

2155hrs - 24/9/97

Transcript of UUP Leader David Trimble speaking after the winding up of the Opening Plenary session of Talks at Stormont,

Mr Trimble :

The procedural motion to wind up the Opening Plenary session has now been past and that procedural motion includes within it, the phrases that we wanted to see within it, relating to consent and decommissioning. In particular it contains the views that Plenary supports the view of the British and Irish governments as set out in their joint statement of 15 September on consent and on the decommissioning of 'some paramilitary arms during negotiations'.

Consequently the views of the Governments regarding actual decommissioning during negotiations have now been adopted by Plenary as a whole. This decision was not unanimous. It was by a sufficient consensus; one Party, namely Sinn Fein, voting against. I think that is quite significant. The very first decision to be taken, the very first vote to be held, we found all the Parties on one side and Sinn Fein alone on the other side. We have started the process of marginalising Sinn Fein and we have on this issue started to break up the pan-nationalist front. I regard that as a highly significant development and it will I think set the pattern for what we hope to see happening in this process. Indeed it is the way in which there is any prospect for movement on this. The views of course set out by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on consent are clear and straight forward - that consent is the guiding principle for the negotiations and for determining the outcome of the negotiations, and so Sinn Fein have taken the first faltering steps towards accepting consent and consequently accepting, as indeed the Prime Minister's letter which other's will release to you made absolutely clear, that the crucial decision on this matter will be taken on Northern Ireland basis. So Sinn Fein are taking the first faltering steps towards acceptance of partition, and that I think is another significant development.

The only other thing that happened in the Plenary was the expected and rather reciprocal judgment of the Governments. I am not going to comment on it in detail. It is wrong. You will see it when you read it. The government is living in an unreal world and painful reality will break through and we shall remind them of that reality whenever appropriate.

Journalist : Are you content with your day's work?

I am content with the last weeks work because we started argument on this Tuesday week ago, and as Jeffrey Donaldson was remarking to me earlier this evening, we have by today achieved more than we expected to achieve last Tuesday. We are satisfied that we have achieved what could be achieved at this stage. Obviously there are some aspects on which we would like to see more, but we have achieved what could be achieved at this stage and we have underlined that and Plenary has agreed that it would like to see some decommissioning of Paramilitary arms during Talks.

Journalist : Mr Trimble, now that you have arrived at substantive Talks at last, do you think a settlement can be achieved that will be acceptable to the two communities in Northern Ireland?

Well as I said, what happened tonight, and the way in which Sinn Fein found itself isolated and the pan-nationalist front divided, I hope indicates how this process is going to go forward and has set the pattern for what I think is the best and only pattern that we can follow. Other people will come and say things to you, indeed we may be keeping the two governments waiting, but of course that is the proper place for them! Thank you.