rights for children. We will continue to seek changes in legislation to improve the lives of our children.

Children Order

We support the emphasis in the Children Order on offering families support to care for their children at home - developing a preventative framework for families rather than relying solely on child protection. However, in Northern Ireland family support day care and after care is relatively poorly developed, underfunded and provided mainly by the voluntary sector, and whereas many children continue to be looked after by the extended family, it is not an excuse for society to abrogate its responsibilities. More resources need to be allocated so that the Order can fulfill its requirements. Lack of resources remains a particular problem in respect of the duty which would be placed on health and social services boards to provide accommodation with care if a child's welfare is likely to be seriously prejudiced by a failure to provide accommodation.

Child Abduction

In recent years a number of cases have come to light of children being abducted from their homes in the UK and taken abroad. We are working with interest groups to plan and implement means by which such abductions will become much more difficult to achieve and which will assist in the return of those who have already been abducted.

Sex Tourism

Sex tourism is a problem which demands urgent attention. This brutality against young people has been shown to be particularly rife in countries in the Far East. We have been fully supportive of efforts by British and International human rights groups to stamp out this disgusting trade. We support measures to allow paedophiles, who travel from the UK to commit crimes against children abroad, to be prosecuted in the UK.

Child Abuse

Child abuse in the UK also remains a problem. We support improved training for those who work in this field. Every effort must be made to stop convicted paedophiles having the opportunity to re-offend.

The Ulster Unionist Party continues to work hard for improved rights for disabled people. Whereas there have been many improvements in attitudes during the last twenty years, much more practical work remains to be done if disabled people are to enjoy life to the full.

Disability Discrimination Act

The Disability Discrimination Act does not go far enough in its provisions to remove discrimination against disabled people in the workplace. The argument that improving the Act would cost much more money, particularly in transport costs, is shown to be exaggerated by the fact that significant advances have been made in transport design in recent years to improve access for disabled people.

Whereas we will continue to support efforts to improve the Act, it should be recognised that it goes some way to ameliorating the problem of discrimination.

Our efforts in Parliament ensured the Act came into force in Northern Ireland at the same time as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Commission on Disability

We support the establishment of a Commission to which disabled people can bring complaints of discrimination. We will continue to argue that the 6 million disabled people in the United Kingdom should enjoy at least the same protection as racial, religious and other groups.

The Ulster Unionist Party believes that our future lies with our children. For this reason, we have placed education at all levels at the very top of our list of priorities. We are determined to maintain the excellent standards of education achieved in Northern Ireland which are widely acknowledged to be by far the best of any region within the United Kingdom.

Disability Issues



Education



Nursery Education

Greater access to good quality pre-school education for children would enhance the level of educational attainment achieved by participating children throughout the period of their compulsory school attendance.

In the absence of additional specific funding for new nursery schools, we welcomed the Voucher Scheme which would have assisted more parents to obtain a pre-school nursery education place for their children.

We will continue to demand increased funding for pre-school education and the application of the Voucher Scheme in Northern Ireland.

Transfer procedure

We support the retention of the transfer procedure at age eleven although we believe it should be kept under constant review.

Special Needs

There should be a greater focus placed during teacher training courses on methods of identifying and helping individual children with learning difficulties. We further believe that a specific increase in funding to increase staffing levels of Educational Psychology departments is urgently required for the purpose of delivering the level of service expected and demanded by parents of children with special educational needs.

Secondary/Grammar School Education

All schools must be provided with the accommodation and equipment necessary to meet the demands placed on them by the National Curriculum. We welcome the fact that few pupils are now leaving secondary schools with no GCSE passes. However, GCSE coursework and examinations are not suitable for a significant percentage of pupils and we support the introduction of alternative methods of assessment for less academic children who may have good practical skills and a greater likelihood of success in pursuing more vocationally related study.

The issue of grammar school places needs to be examined in view of the fact that children in certain areas of Northern Ireland are at present disadvantaged as there is not a geographically even distribution of places.

