

Agenda for Change

**The Alliance Manifesto,
General Election, 1 May 1997**

The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
Alliance

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Tell them it has to stop

Tell them...

These elections give us - the people of Northern Ireland - the chance to send the clearest possible message our political leaders.

Its time...

We've had years of failure and wasted opportunity - and it will only get worse if we don't do something about it.

Stop the intransigence! Stop the violence!

If you vote for 'not an inch' politicians you will get 'not an inch' politics. If you want things to change for the better, then you will have to vote Alliance.

This will be the last Westminster election this century. It gives you a vital opportunity to send a clear message to political leaders demanding an end to the failed strategies of unionism and nationalism, and demanding a start to the really serious process of building political agreement and a future for us all. You can send that message, by voting Alliance. Anything else is a vote for more failure.

These last three years have been a period of wasted opportunity and lost optimism. We have seen the IRA cynically abandon their cease-fire and re-launch a campaign of violence, as vicious as it is futile. We have seen the loyalist cease-fire slip away. We have seen an elaborate and internationally supported Talks Process run into the sand in the face of continued obstruction, intransigence and delay from politicians who seem frightened of seeking a solution. We have seen bitter confrontation over marches lead to widespread destruction, and a deepening of community division and fears. The Northern Ireland community has never been more divided or more frightened. **We cannot go on like this.**

We need a clear message from the people in this election demanding real progress towards political agreement and accommodation. A vote for Alliance is the only way to send that message. A vote for Paisley or McCartney is a vote for division and conflict. A vote for Trimble is a vote for further confrontation at Drumcree and elsewhere, and for endless delay and obstruction in the Talks. A vote for Adams is a vote for a strategy of talking peace while making war. A vote for Hume is a vote for a sadly failed strategy of putting agreement with Sinn Fein above agreement with other parties. A vote for any of the minor parties is a totally wasted vote.

There is just one central and crucial issue in these elections and that is the need to reach a fair accommodation within Northern Ireland. We can do little that is really effective on education,

health, jobs, important though they are, until we can get political agreement which creates institutions that give us some control over the decisions which affect us. We cannot afford to just **hope** things will get better. The Talks will drift into complete irrelevance if there is not a fundamental change of attitude. The potential clearly exists for increasing violence, both republican and loyalist, and we face the prospect of further ruinous confrontation at Drumcree and across Northern Ireland this summer if we don't **do** something about it. ,

The situation is very serious. That's why these elections are so important. That is why every vote for Alliance is vital. It is the only way to call a halt to the slide, and put us back on the road to peace.

Every vote for Alliance is a vote that says 'No' to:

- Endless delay and obstruction in the Talks
- Confrontation and Drumcree Three
- Terrorism, violence and lawlessness whatever its source

Every vote for Alliance is a vote for:

- An effective and inclusive Talks process on the basis of the Mitchell principles.
- Reasonable compromises over marches and the implementation of the key recommendations of the North Report on Parades.
- An end to violence from all sides.
- A commitment to providing the necessary resources for the highest standards in the Health Service and in Education.
- A Northern Ireland we can all share, based on respect for all rights and traditions, in which all sections of the community can participate, and which will let us shape a peaceful future together.

The Rule of Law

The Alliance Party believes that individual freedoms carry responsibilities to ensure that those freedoms are available for all citizens. We propose the enactment of a Bill of rights, and the creation of a Department of Justice (to be overseen by an elected Northern Ireland Assembly) which would lead to more widespread involvement in issues of justice and human rights throughout the community. The Department of Justice would have responsibility for parades, policing, victim support, prisons, probation, criminal injuries and criminal damage.

Parades

It is essential that the Rule of Law should be upheld in Northern Ireland. The events surrounding Drumcree last summer including blocking of roads, burning of vehicles and looting of shops were totally indefensible and unjustifiable. Alliance has been pressing for an independent body to deal with the issue of controversial parades, a proposal closely reflected in the central recommendation of the North Report.

