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10/10/2012**

Field Code Changed

Dear Sir or Madam.

Please find enclosed/attached a copy of the submission from the Communist Party of Ireland regarding the document that the Secretary of State issues in August this year relating to the Belfast Agreement and the N.I._Assembly. We do question the right of the Secretary of State to make changed to an agreement that was made by referendum by the people of Ireland. Please send any response to the above address. Thank you Lynda Walker, Chairperson of the Communist Party of Ireland

1. The Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) would normally welcome the opportunity to participate in democratic debate, however in responding to the document that the Secretary of State has issued, the CPI wants to express concern at the nature and limitation of the document and the questions asked.
2. We would ask why Owen Paterson has identified some sections of the Belfast Agreement for policy re-formulation and not others. There are four key areas regarding primary legislation, which he says has been debated. The Communist Party of Ireland believes that there are other areas of the Belfast Agreement that need to be considered also.
3. At our last congress, the Communist Party of Ireland called for the full implementation of the Belfast Agreement, especially in regards to a Bill of Rights and full commitment to equality laws. We also called for the establishment of a Civic Forum.
4. Whilst the CPI recognise that there are political and democratic limitations inherent in the nature of the political structures established by the Belfast Agreement; nevertheless, we believe that they can provide an opportunity, which was not there before, to present alternatives to the people. As we develop a strategy to overcome these difficulties, we hope to create a greater democratic space, to advance democracy beyond the existing structures.
5. We set out below answers to the questions that the Secretary of State chose to identify in doing so we have included wider areas of concern.

Question 1: What should the future size of the Northern Ireland Assembly be? We think that it should stay the same

Question 2: Do you believe that there should be combination of Parliamentary and Assembly elections. YES in 2015 or should these be decoupled? NO

(I do not think that this is a big issue for us, for political parties standing it might also be more convenient) If there is enough publicity for the elections there should not be a problem voting twice in one day, and saves money.

Question 3: Do you think the term of the current Northern Ireland Assembly should be extended from 2015 to 2016? NO-this is a move away from democracy, the electorate voted in the assembly for the term to 2015.

Question 4: Should the Northern Ireland Assembly move to a fixed 5-year term

Permanently? NO-this represents a move away from democracy whereby the electorate should be able to remove an assembly of it is clearly unrepresentative.

Question 5: Do you believe that representatives should be prohibited from holding the offices of MP and MLA at the same time? YES Agreed on this point

Question 6: Should MLAs also be prohibited from being members of the House of Lords? YES

Question 7: Is it better to use primary legislation to ban such practices outright at the earliest opportunity YES or to take a power to do so later to allow space for agreement to be reached?

Question 8: Do you think the Assembly would operate more effectively with a system, which provides for a government and an effective opposition? If so, how can this system best be achieved?

1. Answer: Question 8 is the most controversial one. Many believe that the voting system as it is now within the N.I. Assembly embeds sectarianism. However, as experience shows a "majority" government in Northern Ireland has not been a democratic solution either.
2. Whether there should be an opposition is complex and requires critical analysis, also the question of power sharing is crucial in a state that has experienced a severe democratic deficit, with a large section of the population denied basic democratic rights.
3. The Communist Party of Ireland believes at the present time that the Northern Ireland Assembly is not ready to operate within a system that

provides for an effective opposition. In the past, the Unionist Party abused the system of majority rule and the British Government were instrumental in upholding this system. Unfortunately, sectarian attitudes and practices are still entrenched within society and political parties. Even within local councils power sharing is still a disputed concept. The fact that Ministers in the power sharing executive can call for civil disobedience in protest at the legal determinations of the Parade's Commission clearly demonstrates the fragile nature of relations within society and the institutional nature of sectarianism.

4. At the present time there is evidence to show that some MLA's do not "serve all the people of Northern Ireland equally, and to act in accordance with the general obligations to promote equality and discrimination", neither do they "operate in a way conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment." (Pledge of Office and Code of conduct, page 10 of the Belfast Agreement)
 5. Furthermore, the recent abuse of petitions of concern shows how a safeguard against sectarian abuses, has been cynically used to entrench reactionary positions on social issues."
 6. In seeking "views on whether the Assembly would be more effective if it has both an inclusive government and effective opposition" (forward of the consultation document), the CPI would ask who would provide "an inclusive government". In a situation where a section of those in government do not even agree with the Belfast Agreement and the concept of power sharing or representation of all constituents.
 7. The CPI believes that the establishment of a Bill of Rights and the Civic Forum, as set out in the Belfast Agreement may go some way towards establishing more democratic institutions. Regarding gender equality 50-50 representation would at least ensure that women are more fairly represented at Stormont.
1. At this stage, the Communist Party of Ireland calls upon the N.I Assembly to:
 2. Establish a Bill of Rights.
 3. Establish 50/50 Gender representation
 4. To assemble a "Civic Community Seminar" to reconsider the re-establishment of the Civic Forum and its remit.
 5. And to assess the work of the North/South Ministerial Council to look at the areas of North/South co-operation that has been implemented and to identify a strategy for potential areas for development. This is particularly crucial at time of high emigration, unemployment and economic crisis.

6. The Communist Party of Ireland also calls upon the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly to establish a commission to work with the trade union movement and others, to put into effect a plan to create an economy for the common good, securing a strong public sector and encouraging the emerging worker owned co-operative sector and set about creating manufacturing jobs, and to consider ways that the agricultural and fisheries industries can be developed, where practicable to work on an all Ireland basis. The commission should explore all Ireland networks to facilitate the development of the manufacturing industry.

Among the features of such a strategy would be.

- The need to dramatically increase investment in research and development.
- Exploring all-Ireland networks to facilitate the development of manufacturing industry; transport, health and natural resources.
- Greater planning and integration to obtain optimum gains from the scale of exports from the Republic and from industrial enterprises in the North.
- Public procurement, whereby any investment package must be tailored to the maximum advantage of the greatest number of people, in recognition of the integral connection between economic dynamism and economic justice.
- Investment in the environment and environmentally responsible projects.
- Education co-operation

CONCLUSION

The CPI believes that the Political institutions here should work to increase democratic participation at all levels within society here. We believe that double jobbing among politicians is a barrier to greater democracy particularly the participation of women whose representation remains woefully inadequate.

We believe that full implementation of the Agreement has not been achieved and it is essential that a Bill of Rights and the establishment of an effective and representative Civic Forum, which are integral parts of the Agreement, be established as a matter of urgency.

We call for greater participation of an All Ireland nature to ensure that economic progress, decent health and educational services and social mobility can be realised by all citizens on this Island.

Statement for the wider public

THE Communist Party of Ireland has read the consultative document that Owen Paterson the Secretary of State has launched in August. The CPI believes that document is severely limited in the questions it asks and its remit. However, we believe that this is an opportunity for trade unions, political

parties women's and community organisations, individuals, republicans and socialists, to put forward their views on change. We draw attention to the fact that the 23rd of October is the deadline for submissions.

Although there is no reference to other aspects of governance, for example north-south relations, gender equality, a Bill of Rights, and the Civic Forum, the Communist Party believes that this is an opportunity to put forward proposals and ideas for positive change. Many people are dissatisfied with the system of government here but there is no consensus on what changes should be made. If trade unions and others do not respond to this consultation, those who do will hold the day.

The CPI thinks that it is worth our while to take the opportunity to make our views known. (Anyone interested in CPI wider policy can find this on our web page or available for Connolly Books: 43 East Essex Street, Dublin or **PO Box 85, Belfast BT1 1SR**. www.communistpartyofireland)