

SUMMARY RECORD OF OPENING PLENARY SESSION -
TUESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 1997 (14.09)

Those present:

INDEPENDENT CHAIRMEN

GOVERNMENT TEAMS

PARTIES

Mr Holkeri

British Government

Alliance

General de Chastelain

Irish Government

Labour

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

Progressive Unionist Party

Sinn Féin

Social Democratic & Labour Party

Ulster Democratic Party

Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman (Mr Holkeri) convened the meeting at 14.09 and stated that the first item of business was approval of the minutes of previous Plenary sessions. The Chairman stated that at the Plenary on 15 September it was agreed that the record for 9 September would be reviewed at the next opportunity. He then asked whether any participant present at that meeting had any comments on the record previously circulated. Hearing none, the Chairman approved the record of 9 September as circulated.

2. The Chairman continued, referring to two other sets of minutes which had also been distributed for approval; one set comprising two records from 15 September, distributed on 22 September and a second set comprising four records distributed earlier that day. The Chairman said that following previous practice, and in order to provide the participants who took part in those meetings sufficient time to review the records, he proposed that approval be deferred until the next Plenary opportunity. This was agreed.

3. The Chairman moved on, stating that the meeting would now address the formal UUP representation against Sinn Féin under rule 29 which had been received on 16 September and circulated on the same day. He added that the handling of a formal representation requesting a participant to be excluded from the talks was governed by rule 29 and by established practice based on that rule. The Chairman then read aloud the contents of rule 29.

4. The Chairman said the rule quoted was applicable in the present circumstances. At the last Plenary session on 17 September, Senator Mitchell, as Chairman, had described the terms and format to be followed in the handling of the UUP representation today. The Chairman said these were based on the handling of the two previous formal representations both filed in September 1996. They were as follows; the UUP would have a maximum period of 30 minutes to present its case against Sinn Féin, including if it chose, the reading aloud of any written submission; Sinn Féin would then have a maximum of 30 minutes to reply. The Chairman said both the UUP and Sinn Féin had the right to present their statements uninterrupted. Following both contributions there would be time for a general discussion during which the other participants could express their views and raise questions.

5. The Chairman confirmed that the overall time limit for the handling of the issue would be 3 hours. If participants expressed their views within a shorter period and no one sought further recognition, the Plenary would be considered to be concluded. If, at the end of three hours, a participant had not had an opportunity to comment and still wished to do so, the 3 hour period could be extended for a reasonable amount of time to allow the participant

to do this. These were the rules and the Chairman asked the UUP to commence its presentation.

6 The UUP said that its submission was to be made available to participants. Before the party commenced, copies were distributed by the Chairmen's staff. Addressing the Chair, the UUP said it understood that it had 30 minutes to present evidence and that after any response from those who stood indicted, there might be a period of questioning. The party said it might be helpful if it indicated that it would not require to question the IRA delegation present but that it might seek, by directing questions elsewhere, to render intelligible the reasoning of those who dared to bring 'unreconstructed' murderers to the 'table of democracy'.

7. The UUP said that by its actions in bringing its accusation against IRA/Sinn Féin it would seek to prove that Sinn Féin was not qualified to participate in the talks insofar as that organisation had for many years been strategically and actively committed to an "Armalite and Ballot Box" philosophy, from which it had not withdrawn. The UUP said it intended to establish the link between individual delegates for Sinn Féin and the IRA and establish that Sinn Féin was already committed to frustrating the objectives of the talks.

8. The UUP said that it realised that this was not a court of law. If it was it would be obliged to produce witnesses to the crimes of IRA/Sinn Féin and to produce forensic evidence but that was not the case today. The UUP said the process was a political conclave, charged with the responsibility to sustain the process of democracy as it had evolved throughout the Western world; to represent, what in practice and by necessity became effectively 'best compromise', the democratically expressed wishes of society

and to act with propriety to protect the interests of all including the weakest elements within society. The UUP said everyone had to make judgements on that basis. If the process was to meet its obligations then it had to repudiate the presence here of the IRA in the guise of a political party. Sinn Féin was a monstrous deceit condemned out of the mouths of virtually every other party present; with no commitment to work, as other parties at the table had to do, within the accepted constraints which applied to the rest; that is, a strict commitment to the Mitchell Principles.

9. The UUP said these principles were what each party had been required to endorse and accept - not the Mitchell Report as a whole. The party said the Mitchell Commission was sadly constrained in terms of being permitted to clarify its Report but it had always made clear that it had no mandate to decide by what method disarmament should take place or within what timescale and by what methodology. The party said what was called the 'Mitchell compromise' was no more than an observation, one which the UUP said it most reluctantly accepted as a possible basis for progress but one which in no way overrode or ameliorated the basic principle that "total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations" should be accomplished. That was the background to the day's proceedings.