Alliance's proposals to the North Commission included the following:-

- An independent commission on parades.
- A preference for voluntary compromise, through mediation, with a binding decision to be taken by the Independent Tribunal where compromise is not possible.
- A longer notice period for parades to allow for mediation and negotiation.
- The police to enforce the Commission's decision, with discretion to respond to the developing situations.

In effect the community, not the police force, would take responsibility for the organisation of parades.

Alliance believes that it is inappropriate to infringe freedom of assembly by imposing charges, but it is necessary for the Independent Commission to have statutory powers.

Policing

The fight against terrorism must continue unabated, with the police supported by the army and, most importantly, by the community as a whole. This task has been undertaken over the years with great courage and professionalism, but the increased professionalism of the RUC and its standing in the community were threatened by the events of Drumcree last summer. Alliance believes that the community and its elected representatives must work with the police to promote greater co-operation between the police and the public. There must be a fully independent police complaints procedure. As the terrorist situation permits, there should be greater emphasis on community policing. Training and secondment schemes should be adapted to take account of policing in the changing environment of Northern Ireland, especially in respect of the negative 'peace dividend' of increased drug trafficking and other organised crime.

Victim Support

Alliance believes there must be proper recognition of the suffering of victims by practical, as well as symbolic means. Alliance rejects the 'tariff' system of criminal injuries compensation introduced in Great Britain and calls for a review of the permanent exclusion of former paramilitaries from criminal injuries compensation.

Emergency Legislation

The Emergency Legislation currently in force under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, must be kept under review to ensure that the measures in place are appropriate to take account of the terrorist threat faced by the community while safeguarding the rights of individuals. Exclusion orders in particular should be ended. Interrogation of suspects should be video-taped as well as audio-taped, to ensure that false claims cannot be sustained in respect of the material or conduct of interrogations.

Alliance has consistently supported the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into a Bill of Rights for the UK as a whole and for Northern Ireland in particular. We will strive especially hard to ensure that the new Parliament sees this enacted.

Political Development

The current round of multi-party talks is deadlocked but Alliance will continue to work vigorously to find a way forward. Any just, fair and workable settlement needs to have four main elements:

Elements of a Settlement

A Regional Power-sharing Government for Northern Ireland

In a divided society like Northern Ireland, it is essential to ensure that representatives of all sections of our people have the opportunity to work together, at every level of government. Partnership in government, based on party strength in an elected Assembly, is not only the right framework for our community representatives to work together, it is also the only proposal which has sustained substantial support across the divisions in our society throughout the last twenty-five difficult years. Co-operation together in areas such as Agriculture, Health and Social Services, the Environment, the Economy, Education and indeed Policing, is the best way to build a partnership and a sustainable and lasting peace.

A Bill of Rights, to protect every individual citizen and prevent discrimination

Whilst every community needs a legal structure for the preservation of individual rights, it is particularly vital in a divided society like Northern Ireland, where there is a history of discrimination and disadvantage. Alliance will insist on the incorporation of a Bill of Rights and a series of other measures to give confidence to all citizens that their rights will be protected.

A constructive and co-operative North-South relationship

North-South co-operation is important for both practical and political reasons. On a small island like Ireland, it simply does not make sense to have so little co-operation on matters of mutual interest. The environment, transport infrastructure, tourism, and, as we have recently seen, animal health, are just a few of the sectors where better co-operation could be in all our interests. It is also true that there are areas where we are in competition with each other, and we should recognise that fact.

A constructive and cooperative North-South relationship does **not** mean a large institution on the border, running our affairs. It could mean Ministers from North and South meeting with each other, and, in so far as they could reach agreement on areas of common interest, working constructively together. Such democratic accountability ensures that everyone's interests are protected.

No less important for Nationalists, North/South co-operation gives some recognition of their aspiration to work towards a United Ireland, and some expression of their all-Ireland identity.

