

Consultative Process

Background:

- Consultative process was conducted over the period 15th August 1997 to 4th September 1997: almost 50 organisations were met in the course of over 30 meetings: each meeting lasted approximately 2 hours; this does not include the all-important consultation within the UUP as well as meetings with other political parties;
- The aim of the consultative process was to have, by way of a wide ranging discussion, a better understanding of the communities' wishes and equally that they would have a better understanding of the UUP's perspective of the difficulties and opportunities that exist at present;
- There was widespread appreciation of the consultative process and many requested feedback after its conclusion;
- In addition to the organisations that the UUP requested to meet some others made a request to participate in the process: some organisations presented a written submission of their views: individuals made written and oral comment to UUP HQ - one Presbyterian church forwarded a letter signed by over 60 members of its congregation;
- To enable as wide a range of organisations as possible to be consulted 36 community and voluntary groups were invited to participate (over 20 were able to do so): NICVA selected the organisations from its data base: criteria used were - spread by type and geography and size by financial turnover and number of members: this sector comprises over 4000 organisations, has an estimated turnover of £480m, employs 30,000 paid workers plus 65,000 volunteers and often deals with the consequences of violence;
- At each meeting the UUP explained its position, as part of the two-way exchange of views: for example, concerns regarding the integrity of the two governments, are the negotiations for real since such matters as 'consent' lack clarity and is there any likelihood of an outcome to the talks; UUP's policy position was made clear in that the Unionist voice will be heard regarding the way forward, the message is positive and is based on accepted principles and practices applied elsewhere in the democratic world; an outcome and settlement is sought so as politicians could then concentrate fully on the all-important socio/economic issues confronting NI in an ever increasingly competitive world; UUP may be in a position where it could not advocate support for a referendum if it were perceived to reflect the central thrust of the 'Framework Document' of an all-Ireland administrative/executive unit;
- The UUP indicated to the various organisations that it may repeat, in a more limited form, this consultation process;

Business, Professional and Trade Unions:

- Should be at the talks even though do not trust all participants - examine/expose Sinn Fein's position relevant to the economy; the NI economy has coped with the last 25 years of violence and must now re-double efforts to find an accommodation: little to be lost in making an honest effort to achieve a settlement by reaching out and exhausting all possibilities; process requires full and inclusive negotiations; one organisation was opposed to the talks process - need united Unionist front to oppose Irish unification;
- Appreciate the difficulty of creating political structures but risks must be taken: not aware of all the political nuances yet economic progress and politics are closely linked: appreciate that there are widely conflicting goals within the political spectrum and understand Unionism's deep suspicion regarding pronouncements about commitment to peaceful methods;
- Accept should make progress where it is possible - implementation of governmental structures by stages: the notion that nothing is agreed until all is agreed is alien to the business environment;
- Accept that the UUP, for example, wishes full participation by Unionists and Nationalists at all levels of government in NI - but this type of positive message is not getting across to the public: Sinn Fein, in comparison with Unionism, has an excellent PR image;
- Need for cross-border commercial links;
- The resolution of the 'marching season' must be given a high priority by politicians;
- Economic and social issues could be used to build trust within the political process: recognition of the importance of partnership at District Council level: there is a great will on the part of the whole community to work together and to make a contribution: stability is required to enable the economy to grow; and
- Because of lack of political progress the politicians with 'power' in NI cannot fully concentrate on the real 'bread and butter' issues: NI Office Ministers have too wide a brief to be fully effective: there is a perception that nobody is really interested in the real issues that concern the community.

Churches:

- Should be at the talks - talking does not jeopardise one's principles; fear of participating in talks is misplaced - Unionism has a good case and thus should be confident; if do not participate in talks the Unionist position will be weaker next time; Sinn Fein cannot be marginalised - talks must be inclusive unless terrorist actions in the future lead to exclusion of one or more talks participants;

- Fully realise the difficulty of talking to Sinn Fein and that the process is complex - people do not fully appreciate the nuances: appreciate that Unionism has a difficulty with the cease-fire as to its permanence: strong wish to hold onto optimism while recognising our difficulties - looking for politicians to take a step of faith;
- Unionism is perceived to lack realism and is intransigent yet now appreciate that the UUP has attempted to understand the dynamics of the problem and is being constructive: positive policies have not been positively communicated but have been perceived as a sell out;
- Ethnicity aspects need to be resolved - UUP can and should be positive about this dimension: cultural aspects should be separated from the political aspects: desire to build good relations at ground level;
- Nationalists feel that they have made accommodation and Sinn Fein will go along with consent though should not be asked to overtly, and directly, to accept this principle;
- One Church stated that Christ talked with his enemies while another stated that Sinn Fein has not earned the right to talk (nor should Unionists be talking with Sinn Fein) since without repentance forgiveness cannot take place;
- Recognition that confidence building for both communities is very important and that the principle of consent is an important element;

Community and Voluntary Groups:

- Should fully participate in talks - if wait for an ideal situation, it will never happen - but realise the difficulties and that there are no instant cures: most persons do not understand the nuances of the talks procedures and accept that progress should be made in stages (do not accept the position of nothing is agreed until all is agreed);
- Unrealistic not to involve Sinn Fein in the talks process - all must be 'on board' at the commencement of the process - and if violence returns then Sinn Fein would be excluded by such actions;
- A great need for accountable government in Northern Ireland and all politicians should be acting in the best interests of the community - the civil service is perceived as a problem in this context of accountability;
- Was not aware, and do accept, that the UUP has positive/realistic policies - for example the Council of the British Isles: this should enable the UUP to give confidence to the Nationalist community as to its desire to find a genuine accommodation: the Unionist case is legitimate but badly presented by mainstream Unionism while the minor loyalist parties are seen as positive;

- Other aspects such as policing and the judiciary are as fundamental as the integrity of the State;
- The Youth has a feeling of despair and wish for the politicians to be fully engaged;
- Need to be reassured that the outcome of the talks process will introduce 'real politics' - would have preferred to be discussing the all-important socio/economic issues and not future political structures;
- Will take much longer to bring people together than it will to create political structures: the need to develop trust, or at least the ability to work together, is important; and
- A talks process should be as much about listening as talking: politicians tend to do much of the latter and less of the former.

Loyal Orders:

- Hostile to the present process yet believed that the Unionist case must be put by some method and in one submission it was made clear that we should participate in the talks;
- Concern was expressed at the apparent concessions made by Unionism with nothing to show in return and to participate in the talks is giving the process legitimacy with no apparent benefit in outcome;
- Nationalism seems to have a clear agenda while Unionism does not and thus Unionism must demonstrate a sense of unity (unionism is perceived as split) behind a clear (and positive) message;
- The view was expressed that proximity talks were not the best method unless the mediator can be trusted;
- Distasteful as it may be, Unionists must participate in the talks - who else will do the talking for the Unionist community;
- The aspects surrounding 'consent' were viewed as very important; and
- All clearly understood the difficulty of the present situation as to how to present the Unionist position in a constructive manner.