

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

STATEMENT ON ENTERING CASTLE BUILDINGS

Wednesday, 17 September 1997

Last Saturday the Executive of the Ulster Unionist Council was determined that the Unionist voice should be heard in the talks. The Ulster Unionist Party has at no time left the talks. The Secretary of State's invitation to Sinn Fein, after a premature judgement that the cease-fire was "genuine" gives rise to a number of difficulties, some of these have been addressed in discussions with government over the summer. As a result the British and Irish governments have declared -

- * consent to be the guiding principle governing the conduct and outcome of the talks

- * actual decommissioning to take place during the talks

the results on other matters are set out below. Some are still unresolved.

We have no illusions about the character of Sinn Fein. We have not invited them to the table. But we are not afraid of them. We will not run away from them.

We are not there to negotiate with them, but to confront them - to expose their fascist character.

Sinn Fein's support is not necessary for any agreement within the talks. Their presence is a challenge to the SDLP and the Irish government. Will they side with the undemocratic demand that a united Ireland be imposed on the

people of Northern Ireland against their will or will they work with us to build a better future for all the people of Northern Ireland and a new broader based agreement that would reflect the totality of relations within the British Isles

We are not prepared to tolerate Sinn Fein being portrayed as the party of peace and unionists as the problem. The truth is that Unionists are genuine democrats: but if we are outside the process that truth will not be recognised. This is why the IRA has tried, last Thursday and yesterday to provoke a unionist walkout. But Unionism will not be marginalised.

Those that walk out leave the Union undefended. They surrender the defence of the Union, leaving it to the tender mercies of the British and Irish governments. Those who have run away have no alternative to offer but they try to cover this up by attacking those who continue to defend the Union.

The Ulster Unionist Party will ensure that the Union is defended. We will ensure, as we have done this summer, that attempts to dilute the consent principle are defeated.

It is the clear duty of all unionists to support us in defending the union and defending the civil rights of all the people of Northern Ireland. We would like their help: but we will do the job alone if necessary!

With Ulster Unionists at the table, there will be no united Ireland: there will be no joint sovereignty; no joint authority (actual or disguised): the Anglo-Irish diktat and the illegal territorial claim will be under constant attack.

There will be no agreement coming out of these talks which is not clearly a United Kingdom solution. We firmly believe that it is only within the union that the rights and identities of everyone in Northern Ireland can be recognised and protected.

The Ulster Unionist Party will also make sure that those who have not renounced violence and have not accepted the democratic process are under constant attack.

After the repudiation of the Mitchell principles in Sinn Fein's newspaper last Thursday and yesterday's bomb Sinn Fein's presence in the talks must be challenged. Our entry here today will make sure that happens, whereas the DUP challenge on Monday was not heard because they were not there to make it.

Similarly we are pressing for a declaration of support by the plenary for the "Mitchell compromise" of actual decommissioning during talks. The DUP should be here with us supporting that call and voting for it.

We will be pressing the Government and the Independent Commission to secure actual implementation of the "Mitchell Compromise" of decommissioning alongside talks; and the talks will return to this issue in future plenaries.

NOTE TO EDITORS

CONFIDENCE BUILDING FOR THE PRO-UNION COMMUNITY

The Ulster Unionist Party has been at the Multi-Party Talks since they commenced on the 10th June 1996. We have not walked away but have accepted our responsibility as the upholders of the Unionist Cause - a Union which we have maintained since partition in 1921.

The premature invitation by HM Government to Sinn Fein to become a participant at these Talks was anticipated by us in July of this year and the arrival of Sinn Fein at Stormont has required assurances for Unionism before we continued with the Talks.

Since July we have been in regular contact with the Prime Minister and other Government Ministers. We have not been in contact with the Irish Government.

As a result of these on-going discussions we can report:

1. Both Governments have now accepted that the principle of consent will apply to all aspects of the Talks and any Agreements emerging therefrom.
2. Both Governments have now accepted that decommissioning is an indispensable part of the process and they now expect paramilitary organisations to proceed with the decommissioning of illegal armaments in parallel with the Talks. Special review plenaries have been built into the procedure to make sure that decommissioning occurs.
3. Attempts to remove General de Castelain as Chairman of the International body to oversee the de-militarisation programme have been overcome. He remains Chairman as Ulster Unionists had demanded.
4. H M Government have agreed to look urgently at how best to mark the sacrifices made by the victims of violence and help those left behind.
5. HM Government has now agreed to our request that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will attend the NI Forum on a regular basis.
6. Arising from the different circumstances in Northern Ireland the new Gun Legislation in Great Britain will not be extended to Northern Ireland.
7. The proposed legislation on policing in Northern Ireland will not be presented as an Order in Council but will now be a Bill - thus giving Members of Parliament the opportunity to amend the Bill.
8. The Government has agreed to our request that powers of District Councils be extended in relation to the development of property and land in their own area for the purposes of Economic Development.
9. The Government has accepted our request that the recommendations of the Coopers & Lybrand Report on financing of education be acted upon. This will be beneficial to our controlled schools.
10. The Government has appointed an Ulster Unionist to be a member of the Council of Europe at Strasbourg for the first time in 20 years.
11. The Irish Government will most definitely not be involved in the Talks relevant to the internal institutions of Government and Administration of Northern Ireland.