The right of the people of Northern Ireland to decide their own future, with no change in the constitutional position without their consent

In 1988 we published a very detailed and imaginative set of proposals which we entitled "Governing with Consent". That Principle of Consent, which insists that the constitutional future of Northern Ireland is a matter to be decided by the people here, has always been a fundamental principle for Alliance. It remains so, and we are encouraged that it is has been so fully endorsed in the Downing Street Declaration, the Framework Documents, and most recently in the Draft Report of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. It is the recognition and respecting of this principle which makes the achievement of a settlement in Ireland a realistic prospect.

There is another side to this principle, and it is the consent of the minority to the **way** in which Northern Ireland is governed. This other dimension of consent is also an essential feature. Dealing with this will amongst other things involve reaching agreement to ensure that those with responsibility for the law and its administration, receive the respect without which no society can give its citizens a sense of safety and security.

The Process of Reaching a Settlement

The Mitchell Principles

If we are ever to reach a negotiated settlement, the parties must be committed to Talks and an honorable compromise. The issues must be resolved through the force of argument, rather than the use of violence. The Alliance Party remains fully committed to the Mitchell Principles as the basis for the current Talks. It is regrettable that the strength of those principles has been diluted by the actions of certain parties and the response of the two governments.

Alliance fully supports the recommendations of the Mitchell Report that decommissioning occur alongside talks, in the context of ceasefire from both sets of paramilitaries.

Decommissioning

Decommissioning is fundamentally a political issue. Alliance recognises the importance of the neutralizing illegally held arms to reduce the prospects of violence in our society. However the possession of arms is not the core of the conflict within Northern Ireland. Like terrorism itself, it is only a symptom of a much wider political problem; decommissioning cannot by itself put an end terrorism.

There are clear practical limitations to decommissioning. There can never be any guarantee that it has been completed by either set of paramilitaries. Decommissioning should be viewed as both a means of reducing the threat of terrorism and as a confidence building measure. The acceptance of the principle of and implementation of decommissioning by the paramilitaries, like the acceptance of the Mitchell Principles and the principle of consent by parties associated with paramilitarism, would go a long way to providing the necessary confidence that the ceasefire were genuine.

We have provide elsewhere a detailed publication showing how decommissioning might practically be achieved in parallel with negotiations.

Education

Education is a preparation for life, and the opportunity for our children's future. This opportunity must be available to all. It cannot be provided without the necessary resources. That is why Alliance is prepared to see a 1p increase in Income Tax, to be put entirely into education. Not a single Northern Ireland MP voted for this proposition when it came to Parliament in late 1996. Alliance is opposed to unnecessary taxation, but Education is a priority and we are prepared to accept that more public funds are necessary, if our children are to get a fair chance in life.

The Alliance Party's approach to Education is influenced by the Party's desire to heal divisions in the community by ensuring, amongst other things, equality of educational opportunity for every child.

Alliance is committed to:

- The opportunity of integrated education for all, believing it fosters understanding and tolerance between the different traditions in our community. Alliance was responsible for the introduction of legislation allowing for integrated education in Northern Ireland and believes the option should be **available** to all, but not imposed on all
- Encouragement of mutual understanding links between controlled and maintained schools.
- Constant review of the primary and secondary curriculum to ensure flexibility in subject range and in meeting the needs of all pupils.
- Availability of Nursery School places, properly funded, for all under fives.
- Opposition to the continued erosion of student funding.

- The extension of adult learning facilities and accreditation for vocational qualifications, including NVQ's and GNVQ's.
- A review of the basis for allocation of funds under Local Management of Schools. Rather than provide only for average teacher salaries, schools should be able to fund payment for more experienced staff at a level commensurate with their experience.
- A proper and constructive review of the needs of educational administration in Northern Ireland. The recent review by Government was a disaster, and was only stopped by united local political opposition. A proper review is however appropriate.

Education can and should be fundamental in developing tolerance, respect and mutual understanding from Nursery School to third level and must be adequately resourced to ensure the highest standards are available to all.