Integrated Schools

We respect and defend the right of parents to choose the type of school in which they wish their children to be educated, consistent with the best use of public funding.

We acknowledge that many parents wish to have their children educated in integrated schools. We wholeheartedly congratulate school governors, staff and parents on the success of voluntary integration which has been an unproclaimed achievement of many schools for generations.

Nursery, special education, further and higher education are excellent examples of successful pupil and staff integration.

We oppose funding from already scarce educational resources to develop a third system of integrated schools at post primary level in Northern Ireland

when surplus accommodation for post primary school pupils already exists in the controlled and maintained sectors.

We commend to the school governors, staff and parents of controlled schools a policy of transformation to controlled integrated status where appropriate.

Third Level Education

The increase in the number of students moving into further and higher education should be matched by a proportionate increase in the levels of funding provided to cater for them.

Entry qualifications for third level education in Northern Ireland should be at the same level as those required in the rest of the United Kingdom.

We believe in the principle of free education for all, through state payment of fees and grants, and we are opposed to alternative methods of funding such as voucher schemes. We oppose students loans and support the re-establishment of adequate grants to remove the burdens of debt and unnecessary stress.

We support improved co-operation between the further education and higher education sectors and between the sectors and commerce and industry.

We support the principle of voluntary membership of students' unions and oppose attempts by those in favour of compulsory membership to stop individual students exercising their freedom of choice.

University/College Lecturers

We continue to actively support calls for the establishment of an independent pay review body for university and college lecturers.

The Ulster Unionist Party supports the provision of Centres of Excellence on a Province wide basis to develop the sporting talents of our young people to national and international competitive standards.

District Councils, the Sports Council and Education and Library Boards should co-operate more closely in promoting "Into Sport" experiences with non sectarian bodies.

We would encourage more applications for funding for sports and leisure provision from groups representative of the Unionist community and the greater number in Northern Ireland. We will continue to monitor the distribution of funding across the Province.

Proportionate funding from all sources should be made available to promote both majority and minority sporting leisure activity, both indoor and outdoor.

We believe that participation in sport should be encouraged on both

Sport and Leisure



National Heritage and the Arts



recreational and competitive levels. For this to happen, the necessary facilities must be available. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that Northern Ireland has not received sufficient government assistance in this area in comparison with other regions in the United Kingdom. The Party will continue to urge government to rectify this situation, and, in doing so, attract more high profile sporting events to the Province which, in the past, would not have taken place but for the strenuous efforts of local governing bodies and promoters.

The Ulster Unionist Party will continue to support initiatives designed to protect and develop our national heritage at both the local and United Kingdom wide level.

In addition to the development of our tourism industry, we are concerned with a number of other related issues such as the National Lottery, museums, public libraries and the arts.

Tourism

The main constraint on future tourist development will be a lack of suitable accommodation. Estimates are that at least 40 major new hotels are needed, as well as a large number of guest houses and the development of more bed and breakfast accommodation. We support attempts to develop new tourist accommodation. However, for its own long term benefit, tourism development should be environmentally sensitive.

Tourism is an industry which involves large parts of the community. Areas of outstanding scenery or of urban amenity need careful attention to maintain and enhance their beauty. There are considerable pressures on both urban and rural areas from commercial, residential and transport developments. Our aim is to involve the whole community in protecting the countryside starting with the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture. We will explore various models elsewhere including the highly successful National Parks in Great Britain.

The single biggest asset which has been given to tourism and culture in Northern Ireland in recent years is the Waterfront Hall. We supported the project despite criticism from those who are unwilling to invest in Ulster. We will continue to support worthwhile projects from those as large as the Waterfront initiative to the smaller tourist information services provided by our local councils.

The tourist industry in Northern Ireland enjoyed an unprecedented boom prior to the end of the IRA cease-fire. The extra revenue and employment generated provided proof of how attractive Northern Ireland is to overseas visitors. We want to see increased funding being made available to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and to district councils for the financing of a high profile publicity campaign, aimed at encouraging more tourists from overseas to visit Ulster and see for themselves the real Northern Ireland and what it has to offer.