10. The UUP said it intended to draw Plenary's attention to the fact that the leadership of Sinn Féin was drawn from the IRA; that both the current President and the party's chief negotiator had, for over 25 years, been active within that terrorist organisation as activists, commanders and 'Godfathers'; and that the presence of the Sinn Féin delegation at the talks was in line with the IRA's declared strategy - the 'Armalite and Ballot Box' approach. The UUP said it wanted to remind delegates of several other constitutional parties represented of either their own, or their

party leader's previously declared assessment of Sinn Féin and simply to ask them whether this honestly reflected their knowledge of that organisation/party. It was important for the record that, in this respect, the UUP invited each participant to demonstrate its integrity in this matter. The party said that, particularly significant, would be the words of the Governments who would have based their verdict on advice from their own security advisers, a facility not available to many of the rest of the participants.

11. Addressing the British Government, the UUP asked was it true that the Secretary of State, on 16 July this year, expressed the view that "Sinn Féin and the IRA are inextricably linked" and that on 15 September the Secretary of State authoritatively and accurately quoted Prime Minister Blair as having said on 13 September, "No-one should be naive about the IRA and Sinn Féin. The two organisations are inextricably linked. One could not credibly claim to be acting independently of the other". The UUP said it realised that the Minister of State was not present but it didn't want him to think he was being neglected. The UUP said it wished to draw his attention to Hansard, Col 919, 9 July 1997, and asked whether his words conveyed his conviction that Sinn Féin was synonymous with the IRA. The party said it particularly drew his attention to, "Sinn Féin knows exactly what to do if it wants to join the talks process. It must renounce violence and go back to the situation of an unequivocal cease-fire".

12. The UUP said its question was whether the Secretary of State was sincere in her opinion, if she believed that the Prime Minister was a man of integrity and intended what he said, and whether the Minister of State stood by his declared position in this matter. Did they believe that, in the light of the IRA'S repudiation of the Mitchell Principles in Sinn Féin's An Phoblacht that 'unequivocal'

is what they had got? The Chairman asked the UUP whether it wished to seek a response from the British Government at this point. The UUP said it did. In response the British Government said it didn't want the UUP to wait for its reply which was probably more constructively given after both the UUP and Sinn Féin had completed their initial exchanges. The UUP said it hoped it had been correct in what it had quoted and would be right, if the Government was correct in its opinion, to assert that the IRA was present sitting at the table of democracy. The party said it hoped the British Government would tell everyone whether its logic was correct.

13. The UUP said it recognised that the Minister for Foreign Affairs was not present but the Minister for Justice was. The Minister was a member of a comparatively new Government and might protest if he was asked about the words of ex-Taoiseach Bruton who said before the May 1st Westminster election, "A vote for Sinn Féin is a vote of support for the IRA and the IRA's campaign of killing and murder. Currently Sinn Féin is part of a movement which also consists of another element which is the IRA, and the IRA is engaged in a campaign of violence which includes the killing of people to pursue a political objective. Political support for Sinn Féin is support for that campaign. ... That's the truth, and the cause of peace is never served by failing to tell the truth or engaging in hypocrisy. It would be hypocrisy to pretend that a vote for Sinn Féin is anything but support for the IRA, because they're part of one movement".

14. The UUP said that the Minister could tell everyone whether he shared Mr Bruton's desire for openness and honesty in politics and if he believed that those words from an Irish Taoiseach, uttered in the presence of the SDLP leader and one of his Westminster colleagues, were in line with his own and his party's opinion at

that time. The UUP said that the SDLP leader had in fact endorsed the Taoiseach's remarks on the spot, when the former agreed that he had "absolutely no doubt" about the veracity of what the Taoiseach had said. In the Minister's opinion, were the Taoiseach and the SDLP leader men of integrity or did he think this was just a pre-election gimmick? The UUP asked whether he would say what was the opinion, on this issue, of his own party leader and if anything had substantially changed to alter Mr Ahern's assertion on 18 June, that "it is now next to impossible for Sinn Féin to convince people of their good faith". The UUP sought a response from the Irish Government. The Irish Government said it wished to wait until the UUP and Sinn Féin had completed their initial exchanges.