Training for Work

Alliance welcomes the growth in the establishment of formal and informal learning opportunities but believes that a proportion of the potential workforce is still insufficiently prepared for the demands of the workplace. Aware that employers demands change continuously due to technological developments, Alliance believes further initiatives are required. These include:

- Further development of Career Guidance within the school system with a strong emphasis on 'learning how to learn, for living and working'.
- NVQ systems should be expanded to encourage the over 35 age group, and financial support during training and retraining should reflect current wage levels rather than social security benefits.
- Long-term unemployed should be given the opportunity to regain the work ethic, and emphasis placed on new skills and experience.
- Greater emphasis on in-service training and management training within industry, commerce and the public sector.

In the future, few people will work in a full-time career for life. Many will develop a portfolio of part-time jobs, which will change throughout their working life. Education, training, social security, taxation and pension schemes will all have to change to facilitate this. If we prepare for it, the world of work can be a much more individually fulfilling experience than ever before. If we do not address it, our society will increasingly split into those who have more than they need; those who are stuck in dead-ends; and an underclass without work, without hope and without respect for society.

Health Care

Alliance is fully committed to the fundamental principle of equity of access on the basis of medical need to a National Health Service, free at the point of delivery and funded from general taxation.

A uniformly high standard of treatment must be available to every patient regardless of whether his/her GP is a fundholder or not and regardless of his/her location within the province. Alliance deplores the increasing play of so-called market forces in a sector which should be driven by need and the desire to provide optimum care.

Alliance welcomes the shift in the focus of health care towards practice within the community, and also the increasing emphasis on Health Education and Health Promotion.

Funding for community care must be adequate and effective as it must also be for the acute hospital services. The Patients' Charter offers certain guarantees to the patient regarding level and quality of care. It is essential that patients are well informed and involved in their treatment where appropriate. Adequate consultation, both with the public and with health care professionals, is necessary to ensure that properly financed health care is available.

Alliance recognises that Trusts and some form of GP Fundholding or Commissioning are likely to remain a feature of our Health Service. It is crucial that change in the administration of health care should not have a detrimental effect on its provision. The operation of Trusts and purchasing arrangements must therefore be kept under review to ensure that the system is not top-heavy with management at the expense of adequate provision of care. A review of the need for a multiplicity of Health Boards will be part of this process.

The introduction of GP Fundholding has, regrettably, led to a 'two-tier' system of health care with patients of fundholders often receiving treatment more quickly than those who rely on block funding. This is unacceptable and the public must be reassured that adequate levels of care are being purchased by the Health and Social Services Boards. Under-purchasing by the Boards has a knock-on effect on the range and quality of treatment which can be provided by hospitals and can lead to excess pressures on the well motivated and dedicated staff who are essential to a successful National Health Service.

While recognizing the importance of sound financial management, Alliance deplores the year-on-year cuts imposed by the Government on health service budgets. Advances in medical techniques, the ageing of the population and the expectation of a high quality service can only be met with adequate resources. Alliance will support an increase in taxation on cigarettes and tobacco to help fund healthcare.

The Economy

Alliance is committed to the creation and maintenance of a thriving Northern Ireland economy characterised by sustainable growth, stability, high employment and a fair distribution of resources. The private sector is generally best placed to achieve these goals through the marketplace, for it is primarily through individual enterprise and initiative that the economy grows and wealth is created. However the public sector will have a continuing significant role helping to improve the competitiveness of business, provide services and infrastructure development beyond the scope of the market, and compensating for things the market does not do, such as the distribution of some of the benefits of wealth creation, especially in health care and the education services.

While peace and political stability are prerequisites for optimum economic development, the economy is important in the success of the political and peace process. Economic development leading to greater employment and increased prosperity is itself a motivating factor towards peace. Implementing reconciliation measures depends upon having available adequate resources and a local community with a positive outlook on job prospects. In utilising economic opportunities we must tackle a number of issues outlined at greater length in Alliance's overall economy policy document. These include:

- developing an enterprise culture.
- improving trade and business support.
- making education and training more efficient and relevant to the needs of employers and students.
- tackling long-term and overall unemployment and developing a real social economy.
- improving the transport and energy infrastructure.
- developing the tourist potential.
- determining effective means of cross-border co-operation.
- ensuring equality of opportunity regardless of religion, gender, disability or age.