We call for an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of the present joint tourism promotion arrangements.

National Lottery

We acknowledge that many people have serious reservations about the existence of the National Lottery. We are concerned, however, that Northern Ireland is not receiving its fair share of awards in relation to other parts of the United Kingdom and emphasise the fact that funds cannot be released to Northern Ireland unless applications are submitted for worthy projects.

Museums

We will urge Government recognition of the lower level of disposable income in Northern Ireland and the low level of profit for the sponsorship of museums. We believe that adequate funding of museums should be continued, thereby avoiding the need for increased admission charges. We would like to see action aimed at increasing the number of visits by the adult population to our museums.

The Library Service

We believe that prolonged cut-backs in library expenditure are damaging. Accordingly we support increased funding for library services.

The Arts

The Arts can play an important role in the economic regeneration of Northern Ireland. It is important that this role is appreciated. The Arts could develop their contribution to attracting visitors, particularly at the height of the tourist season. The Northern Ireland Arts Council should concentrate its funds on projects in Northern Ireland and should encourage more national arts bodies to include Northern Ireland in their activities.

Agriculture remains of much greater importance in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom. It employs a direct labour force of about 5.8% of the Northern Ireland workforce and the total employment in the Agribusiness industry is some 85,000. The pattern of land ownership is very different from elsewhere in the country. The owner occupier farmers of Northern Ireland are a hardy, self reliant, industrious element of the population. The Ulster Unionist Party has a well established commitment to the continued existence of the Northern Ireland family farm. These farms must, however, generate an income which will allow the farm family to enjoy a standard of living comparable with other citizens. Given that over 70% of Northern Ireland is a Less Favoured Area this is no easy task. We expect that GATT and changes in the EU will create a lot of problems over the coming years. Some of these changes will be related to agricultural production but there will also be social consequences. These events will have to be managed to keep intact the social structure of the rural population and we will promote policies which do so.

Food Quality

We support measures which will further improve the quality of our food by

Agriculture



applying the highest standards to production. We oppose any measures which will further erode the traditionally superb standards of animal and plant health which we can maintain. BSE has been a hideous warning of what happens when standards slip.

We have been in the forefront of the fight to overcome the very serious problems caused to the farming industry by BSE over the past year. We will continue to battle in the new parliament to ensure that the door is opened to Northern Ireland beef exports.

We are confident that given a level playing field Northern Ireland agriculture can compete successfully, but we must have action to make certain that our competitors have to meet the same standards of hygiene, animal welfare and medical treatment given to animals. We believe that in respect of crops they must observe the same high standards of production as we do. Risks should not be taken with the quality of food sold to the people of the United Kingdom.

It is essential that all possible benefit is derived from the food produced by our farmers and we continue to stress the need for the maximum level of employment to be achieved and maintained in the food processing industries. Assistance should also be given for the development and promotion of new products.

Investment in farm buildings

We will encourage investment in modern farm buildings for the housing of farm stock and the storage of crops by improvements to the grant structure. We urge that every effort be made to provide for the safe storage and disposal of farm wastes to avoid pollution of the environment and to diminish the harmful effects when such wastes are used as fertilisers.

Farming and the environment

A healthy and pleasant environment will not just happen of its own accord and improvements will have to be funded by society at large. We welcome the steps already taken in this regard and call for a steady expansion of the various schemes such as the recently announced Farm and Countryside Enhancement Scheme.

Education and training

The farmer of the future will need to be properly educated and qualified to produce the highest quality of food possible and they must have an income commensurate with that level of training. In addition, we are committed to better training for our farmers in modern business methods

Retirement scheme

We continue to press for the introduction of a retirement scheme in order to increase the present low percentage of younger farmers. At present some 63% of farmers in Northern Ireland are over the age of 50.

Planning

Many future farmers maybe part-time and the planning regulations need to recognise the need of such people to live on the family farm. Planning policy has to meet the needs of the active full-time and part-time farmers

and retired farmers.

