

NORTHERN IRELAND BRIEFING LINES 16 DECEMBER

Basic line to take

The points we should emphasise today are

- **The Joint Declaration set out a clear challenge to the Provisionals. This is that they should give up violence for good, and show that they have done so. The way would then be open for them to enter the political arena as a democratic party under the law. This challenge has had strong and wide support from the House of Commons, Church and Community leaders, and from people across the United Kingdom. It is now up to the Provisionals to decide. They will never have a better opportunity to opt for a peaceful future. All those who are sympathetic to the Nationalist tradition should urge them to take the democratic path, and help to build a better life for all the people of Northern Ireland.**
- **The Joint Declaration clearly and explicitly protects the democratic rights also of the unionists. It does not weaken or undermine the union. It reaffirms the Government's constitutional guarantee [that the status of Northern Ireland will not be changed without the consent of the majority of its people]. It takes no steps in the direction of joint jurisdiction of the British and Irish governments over Northern Ireland. The claims which have been made to this effect are entirely false, and cannot be justified by anything in the Joint Declaration. Nor does the British Government, in the Joint Declaration, subscribe to the "value" or "legitimacy" of a united Ireland. The British Government's position on this has not changed. We shall respect the wishes of a greater majority of the people of**

Northern Ireland. We shall not seek to persuade them to accept a united Ireland.

- The essence of the Joint Declaration is that it offers fair treatment to both sides of the community in Northern Ireland, with the support and encouragement of both the British and Irish Governments. The cooperation of the Irish Government will be very important in helping to bring peace to Northern Ireland. But the Joint Declaration does not give the Irish Government a role in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. This too has been misrepresented. There is nothing in the Joint Declaration to substantiate the assertion.

Will PIRA be allowed to keep their weapons? Will there be an amnesty?

- There is no question of "allowing" people in any part of the United Kingdom to hold weapons illegally, or in other ways of departing from what is clearly laid down in law.
- We are asking the provisionals to commit themselves to a permanent cessation of violence. This is not negotiable, and we are not talking of a temporary or conditional ceasefire.
- A permanent end to violence means that those concerned must accept that they have no need for weapons, but will live peacefully under the law and will pursue their aims by democratic means.
- The law will continue to be applied. Those who have committed crimes will be subject to it. So will those who are found illegally in possession of weapons.

How will the IRA's decision be announced and judged?

- We are waiting for one straightforward act from the Provisionals. That is implementation of a decision to end violence for good, and to take up our proposal that they should opt for a peaceful democratic future.
- It is not for us to say how the Provisionals should announce their decision. The responsibility for implementing it will rest with them. But we are confident that it will be clear to us whether or not a decision is being carried out.

Further meeting between John Hume and Gerry Adams?

- This is a matter for Mr. Hume. There is nothing to be negotiated with the Provisionals. They have seen the position clearly set out in the Joint Declaration. They must now give a clear answer to the question: will they enact a cessation to violence? This is not a matter for negotiation.
- In the House of Commons on 15 December, Mr. Hume expressed his strong support for the Joint Declaration. If he chooses to see Adams, we hope that he will put only one point to him: will you accept the Joint Declaration and give up violence for good, for you will never have a better opportunity?

What will the "preliminary exploratory talks" with Sinn Fein discuss?

- The first question to be answered is whether Sinn Fein will give up violence, and demonstrate that over a period of three months. The

preliminary talks would not be talks on Northern Ireland's political future. They would be talks about how, building on the confidence established by a cessation of violence, Sinn Fein could enter the political process. But we shall not determine the precise agenda for those talks until a cessation of violence is clearly in effect.

Self-determination: must there be simultaneous referendums? What does "concurrently" mean? Does this give the Republic of Ireland a say in how and when Northern Ireland's future is determined?

- The future of Northern Ireland is for the people of Northern Ireland to determine. The Joint Declaration does not specify how they should do so. It accepts that there should be concurrent processes in the North and South of Ireland respectively. That means that the processes would run in parallel. They would not have to be simultaneous [there is nothing in the Joint Declaration to prevent an exercise in self-determination being conducted in Northern Ireland at any time. Nor does the Declaration say that self-determination must be by referendum, though a referendum would be a likely way of achieving this].

Will the means of self-determination be a matter for discussion in the 3-Strand talks?

[NIO to answer]

What will be the next steps in the 3-Strand talks process

[NIO to answer]