Alliance is pro-business and sensitive to the need for social change. Alliance believes that in many respects, Northern Ireland society needs to change its attitude to business. Entrepreneurial spirit should be identified, nurtured and supported.

Innovation needs to be encouraged while progress and change should be regarded as opportunities rather than portrayed or accepted as threats. Alliance supports an enterprise culture rather than a dependency culture.

Agriculture and Rural Development

Agriculture is the largest sector of the economy in Northern Ireland and employs thousands of our people both directly and in ancillary industries. It also has the capacity to make a larger contribution by additional activities which 'add value' to agricultural produce.

The whole rural economy is, however, going through a period of rapid transition. The GATT agreement will inevitably have major effects on the future of subsidies, quotas and other special measures. The boost for the tourist industry which occurred during the ceasefire must be pursued, and this will largely feature "green tourism" - activities such as walking, fishing and camping which depend on an unspoilt countryside. We should aim for high quality, high spend tourism, rather than the mass market. Other factors are constantly threatening the viability of rural community life, both social and economic.

The BSE crisis highlighted the importance of agriculture to the Northern Ireland economy. Alliance has been critical of the Government's handling of the crisis. Alliance will continue to work to ensure priority treatment for Northern Ireland's beef cattle. This is important, since the province is the only part of the UK which is a net exporter of beef, and appropriate given Northern Ireland's excellent record of animal health and traceability schemes.

In place of the Common Agricultural Policy, there should be a Common Rural Policy throughout the European Union. This would cease to be a system of indirect price management and instead incorporate payments for specific environmental economic and social goals to benefit the wider community as well as the individual concerned.

A wider rural development policy will provide for the continued provision of health, education, housing, transport and policing services to all rural communities. The rural economy should be developed by the encouragement of technology and information based activity alongside farm diversification, leisure and tourism.

As part of a Common Rural Policy in Northern Ireland, there should be advice and assistance for farm diversification and the development of new businesses. The present rural planning policy should be modified, to allow new housing in Rural Policy Areas, where this is necessary for the long-term viability of farm and other businesses, and to allow the development of small scale alternative enterprises.

Since 1947 agriculture has been asked to produce food in quantity, and the industry has been very successful. The problem of surpluses has arisen because of this success and the introduction of quotas has been an attempt to remedy this. The need in the future will be to produce quality food, as demanded by increasingly affluent and discerning consumers. Encouragement should be given to the development of less-intensive agriculture, including organic production, to meet the demands in this area.

In the medium to long term, production quotas will have to be replaced by alternative measures. It is not possible to maintain the present system alongside a move to a more market-orientated system under GATT.

As the demand for food decreases, forestry and biomass energy crops should be encouraged on surplus land, with appropriate fiscal incentives. The current set-aside policy is inimical to good husbandry and should be ended. Greater emphasis should also be given to the development of processing to add value to agricultural produce, to maximise the benefits to the 'local economy.

Animal welfare concerns, as well as the need to add value to agricultural goods, mean that we should reduce the export of live animals from Northern Ireland. There should be significant curbs on the transport of live animals throughout Europe, and uniformly high welfare standards. The Department of Agriculture should also be more pro-active in dealing with cruelty to animals in the form of sports such as hare coursing and various kinds of hunting.

Energy

Alliance supports a sustainable energy policy for Northern Ireland which aims to maximise energy efficiency and minimise consumption of non-renewable resources. Northern Ireland has the potential to develop renewable resources. Government policy must emphasise and encourage new, imaginative sources of energy, such as wind and wave power, bio fuels and agricultural and municipal wastes. Alliance believes new energy technology should be supported by government funding as well as by the private sector. The Party also supports energy inter-connectors between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, subject to careful consideration of economic and environmental concerns.