Forestry

We are concerned about the low level of tree cover in Northern Ireland and urge improvement of incentives so that further planting of timber trees, especially broadleaf trees, can take place.

Horticulture

Northern Ireland should be producing far more of our horticultural needs. We continue to seek improvement of the prospects of that industry in the coming years.

Fisheries

While the Northern Ireland fisheries industry employs relatively few people compared with agriculture, the industry is of vital importance to the fishing ports of County Down, both in terms of fishermen and of those involved in the processing industry.

Quotas

The Northern Ireland fishing fleet must be given large enough quotas of the commercial species to enable it to provide sufficient fish to sustain the level of employment ashore and afloat.

The Common Fisheries Policy

The Common Fisheries Policy has not been helpful to Ulster's fishermen, We will continue to maintain pressure for the necessary changes to the present regime to ensure a long term stable future for our industry.

Scientific research

We want to see an improvement of knowledge of the sea and seek further funding for scientific research on sea fish.

Boat replacement

We call for a long term policy for the replacement of boats and harbour improvement.

The Ulster Unionist Party supports the Commonwealth of Nations, accepts the United Kingdom membership of the European Union, upholds the importance of NATO, and is committed to improvements in administration of the United Nations and the operation of its various agencies around the world.

Hong Kong

We are concerned that the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China should not damage civil rights in Hong Kong.

Foreign and European Affairs



Falkland Islands

We defend the right of the people of the Falkland Islands to determine their own future.

Gibraltar

We strongly object to the increasing restrictions being placed by Spain on Gibraltar.

European Union

We encourage the increased membership of the European Union but oppose the non-democratic bureaucratic control of European institutions and will continue to reject the introduction of a Single European Currency and the establishment of an independent Central Bank.

The Ulster Unionist Party will continue to campaign for greater democratic control over those institutions. Our belief is that a European “super state” could hamper the benefits which increased co-operation already bring to the citizens of the nations that make up the EU. Therefore we oppose any move towards European federalism which infringes upon our liberty and status as citizens of the United Kingdom.

European Fund for Peace and Reconciliation

We are concerned that money from the Fund for Peace and Reconciliation is not being allocated to sustainable projects. We want the money spent on projects which will achieve something for the people of Northern Ireland over a long period of time. We will continue to encourage applications from useful projects which will genuinely benefit the community.

Improving contacts

We will continue to improve contacts in the USA, in Europe, throughout the Commonwealth, and in South East Asia.

Overseas Aid

We support a ten year timetable to achieve the United Nations Development Aid target of 0.7% of GNP. We support fair Third World producer prices and a United Kingdom Development Education Fund.

Improved information from the developing world has given us a more accurate picture of how effective aid programmes are. It is clear that whereas many programmes are successful, many others are not. The quality of aid is central to the issue both in terms of long term and short term objectives.

We believe that the best way for the UK to continue to provide valuable overseas aid is for the UK to have as much control over its national aid programme as possible. The move towards European Union Aid will inevitably result in more bureaucracy and less aid reaching those who need it.

Land mines

We would support a ban on all anti-personnel land mines.

Human Rights

Abuse of human rights remains one of the major problems in today's world. It is important that we, in our advanced democratic society, continue to work for our fellow human beings in other parts of the world who do not enjoy the same rights and freedoms. The Ulster Unionist Party actively campaigns in Parliament for better human rights for all.

Recently we have been involved in endeavors to try to bring an end to the war in the Sudan and we have been active in seeking civil and religious freedom in parts of the world as diverse as Tibet, Iran, and Kashmir. We also co-operate with the other parties at Westminster in campaigns against slavery and torture.

We are concerned that human rights groups concentrate their efforts on parts of the world where abuse of human rights is a very real and immediate problem in people's lives. It is important that the credibility needed to conduct valuable campaigns is not undermined by misguided schemes closer to home to promote the demands of terrorists over the real rights of society.

At the same time responsibilities must also be stressed in an age when aspirations or desires might be elevated to rights, often to the disadvantage of fellow citizens.