15. The UUP said it wished to turn to the SDLP and first to its leader. The party asked whether the SDLP leader would say if he was being sincere when he, on the same occasion as ex-Taoiseach Bruton had stated, "There is no doubt they are one movement" and added that it was an insult to the intelligence of people in the street to suggest that a vote for Sinn Féin was not a vote of support for the IRA? If he was, would he explain what external pressures had constrained him to sponsor Gerry Adams' interest and to virtually ignore the existence of unionism over the last few years since the IRA allegedly 'bugged' his offices? The UUP then stated that the SDLP Deputy Leader had adopted, in the opinion of many, a more realistic and consistent view of IRA/Sinn Féin. The party said it wished to draw attention to his April statement in the Irish News when he said, "peace is not something which Sinn Féin and the IRA can confer on the Irish people as one would dole out dolly mixtures to children". Central to the talks and to the Westminster election is the choice between the right to peace and the illegitimacy of political violence. Peace does not belong to the republican movement and is not an electoral expediency to be

promised or bartered with or withheld depending on what way the political wind is blowing. Sinn Féin must accept that to live in peace, free from violence or threat was a fundamental human right which no one can usurp or infringe. It is a core responsibility of governments and the political process to protect and defend that right. It is a principle that the SDLP has never wavered from in 25 years of soul destroying carnage. Peace was wilfully and murderously blown away at Canary Wharf. Since then Sinn Féin has blamed everyone in sight as a smokescreen to cover their own lack of moral and political courage in not disowning and not moving away from those who plan it and who carry it out".

16. The UUP said that these comments, everyone would agree, were courageous words just as the SDLP's Deputy Leader's words following the Markethill bomb were courageous. The UUP asked whether the SDLP was prepared to endorse the frank and unequivocal arguments of its Deputy Leader? Those were the words, by three of the four main parties to the Talks. The UUP said it had little doubt that much of what had been quoted would also be endorsed by other participants like Alliance, but time constrained this.

17. The UUP said, in contrast to these views, the process now had to look at the position of IRA/Sinn Féin. If everyone was to make political progress around the table they must be clear, beyond reasonable doubt, that they were witnessing the beginning of a metamorphosis which would take those who depended exclusively or mainly on the use of political violence, to a position where they committed themselves exclusively to democratic politics. Everyone remembered the words of President Clinton when he said to the people of Northern Ireland, and presumably also to the two Governments, "You must stand fast against terror. You must say to those who still would use violence for political objectives - you

are the past; your day is over. Violence has no place at the table of democracy; and no role in the future of this land".

18. The UUP said it believed the British Government, in collusion with the Government of the Irish Republic, had betrayed Mr Clinton's advice insofar as it had ignored the reality of Sinn Féin's accepted links with the IRA and its ambivalence on democratic principles. It had ignored the words of Gerry Adams in the Andersonstown News, on 22 November 1986, "My own position on the armed struggle is that it is a necessary form of resistance in the six county area against the British presence and in pursuance of Irish independence. Armed struggle becomes unnecessary only when the British presence has been removed. In the course of that armed struggle there will be ups and downs, but it ill begets anyone to criticise the IRA, to criticise the IRA volunteers, or to criticise the IRA leadership when they, collectively, have pursued at tremendous cost, this struggle in an unprecedented way and for the longest time ever. Anyone who uses the term 'sticky' or tries to draw a parallel between '69 and today is guilty of an obscenity. If at any time Sinn Féin decide to disown the armed struggle they won't have me as a member. I don't say that out of any fixation with physical force. Sinn Féin candidates throughout the 32 counties have adopted a position of support for the IRA. If they get elected they will adopt exactly the same attitude. Involvement in the mainstream of political life in the 26 counties means a popularisation of the armed struggle and means, actually, a shortening of the war".

19. The UUP said that it believed the Chairman had an obligation to everyone to ensure that the British Government, through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who, sadly, had deceived and sought to mislead everyone, reference the party's article in

the Belfast Telegraph of 18 August ... came back to this room having considered all the implications of Sinn Féin's unequivocal declaration of support for violence. And Sinn Féin had to be able to repudiate in letter and in spirit these damning words.

20. The UUP said that at this stage it was not enough for the Northern Ireland Secretary of State or anyone else to plead that the IRA currently was in a cease-fire mode. Cease-fires were, as everyone had seen again and again, tactical operations with the IRA. Eamonn Collins in his book 'Killing Rage' writes, "Sinn Féin were going to be participating in the European elections in July and Danny Morrison was hoping to be elected as an MEP. All IRA units received an order from general headquarters to 'take a holiday' during the period of the election". The UUP said it knew that happened not infrequently, that it happened for the visit of President Clinton, that it happened for 17 months from August '94 to February '96 concurrent with a quiet reorganisation, regrouping and re-equipping of the IRA and with the putting in place all the requirements for Canary Wharf, Manchester, Osnabruk and a host of other atrocities.