Energy efficiency and conservation must be encouraged in both public, commercial and domestic sectors. While the economic benefits for industry of energy efficiency are clear, Alliance supports the introduction of energy rating for private dwellings and encouragement for householders to look at insulation and other energy conservation measures.

Transport

Alliance supports an integrated transport strategy for Northern Ireland, incorporating transportation by rail, road, air and sea. This should include both internal movement and external movement to the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain and further afield into mainland Europe.

Alliance also believes that European standards must be applied to the development of the main arterial routes within Northern Ireland. Within the Greater Belfast area, the increasing traffic should be addressed by developing park and ride schemes, improved public transport, electronic management schemes, bus priorities, traffic calming and pedestrian and cycle path schemes, rather

than simply pushing road development. This would encourage people to use public transport, thereby reducing the use of private cars within the urban area. The Party supported the recent Traffic Reduction Act and will press Government to carry out its duties under the Act.

Mobility problems should be addressed. Many roads in the rural parts of the province require improvement, and this must be dealt with in conjunction with improved public transport. Improving the mobility of the elderly, the handicapped and the isolated has also a very positive outcome for health and welfare in the community.

Alliance would welcome more integrated ticketing between various transport companies, which would facilitate both local travelers and tourists.

Alliance believes that a comprehensive transport policy which improves infrastructure for industry, tourism and economic development must be a priority for Government.

The Environment

Alliance believes that the ever increasing level of damage being done to the environment is one of the greatest challenges facing countries around the world. Responsibility for taking up the challenge rests with governments, councils, civil servants and political parties as well as businessmen, community groups and individuals.

Alliance is committed to the principle of sustainable development. No matter how competitive or enterprising an economy is in the short term, unless it is environmentally sustainable it cannot succeed in the long term.

Alliance favours, over time, a partial shift in taxation away from income and labour and towards pollution and resource depletion.

Eco-labelling of products would help to create a fairer market for those who are committed to environmentally friendly methods of production,

Alliance will continue to press the Department of Environment to assume a more proactive role in facilitating recycling activities. Councils should also be more innovative in this area and extensive programmed to educate the population, particularly school children, in recycling and waste minimisation are required. A regional strategy for the disposal of waste is now a matter of urgency,

Alliance wants to see a multi-agency approach led by the Department of the Environment, to plan the development of our main cities and towns. Our urban environment must be made more pleasant for its residents who should take precedence over the motor car. Alliance will press the Department of the Environment to apply Green Belt regulations firmly and fairly.

Alliance strongly supports the programme of designating Areas of Special Scientific Interest. The Party has raised in Parliament the DOE proposals to privatise the management of heritage sites and ancient buildings. This is a policy of dubious advantage to the community.

Alliance welcomes the recent decision against the underground laboratory at Sellafield and calls upon the government to publish details of all chemical and other weapons dumps in the Irish Sea and to indicate the arrangements (if any) for monitoring of these weapons.

Housing

Alliance aims to ensure that every family is provided with a decent home, at a price which they can afford. We believe that both the public and private sectors have equally important roles to play in achieving this.

The work of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has helped ensure that housing allocation is made purely on merit, without political bias and has resulted in a considerable improvement in overall housing standards in Northern Ireland.

We believe that every possible encouragement and incentive should be given to those people who wish to buy their own homes. Alliance supports the right of Housing Executive tenants to purchase their own homes, and welcomes moves such as the co-ownership scheme to facilitate couples buying their first home.

Alliance is concerned that sufficient resources have not been made available to tackle the problem of homelessness, especially at a time when 'care in the community' policies are resulting in increasing numbers of people with special needs who require housing.

We are concerned about the growth in the number of single persons on the housing waiting list, and feel that there is a need for more accommodation suitable for young persons to be provided both by the Housing Executive and by relevant Housing Associations.

Alliance considers that the current delays in repair and improvement grants are intolerable. These delays have been made worse by recent cuts in government funding. A simple and more flexible grants scheme is needed to speed up applications and approval.

