

FORUM DEBATE 27/6/97.

**Mr Trimble:** I think it is suitable that we do have the opportunity to take note of the Prime Minister's statement. There is no doubt — I have no doubt in my mind — that the statement made by the Prime Minister this week will turn out to have been one of the key turning points in terms of how the process — whichever adjective you wish to put on that word is going to develop. Although the exact significance of it will not become clear for quite some time.

So I think it is important that we should discuss this matter. It is important that we should analyse it very carefully and tease out the implications of it, obtaining whatever clarification or changes that may be necessary to it. But I would also say, that it is very important that we do not rush to judgement on this matter, either today, or next week. We have to see how the situation develops in order to assess what may be. People may make their assumptions as to the meaning and significance of various parts, but I think we should examine this matter carefully and look at it, very carefully.

I will agree with a number of the points that have been made by Mr McCartney, particularly the point with regard to the contacts that were authorized by the Prime Minister with Sinn Fein, because it is now clear as he has said, that rather than use those contacts simply to explain the Government's position with regard to the process to Sinn Fein, the contacts involved into an exchange which comes very close to negotiation. And indeed, that is revealed by the *aide memoire*, not just the existence of the *aide memoire* but actually the terms of the *aide memoire*. When in the first paragraph on the third page at the end it says "in response to a further point of apparent concern the Government has always" and it then goes out to state the Government position and that clearly is a statement of position in response to

points made to the civil servants in their exchanges which I suspect, went further than merely exploratory.

I would hope that there will be no more of these contacts. I would refer to the statement made by Lord Britchard in the House of Lords on behalf of the Government, when he said "I was asked by the Noble Lord, Lord Holme whether any further meetings would take place with Sinn Fein, the answer is no." Now that is a clear and unequivocal statement, but it is not matched by a similarly clear and unequivocal statement from the Northern Ireland Office whose response to journalists on Wednesday was distinctly ambiguous and that is certainly something which I think has to be cleared up.

I think also we would want to emphasize — at least I would agree also with Mr McCartney in terms of his criticism of the six week period that is stated in the *aide memoire*. I think that is a significant mistake by Government. It is a mistake interestingly which John Major did not make when similar propositions were put to him by Sinn Fein in October and November of last year. It is a mistake for this reason: that if you specify a time period, whatever it might happen to be, whether one week, one month, six months or whatever, in a situation where the important thing is not the passage of time but the quality of the ending of violence, the quality of the cease-fire. But if you state a time period then attention will focus on the time period, the notion will be put about that all that has to happen is that the guns remain silent for one week, one month, six months or whatever and that is it. And that is what is likely to happen with regard to this, and it is a mistake.

I know the Prime Minister tried to recover some of the ground in his statement on Wednesday, when in response to a number of questions, he emphasized the correct point that the crucial thing is the quality of the cease-fire. Namely, is it a genuine permanent ending of violence, or is it merely another squalid tactical manoeuvre. In response to several questions the Prime Minister emphasized the important thing was the quality of the cease-fire, but he has undermined that by stating a period of time. So I think this is a point on which we have to focus attention because if it is important, it is crucial that there be a genuine permanent ending of violence in order to satisfy the requirements set out in the legislation, because we must never forget that the legislation under which the talks are held do not just refer to a restoration of the cease-fire of August 1994, they also, in the criteria, for issuing invitations to parties repeat paragraph 10 of the Downing Street declaration. Namely there must be a commitment to exclusively peaceful means and the democratic process. And that I have always regarded as being an overriding consideration which one uses to interrupt whether or not what is the necessary quality of the cease-fire.

So it is important that we hammer that point. It is also important that we take a good view, to use the phrase that Mr McCartney borrowed from the *aide memoire* that we look at this situation in the round, in terms of the overall political situation. There are a number of different ways, but I think basically two ways of looking at this statement. There is first the way in which I think the Prime Minister looks at it, namely that a last chance is being given to Sinn Fein in order to — if they fail to take it — move the talks on with the democratic parties and to move them on rapidly.