21. The UUP said that, most of all, it knew that the Sinn Féin President and the party's chief negotiator had been actively involved in the IRA's terrorist campaign since the beginning - as activists, as commanders and now as Godfathers. The party said let them deny what everyone knew - what Roger Cooke, Peter Taylor, Sean O'Callaghan, Eamonn Collins, Kevin Toolis, every Chief Constable and GOC and every previous Secretary of State and every self-respecting journalist like David McKittrick knew - and make greater liars of themselves than they already were.

22. The UUP asked what made the Northern Ireland Secretary of State believe that these terrorists had changed? The party said she didn't. Continuing, the UUP stated that Sean MacStiofain had said, quite bluntly, that those who accompanied him to the meeting with William Whitelaw at Cheyne Walk in 1972, Twomey, O'Connell, McGuinness, Adams, Bell, were members of the IRA. The party said the role of Myles Shevlin was never fully outlined but he may have been present as a notetaker. Again addressing the British Government, the UUP said it was the responsibility of the Secretary of State to bring these people to the 'table of democracy'. The party said one could ignore reality and one could sacrifice the freedom and democracy for which thousands had died or one could ask the question when was Sinn Féin's chief negotiator no longer exercising the power of life and death within this society, not just against those on the opposing side but including that was not Rose Hegarty's son, Frank, who had tried to break his links with the IRA, but was brought back to Northern Ireland and Sinn Féin's chief negotiator became personally involved in his death sentence.

23. The UUP said that the Northern Ireland Secretary of State decided to admit the IRA in the guise of Sinn Féin to the talks on the basis of what she knew in her heart was a tactical cease-fire but backed up by words and deeds. Had she listened to the words of Sinn Féin's chief negotiator on Newsnight on 12 August when he had said "no" to consent (and the verdict of the ballot box), "no" to disarmament, "no" to local administrative participation in our own affairs, even through a responsibility sharing Assembly? Basically "no" to any democratic process. The UUP said the British Government sought to convey to it (the UUP) that words didn't matter and that all would be fine after the IRA was admitted to talks and signed up to the Mitchell Principles. Was it seriously reassured after the debacle of assent and repudiation? How far did

it expect the UUP to travel on a diet of deceit, sleight of hand and downright lies?

24. The UUP said the Secretary of State could not be allowed to discard the entire democratic process which had sustained the hard pressed people of Northern Ireland through some of their darkest hours. The Secretary of State wanted peace, so did the UUP, so did everyone. But there was nothing to be constructed that could survive the difficulties everyone faced if it was built on the sands of deceit. The party said it could fill the rest of the day and days ahead with the catalogue of structured evil that had been and continued to be the IRA's strategy. But it had made its point.

25. In conclusion the UUP said it might be that Sinn Féin was on trial because of its proven affinity with the IRA but that was not the whole story. Today began the trial of New Labour on the charge that it had diminished democracy, sacrificed the freedom of the people of Northern Ireland to the terrorist and elevated an evil mafia to a status that would shame any other country in Western Europe and indeed, further afield. The UUP said it came today, assured by people from every walk of life, that it was presenting a case where the verdict had already been written. That was likely to be so but that verdict would be the epitaph on the memorial to New Labour. It was already being written.

26. The Chairman thanked the UUP for its presentation and asked Sinn Féin to respond. Sinn Féin thanked the UUP for its contribution, aligning the contents of the presentation and the position of the UUP to the story of the prodigal son. Sinn Féin said it welcomed the presence of the UUP and that of the two loyalist parties at the talks. This was not meant to be a patronising comment since the party wished to see all seats around

the conference table filled so that the process could move forward and everyone could seek a peaceful settlement together. Sinn Féin said that prior to the meeting commencing, it had read again the letter of indictment from the UUP sent the previous week to the Chairman. The party said the letter of indictment had quite clearly been founded on two grounds - the article in An Phoblacht which the UUP had said was a repudiation of the Mitchell Principles and the Markethill bomb. Those were the two grounds yet the UUP presentation had made no mention of any significance or consequence on either of these issues. Sinn Féin said it believed the UUP's stance in all of this was deliberately provocative and hypocritical. The party said it wished to draw the UUP's attention to the last number of Plenary minutes in which it had clearly spelt out its position on its relationship with the IRA. Sinn Féin said it saw no point in going into this detail again except to say that it rejected any notion that Sinn Féin was the IRA. The party was present on the strength of its electoral mandate. It would put forward its republican analysis as of right on the basis of this electoral mandate.