Alliance is concerned that improvements in combating urban housing decay have not been matched in the rural housing stock, which now accounts for much of the worst housing conditions in Northern Ireland. More resources need to be directed towards rural unfitness. Failure to do this can only lead to further rural depopulation and more urban overcrowding.

Women's Issues

Women represent 52% of the population, yet Northern Ireland representation in Parliament and Europe is exclusively male. Women's rights are neglected because they are not represented in the places where they can argue for them.

The influence of women in work, in government and in all decision making at the highest level should ensure that their concerns are not marginalised.

Women want equality, and deserve to be recognised and respected in their own right.

Alliance believes positive steps should be taken to encourage women to take their place in leadership positions.

Alliance supports the EU directives on social and economic equality for women.

Alliance believes all women should be enabled to realise their full potential and achieve fulfillment at home, in employment and in public life.

Alliance believes in equality of opportunity at all levels of society for men and women.

Children and Young People

Alliance has adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a policy commitment.

Alliance believes that in all legislation affecting children the welfare of the child must be paramount. Accordingly Alliance welcomes the introduction of the Children (NI) Order 1996, the most radical revision of the law in this field for many years. Government must however guarantee appropriate and adequate funding to ensure that the legislation is properly implemented in all respects.

The wishes, needs and rights of the child should always be considered. Children should be encouraged to express their views, and must be listened to.

Children have a right to protection from poverty, discrimination, violence, abuse and exploitation.

We believe that children are the joint responsibility of the family and the state.

Both parents should take responsibility for the upbringing of their children, Parents should be given support and encouragement to carry out these responsibilities, whether or not they are living together.

Disability

More than 17% of the adult population in Northern Ireland (200,000 people) have a disability. While 75,000 people with disabilities are of working age only 10,000 are registered as disabled.

People with disabilities have a right to play their full part in society - equal in opportunity and in practice. Alliance believes we have a long way to go to achieve full equality and to recognise the ability inherent within disability. We need to change attitudes and activities particularly in respect of:

- People with disabilities,
- Carers of people with disabilities,
- The general population.

Alliance is in favour of positive action rather than positive discrimination to further include people with disabilities at all levels in society. Areas of positive action include:

- Review of transport policy on disability.
- Review of equal opportunities policy on disability,
- Career development programmed for people with disabilities.
- Review of automatic benefit loss for people with disabilities taking up employment.
- Disability issue training for non-disabled employees.
- Integrated education for disabled and non-disabled people.
- Statutory agency revision of access for people in wheel chairs and people with sensory impairments.
- The production of public sector literature in an accessible format for people with sensory impairments.

Social Security

Alliance believes the Social Security system must be sufficiently flexible and adequately funded to provide not only a 'safety net', but also proper support and incentives to those seeking work. The long-term aim should be a combined taxation-benefit system which gets rid of the poverty trap created by the present arrangements, and which encourages individuals to take responsibility for themselves in so far as they can. We support the introduction of pilot 'Work Returner' schemes, where payment of benefits is phased out gradually once the recipient finds work. While the cost of such schemes needs to be carefully evaluated, their benefit is that they would allow the long-term unemployed to make the transition to full-time employment without suffering loss or debt.

Alliance advocates a review of the subsistence level on which Income Support is presently paid, and is committed to a realistic level for all benefits with annual rises linked to inflation. The same

allowances for childcare and earnings should be available to all single parents irrespective of sex. We believe that Child Benefit should remain a universal benefit with any inequalities this may produce resolved through the tax system.

A review of the Child Support Agency and its practices is urgently needed. The level of payments required by the CSA often discourages parents, usually fathers, from working. Those fathers who do work and pay Child Support can find their income reduced to near income support levels without the advantages of being on benefit. Often the payments made do not benefit the children concerned, as no additional payment is made where the mother is on Income Support.

We believe society's values are reflected in how it treats its most disadvantaged members: the old, the young, the sick and the unemployed. Alliance calls for a Social Security system which meets genuine need in a caring, informed and effective way.

