

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

5 March 1997, Plenary session.

Statement by Reg Empey, Senior Negotiator, Ulster Unionist Party

Condolences to Mr McCartney on the loss of his Sister

Nobody can come here today with any sense of achievement. While we all have to share a degree of blame, the deck has been stacked against us from the start.

Perhaps the remarks made by Mr Spring's advisor, Mr Fergus Finlay, set the tone when he made his infamous remark that the process was "not worth a penny candle" without Sinn Fein.

Perhaps now that Mr Spring is with us today he will take the opportunity to either repudiate or endorse Mr Finlay's views.

We note the comments of John Hume, Bertie Ahern and Mr Bruton that Talks can continue without Sinn Fein. This has always been our view, but the process provides for the arrival of Sinn Fein, without any guarantee of their commitment to peaceful means.

An arbitrary political decision by a Secretary of State, who's identity we don't get to know, is all that is required to involve that Party, together with a signing up to Mitchell principles, which would only be from the teeth out.

The confirmation on RTE last night of this organisation's involvement in stirring last summer's trouble should cause even the most sycophantic apologist for Adams to reflect on the wisdom of clinging to the proposition that the IRA can be brought into the political process without totally corrupting it.

The time since Canary Wharf must surely have convinced its most ardent supporter, that the concept of involving those people in this process has been a resounding flop.

Sinn Fein/IRA continues to pose a threat to the democratic process both in Northern Ireland, and as Dublin appears to have overlooked, in the Republic as well.

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We welcomed the 1994 ceasefire, and we all benefited from the absence of most of the violence. Many people are alive today who otherwise would have perished. We want to see a new ceasefire, a genuine, universal and permanent one, so that we can proceed to exploit our resources and improve the quality of life for all our citizens.

We look forward, after the election, to pursuing with participants how we might proceed without Sinn Féin, as we see no other way.

Decommissioning is the issue which currently divides us - but it is our only defence against the arbitrary decision I referred to earlier - that we have not got a consensus on that issue is a matter of regret, but we must persevere.

UUP is on the record as saying that there will be no change in our view on decommissioning before, during, or after the elections.
(We append our Policy document Nov. 12 1996 for the record).

It has been suggested that the real agenda here is the Frameworks document. UUP's position on this, also made many times on the record, is an utter repudiation of that document and here again, this is something that is not subject to change.

We strongly believe that there are many matters where we can progress, matters where consensus is possible, to ensure there is no political vacuum left for the men of violence to fill.

When we return, Her Majesty's Government must reassess its objectives - so that we can re-launch a process that can succeed, and not ask of the parties the delivery of agreements that are impossible, and the very antithesis of our reason for existence.

Thanks to the Chairmen and their staff.