27. Moving on, Sinn Féin said its objective was to achieve peace on the island but how could anyone be expected to make peace with parties who didn't even want to speak to others. Despite this situation and the deliberate provocation from the UUP, Sinn Féin said its intention was to build towards a democratic peace settlement. The party said no-one had a monopoly on the suffering arising from the conflict. The reality was it was likely that republicans didn't fully understand or comprehend the suffering or the sense of hurt which unionists and loyalists had endured. Neither was it likely that unionists and loyalists understood what nationalists and republicans had suffered and endured. Sinn Féin said it represented a party which had had 20 members killed. These

people had upheld the principles of democracy, supporting the Sinn Féin cause with their own name on an electoral ticket which had turned out to be their death warrant. The party said it was relating this, not as a recriminatory comment, because the UUP delegation had two former members of the UDR - a regiment which had been involved in many violent incidents against nationalists and republicans, but because it could raise any number of indictments against the British Government, the British Army, the unionists etc. The party, however, wished to get on with the business and to move the process forward. It was prepared to listen to and engage others and try to reach out to them. Sinn Féin said it had signed up to the Mitchell Principles. It had not done this lightly and these did not go as far as the party's own political objectives. The party said it had every intention of keeping to the Mitchell Principles. Noting that the UUP leader was now absent, Sinn Féin wished those members of the UUP delegation still present good luck in the negotiations and hoped that a situation could develop whereby participants could talk to each other over a coffee or a pint in a business-like atmosphere where everyone was working towards the same basic objective of peace.

28. The Chairman thanked Sinn Féin for its response. He stated that there would now be a general discussion and wished to remind all participants that all remarks were to be made through the Chair. The Chairman then called on the British Government to comment.

29. The British Government said it wished to speak briefly about the role of the Governments in the debate. As rule 29 had made clear it was for the Governments to consider the representations and the views expressed and then decide on appropriate action. The Governments had to show absolute impartiality in the proceedings.

The British Government continued saying that the judgement to be reached was whether a party had demonstrably dishonoured its commitment to the Mitchell Principles. The Governments had made clear, when earlier representations were considered, that for such a finding to be made, there had to be a clear and unmistakable demonstration that there had been a dishonouring of that commitment. If that was shown, however, only one course was possible: the party concerned could not be allowed to remain within the talks. Strict observance of the principles of democracy and non violence was the only basis on which the talks could achieve success.

30. The British Government said there was therefore a heavy responsibility on both Governments to be fair and to be seen to be fair. Its role would therefore primarily be to listen. As to the specific questions raised by the UUP, the British Government said that of course it stood by the words of the Prime Minister and the Minister of State. The British Government said it had also listened carefully to Sinn Féin comments. It was, however, anxious to hear the views of other participants. Following these both Governments would reach their conclusions, in the light of the UUP representation, what had been said in response and by those other participants and also all the other evidence available to it. The Irish Government said it concurred with the terms outlined by the British Government in relation to the handling of the debate and the subsequent action to be taken on the UUP indictment, subject to the views of the other participants.

31. The NIWC said it had always held to the principle of promoting inclusive talks as the most productive means of moving the process of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and, indeed throughout these islands, forward. As such it had welcomed the presence of all

parties around the table and regretted the absence of the Democratic Unionist Party and the United Kingdom Unionist Party. The party said it felt that any exclusions from the talks - be it voluntary or imposed - simply made the task of achieving effective peacebuilding even more difficult. The process was difficult enough as it was without parties seeking to narrow the base of political involvement, or to engage in the politics of exclusion or rhetorical condemnation. The NIWC said that this time last year it had been glad to hear and welcomed the reaffirmation of the Mitchell Principles by the PUP and the UDP, when both were subject to a Notice of Indictment lodged by the Democratic Unionist Party. At that time the party made the point that the Mitchell Principles were absolutely clear. They were listed under paragraph 20 of the report of the International Body. The party said it believed that a responsible approach to a formal representation should not make unfounded allegations but should identify which of the Principles had been broken and provide evidence in support of that.

32. The NIWC stated that this evidence was not clearly stated in the UUP's communication to the Chairman. It cited the article in An Phoblacht on 11 September 1997 - an interview with "a spokesperson of the IRA leadership". The spokesperson, while suggesting that the IRA would have "problems with sections of the Mitchell Principles", did not say that the IRA disavowed the Mitchell Principles, nor did she or he argue that Sinn Féin that should not have signed up to the Mitchell Principles. Indeed Sinn Féin's stated commitment to secure a peace settlement, which removed the causes of conflict and took all the guns out of politics, was restated, and tacitly supported. The NIWC said it was then a case of what was meant by "problems". The party said it thought the last 18 months had shown that a number of parties, and political representatives had had problems with aspects of the

Mitchell Principles. It only had to read out a DUP contribution to the Northern Ireland Forum on Friday, 12 September 1997, as follows: "those who say that they speak for the paramilitaries and who think they are going to sit down and talk to others of that sort, should go into the workplace. They should talk to their members on the ground. They should go to East Antrim and talk to the loyalist men with whom I have served, and with whom I have fought shoulder to shoulder down through the years. They should ask whether these people think we ought to sit round the table. Is that what they served their time for? Did they engage in the streets to sit around this table? The answer would certainly be no".