Community Relations

Alliance has believed since its inception that it is essential to work for the elimination of prejudice by a just and liberal appreciation of the beliefs and fears of the different members of the community. Within any framework for a devolved government in Northern Ireland it is essential that there should be a Ministry of Community Relations which would influence other policy areas as well as promoting its own specific community relations agenda.

We have identified the following priority areas:

- Monitoring of community relations at both local and regional level.
- A review of the effectiveness of present legislation and the adequacy of the current provision of resources. This has always been essential in areas such as Fair Employment, but is also important in culture, language, the arts and sport.
- Encouragement of cross-community partnerships within and between government and voluntary sectors.
- A review and affirmation of the contribution of the Community Relations Council.
- Ensuring that in all policy areas new legislation encourages good community relations. This means **not** always dividing the community into two mutually exclusive camps, but rather building a single but diverse community with a pluralist ethos.

Anti-Discrimination Legislation

Alliance welcomes the introduction of Race Relations Legislation to Northern Ireland, albeit some 20 years after the corresponding legislation was introduced in Great Britain. Alliance also welcomes the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act, but believes that the current law needs to be expanded and strengthened in order to be effective. Alliance has consistently supported effective legislation to ensure equality of opportunity and to counter discrimination on grounds of religion, political belief, gender, race, disability and age.

Consumer Affairs

Alliance believes it is essential to have effective redress for consumers, and protection of consumer rights within both national and European legislation.

Priorities for consumers in Northern Ireland include:

Electricity Prices

The price differential between electricity costs in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK is unacceptable and must be reduced. Generating costs must be brought within the remit of OFFER.

Water Privatisation

As a result of Alliance campaigning, the privatisation proposal has been postponed. We will continue to campaign to ensure the proposal is not reintroduced.

Consumer rights must be given appropriate weight in the overall economy so as to encourage fair and free trade. Commercial monopolies and state subsidies are not generally good for consumers. Competition in the market, with appropriate supervision of standards, is the key to the best deal for the consumer.

Europe

The Alliance Party is strongly committed to the European Union, which has maintained peace and democracy in a region riven by centuries of conflict and national rivalries. The Maastricht Treaty allows local issues to be addressed in developing a Europe of the Regions. Alliance supports greater consultation with Northern Ireland public representatives in distribution of EU Funds and, where appropriate, direct representation for the province in negotiations with the European Commission and within the Council of Ministers. These are expressions of the principle of subsidiarity.

Our peripherality within the EU must be used as an opportunity rather than allowed to be a handicap; co-operation between the Republic of Ireland and the UK is essential to maximise the benefits of membership for the island as a whole. The Single Market and the Peace Process enhanced prospects for joint ventures on a North-South basis and for increased international investment. It is vital that Northern Ireland retains its Objective One Status beyond 1999.

Alliance also recognises the contribution made by the EU to the improvement of living and working conditions for all within the Union. We appreciate the overall benefits of EU membership for Northern Ireland, both in the financial support available to our infrastructure and the specific support from the Delors peace fund.

As a member of the European Liberal, Democratic and Reform Party, Alliance will work with this, the third major political group in Europe, to advance liberal views and policies on Northern Ireland and Europe. While other parties may take a negative view on Europe, Alliance is committed to working within the Union to shape political, economic and social policies which will improve the quality of life for all our citizens.

Overseas Development

Alliance is committed to a more equitable distribution of the world's wealth between nations to ensure fair treatment for poorer nations. This may be done through government and international action as well as individual action.

Alliance wants an overseas development policy which will encourage self-reliance for developing countries rather than over-dependence on exploitative Western economies.

Alliance supports the following measures at national level:

Commitment by the UK Government to give 0.7% of GDP in aid to the Third World, as recommended by the UN.

A more flexible approach to reduction and repayment of Third World debt - a problem of staggering proportions for the world's poorest countries.

Assistance with long-term self-help programmed in the developing world, rather than the current emphasis on short-term responses to emergencies.

The people of Northern Ireland have an excellent record of personal giving to charitable causes. The actions of our Government should reflect this popular priority.

Alliance

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