Now my view which I expressed on Wednesday and to which I hold is that it is rather ridiculous to talk about giving a last chance in view of what has happened, particularly in view of what happened after 13 June when the *aide memoire* was given to Sinn Fein. They got that *aide memoire* on 13 June and on 16 June we had a couple of brutal murders, and if that was not enough we have had the other attacks following on after, including crucially one last Wednesday morning, foiled by the police thankfully. But had it gone ahead it would have meant the murder of more police officers in West Belfast, on the very morning on which the Prime Minister was about to make this statement. Could anything else demonstrate more clearly the character of the organization and its intention. It is against that background that I say, that I think, the idea of more, of even this one last chance is inappropriate.

But the reason why, as I understand it, it has been given is because it has proved impossible to persuade Mr Hume to commit himself to talks with democratic parties until this last last chance has been gone through. I think that is a reflection on Mr Hume and I hope that we will not have an attempt on his part to repeat this and that if, as I expect, this process goes through without there being the response from Sinn Fein in its appropriate terms that he will then commit himself clearly and unequivocally to the democratic process, and to talks with the democratic politicians. Because that, as I judge it, is being the object of this exercise.

I said there was two ways of looking at this statement and that is one of them. The other way and it is obviously the way favoured by some present here today, is, I am sure, the way which some elements within the Irish Government and indeed within the Northern Ireland Office would look at this, as being an exercise whereby progressively the

requirements of entry are watered down so that Sinn Fein can enter the process without a commitment to peaceful means or the democratic process and without having to actually decommission any weapons.

And I am sure that is in the minds of some people concerned, that is why in my response in the House last Wednesday I referred to the suspicion that there are elements within both the British and Irish Governments' that our intent on subverting — this is essence of what I was saying although I am using slightly different language now — the whole basis on which the talks process was supposed to be undertaken. And the formation of a new Government in the Irish Republic elected partly, through the support of Sinn Fein in the shape of Mr Kevin Caillion — and I offer that piece of information to colleagues who have not yet been able to master the rather curious spelling of his name. But I would let you know that the real name and the way to pronounce it is Kevin Cailloin and that piece of information only came to me late last night by virtue of reading the 'Spectator' and that is not the Co Down one I share with other people, but will enable us to converse intelligibly on the issue.

But the fact that we have a Government which in order to be elected obtained the support of Mr Kevin Cailloin underlines the concern there must be as to how this will work out in practice. As I have said, those two hypotheses underline the situation, now I think we need in this situation to test carefully the circumstances to see how things are actually going to develop. What is important is that it clear the basis on which the process is founded, namely, peaceful means and a democratic process and that inevitably means that the outcome of the process will not be the position which, as Mr McCartney says, Sinn Fein have inflexibly adhered to, namely the ending of partition, that is very important and I think it is

for that reason that the Prime Minister in his statement emphasize that the outcome will be a United Kingdom outcome with a devolved institution and some arrangements for a North-South dialogue, but that is clear what the outcome will be and what the direction is, and we have to be clear about that.

It is also important to emphasize, and here I may part company with some that looking at the proposals that there is a commitment to actual decommissioning occurring during talks. The opening sentence, "The two Governments are resolutely committed to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organizations". The fact that there has to be a commitment of all participants, including any participants that comes late to actually implementing what is described as the compromise approach to decommissioning in paragraph 34 to 35 of the Mitchell Report. And this was emphasized three times by the Prime Minister on Wednesday, in reply to myself, in reply to Mr Andrew Hunter and in reply to Ken Maginnis, where he said on each of those occasions that decommissioning must take place during the negotiations. And there is a mechanism introduced to ensure that all parties will be able to guarantee that the talks stop if decommissioning does not take place and that is the provision for the review which is significant.

Now the problem is, as Mr McCartney said, the timetable is missing, the objective is stated, and we are not certain that the mechanisms are going to be effective and there is not a timetable on decommissioning to match the timetable for the talks. And it is on these points that we must challenge both the British Government and the Irish Government to satisfy us that the resolute commitment they spell out in their first sentence will in fact be carried in to

effect during the negotiations and that is the point, as the challenge that I issued to them and I wait to see their response to it because that will be crucial.