33. The NIWC said this was an elected representative speaking at the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue. The party suggested that he might well have problems with the Mitchell Principles. Could one imagine the reaction if those words had been stated by the IRA spokesperson in the An Phoblacht interview? The NIWC said it believed that "problems" could be lived with; problems were inevitable in any peace process. But "problems" fell far short of disavowal. The party said everyone was still at a very early stage of the process; and everyone had to be grateful for how far all had come since the General Election.

34. On the issue of whether Sinn Féin did nor did not speak for the IRA, that was something only Sinn Féin could answer. The NIWC said it would be very disappointed if Sinn Féin could not reflect the mind or views of the IRA because if it could not then the process of peacebuilding would be very slow, and fraught with even more difficulties than it was at the moment. The same applied to the PUP and the UDP; both had certainly helped the process by being able to know the mind of the Combined Loyalist Military Command.

The NIWC said that any organisation undergoing reform was immediately vulnerable. Everyone knew that there had been splits among both loyalist and nationalist paramilitaries. Everyone had seen the emergence of the Continuity Army, the continuation of the INLA and the development of the Loyalist Volunteer Force. Everyone had seen the Continuity Army claiming the Markethill bomb. The party said there were clearly forces that were seeking to sabotage the peace process, but it would not be party to anything that might help this sabotage internally. It therefore felt that the exclusion of parties from the talks would effectively do that.

35. The NIWC said it wished to see the effective realisation of the ideals espoused by the Mitchell Principles. It wanted to see political progress that would prove both the mockers and the scoffers wrong, and would isolate those who put sectoral interest before peaceful change. The party believed that everyone was in the business of political change, and this frightened people and led to increased levels of sectarian tension, and even violence. All peacebuilding processes had experienced this - and it was unlikely that the process would escape it in Northern Ireland. After all it didn't take guns to kick the off-duty policeman to death in Ballymoney some months ago. The party said, however, that everyone had the chance to bring a chink of light to the difficulties of peacebuilding. Everyone could be seen to be moving into negotiations in order to achieve new political arrangements with which all could identify. Everyone should, without further delay, turn to that task. The party said it believed the UUP indictment should be dismissed by the British and Irish Governments and that all should concentrate on moving to substantive negotiations.

36. The Chairman asked for any other comments. The PUP said it seemed to be in a somewhat different position to other parties around the table. Some participants wanted to define the link between Sinn Féin and the IRA and on this basis have the former excluded. The PUP said it wished to see Sinn Féin identifying what links it had with the IRA. After all the latter was a well armed, operational organisation out there which no-one appeared to know the mind of. The PUP said it was interested to know who the Sinn Féin President and the party's chief negotiator spoke to in the IRA about the conditions required to bring about the second IRA ceasefire. At what level in the organisation were these people positioned and what influence did they hold then and now? The party referred to Sinn Féin's earlier remarks about one side not understanding the suffering of the other. The PUP said this was a fair point but it could also be said that Sinn Féin didn't understand the needs of others. The process was about moving towards change and Sinn Féin was part of that process. But the process needed a common base from which all participants could start and a set of principles to follow such as the Mitchell Principles. The PUP said that past suggestions by Sinn Féin that it would have no difficulty signing up to the Mitchell Principles had caused it (the PUP) some surprise yet there had not been much public debate on this issue.

37. The PUP said that what somebody was or was not involved in 1973 was not necessarily what they were or were not involved in today. At this point the party quoted from a statement made by Sinn Féin's present chief negotiator back in 1973 when he was interviewed as an officer of the IRA. The PUP said the question here was if he was an officer of the IRA then he was therefore subject to the IRA's constitution. If Sinn Féin's chief negotiator still adhered to this constitution, then he was in breach of

Mitchell Principles (a) and (d). The PUP said that when it heard that Sinn Féin was going to discuss the issue of decommissioning with the International Body and out of this came the suggestion that Sinn Féin would sign up to the Mitchell Principles, this was an interesting position since it flew in the face of IRA ideology.

38. The PUP said this position presented a conundrum for the process. Either Sinn Féin's quest for peace was real or the party was playing a game. The party said it understood the reticence of others who were deliberating on whether to enter the process or not with this question unanswered. For the PUP it was disconcerting for Sinn Féin to affirm the Mitchell Principles on a Tuesday and for such an article in An Phoblacht to appear 48 hours later. The party said that Sinn Féin's attempts to distance itself from the IRA were bad news for the process since everybody knew it was not true. The PUP said that in order for the process to move forward the foundations of it had to be built on truthfulness thereby, generating trust between the participants. In Sinn Féin's case the question of truth was either the war was indeed over or all of this was simply a tactical ploy.

39. The PUP said that it was perhaps asking that question of the wrong people. Perhaps the organ grinder was needed to respond to such a point but whatever way one viewed it, if the falseness of Sinn Féin's position was maintained then the process couldn't continue. The PUP again asked whether Sinn Féin could provide some acknowledgement of its position of authority with the IRA. This was needed urgently since the confusion created over the last few weeks had caused great pain in the unionist community since that community believed Sinn Féin and the IRA to be one and the same organisation.

40. The SDLP said it noted that the UUP had asked some questions of it but was not now present to hear the answers. The party said that there never had been any doubt about its total resistance to the use of violence to achieve political gains. The SDLP said it had stood for this basic principle for over 25 years. As to the UUP's comment that the SDLP leader's dialogue was sponsoring the Sinn Féin President, the dialogue which occurred was sponsoring none and certainly not the President of Sinn Féin. The party said the key objectives of its leader's discussions with Sinn Féin had been to secure an end to all violence, to be followed by all-party talks in which agreement could be reached among a divided people. Did the UUP disagree with those objectives?

41. The party referred to the UUP claim in its submission that unionists were being ignored during the aforementioned discussions with Sinn Féin. The SDLP said, however, that at its first meeting with the Taoiseach, Mr Reynolds, a clear statement was issued to the effect that the views of the unionist community in any proposed solution had to be heard, listened to and respected. The party said it was happy to have played some part in achieving the first IRA cease-fire. This had saved hundreds of lives and the then Chief Constable had described the party's efforts as very worthwhile. The British Government was, however, unable to take the process along sufficiently and unfortunately the cease-fire broke down. The SDLP said that everyone now had a further opportunity to make historic progress. One shouldn't forget what happened in the past but one couldn't be shackled if progress was to be made. The SDLP said the participants had to move to the situation where the guns were removed from politics in Ireland for ever. It was time to stop playing games and get on with securing this objective.

42. The UDP said the debate was neither proving one thing or another. The process was a charade: the outcome of the Governments' decision already known. The UUP had pointed out the position of Sinn Féin; there were no surprises in any of this. The surprise was that Sinn Féin was putting clear water between it and the IRA. The UDP asked what the consequences of the present debate were for the process as a whole? It was the party's view that such a debate seriously impeded the potential for the talks to reach a successful conclusion. The party recalled Sinn Féin's earlier comments about how difficult it was to achieve agreement if one couldn't even talk to fellow participants. The UDP said what was the point of talking at all if there was not a good faith commitment being given by Sinn Féin? It was absolutely vital that everyone approached the negotiations from a position of transparency and unambiguity. But how could anyone take Sinn Féin's word on this issue or anything else? The UDP asked what was Sinn Féin's own position in the talks since it seemed to it (the UDP) that it went far beyond the frequently stated position of representing its electoral mandate.

43. The UDP said both it and the PUP had been down the indictment road before. Both before, during and after that indictment, the UDP said it had always been open and honest at the talks. The party's dealings, conversations and discussions with other participants showed that its word was strong and its position of good faith was accepted. Regarding the NIWC's comment about sabotaging the process, the UDP said it was the position of Sinn Féin with respect to good faith negotiations which had the greatest potential to sabotage the talks. Sinn Féin's integrity was diminished because of this. The UDP said it wasn't complementing or supporting the UUP's comments regarding the relationship between Sinn Féin and the IRA. It did, however, wish to ask a question of

the Irish Government and the SDLP as to whether both believed that Sinn Féin being included in the process was the same as ensuring that a vital element of militant republicanism was also included? If Sinn Féin expressed the opposite view, however, what was the future for the process? The UDP said everyone had to ask questions of themselves about their intentions to make the talks proceed. Until this was fully overcome then some participants would continue not to talk to others. The Chairman asked for any further comments.

44. Sinn Fein said they agreed with the UDP that today's proceedings were a charade and a masquerade, but it was a deliberately staged charade. The fact that the UUP leaders were now out talking to the media instead of attending the session showed the importance which they attached to the process. People all over Ireland could not be reassured by seeing this. Sinn Féin asked why the loyalist parties had not been present at the meetings last week and asked what message this had sent out. The party said it would be nice if its leaders were trusted by the other participants, but it was not necessary. It was necessary only that the participants trusted themselves. Sinn Fein said again that it could stay until midnight indicting other participants for their actions, but it did not wish to proceed in this way. All of the parties present were responsible for the conflict and had a responsibility to resolve it. The party said that the situation could only be resolved by change: this change could be managed through negotiations or it could be imposed by the situation passing out of the participants' control. Sinn Fein said that they would not contribute to hindering the process by engaging in condemnations or indictments. Addressing the representatives of the UUP, Sinn Fein hoped that that party would be represented at

future meetings by leaders who would not ask others to do what they were not prepared to do themselves.

45. Labour said that it had not expected to hear anything new today and this view had been borne out, but that it had been surprised that the indictment made by the UUP had made almost no reference to original stated grounds. The party also considered it astonishing that the leaders of the UUP had not remained present to hear the discussion of their own indictment. Labour believed that the presence of Sinn Fein in the talks process represented progress, although this could not of itself bring the violence to an end, as witnessed by the Markethill bomb. The party said that that bomb had been carried out by the Continuity Army Council as a deliberate attempt to wreck the peace process and to undermine Sinn Fein.

46. Labour said that those whose perspective was neither unionist nor nationalist knew that no one side had had a monopoly on violence, and very few political groups in Northern Ireland had clean hands. It had suited many parties to perpetuate the religious and ethnic conflicts which had been the legacy of the nineteenth century. The party said that people in Northern Ireland were looking for leaders who could look further than immediate advantage for one side or other, and that where this leadership was lacking and people offered no hope about progress being made, was when sectarian division became heightened. Labour stressed that no party should act in a way which reduced the chances of compromise and progress, and asked other parties, if they did not agree with progress through compromise, what alternative could they offer? It was important for the participants to get on with the real business facing them, before frustrations outside the room destroyed the opportunity now available.

47. Alliance said it hoped the sham fight was now over and that the parties could now get down to work. It was not necessary that the participants liked or even trusted one another. What it trusted was its own ability to go into a process and negotiate a deal for the people it represented. The party hoped that today's event was the end of the period of high drama, and that the parties would now play their parts as democrats and move on to negotiate on substantive issues.

48. Sinn Fein said that despite the histrionics, the party felt that progress had been made with the presence today of the UUP, and of the UDP and PUP. The party appreciated that there were difficulties for these parties, but there were also difficulties for Sinn Fein. The question before the parties now was: were the talks going to move forward to sincere negotiations about the future of this island. Sinn Fein believed that the UDP and PUP were sincere in this aim, and the question was whether the UUP was also sincere about the process? The stakes were massive, with tens of thousands of people hoping we were going into a dynamic peace. Sinn Fein said if there was ever to be any hope of peace, it would only come through a negotiated settlement. This would happen now, or in five years, or in ten years' time, so why not now? Sinn Fein recognised that all parties had brought a lot of baggage with them to the talks. The partition of Ireland itself had been carried out under the threat of violence, and many of the subsequent problems derived from that legacy.

49. Sinn Fein said it felt that the TV debate between Mr McGuinness and Mr Maginnis had represented progress, as also had the presence of the UUP today in the same room as Sinn Fein, but people on the streets were looking for visible signs of progress.

They were looking to the two Governments to introduce their procedural motion and move the process into real negotiations. Sinn Fein said that it would have to be part of any process leading to a settlement because it had a mandate from 43% of the nationalist people. The party was confident that there was enough intelligence and ability in both the unionist and nationalist communities to recognise the need to move forward and to make a success of the process. Sinn Fein said it wanted to look to the future, and stretch out a hand of friendship. The party appealed to other participants to recognise that it was time to talk: the situation was too serious to do otherwise.

50. The PUP said it welcomed any party saying it wanted to work towards peace, but it remained to be found out how this could be achieved. It was welcome that Sinn Fein wanted to work towards a peaceful settlement, but how could this come about if that party did not represent the organisation which would make the final decision. The loyalist parties had honestly stated that they represented the loyalist paramilitary organisations. The PUP was concerned that, as long as Sinn Fein continued to say that it did not represent the IRA, the possibility was open that the participants in the talks could spend months agreeing a settlement only to have it rejected by the IRA. The party felt that participants had to be assured that any settlement reached in the talks would have the support and backing of the IRA.

51. In the absence of further comments, the Chairman moved to adjourn the Plenary until 24 September. Alliance and Sinn Fein expressed frustration at the delays of recent weeks, and asked what the proposed business would be the next day and when the Governments would be tabling their procedural motion. The British Government said that it could not predict how long it would take to

