



Ulster Unionist Party

TALKS BULLETIN

This sheet is for information for Forum delegates, councillors, Party Executive members, MPs and Party Officers. It is intended that this bulletin will be published each week that the negotiations continue.

The Talks were conducted over Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of this week. The Forum met today, Friday. Since Wednesday, 19 June, the core issue has been the status of the Ground Rules document which HMG published, after consultation with the Irish Government, in April of this year. The Ulster Unionist Party has serious reservations about this document which can be seen as an attempt by the Governments to drive discussions towards a narrow Frameworks Document agenda while sidelining questions we see as being crucial, such as Articles 2&3 and decommissioning. Our efforts have been concentrated upon agreeing a single Rules of Procedure document which would place discussions in the hands of all the participants.

On Tuesday of this week the two Governments brought forward amendments which significantly enhanced the role of the parties in Strand 3 (United Kingdom/Irish Republic) discussions. It has been a key Ulster Unionist Party objective that the parties have an input into this strand, and that it is not simply the preserve of the two Governments.

They also took a crucial element from one of our procedural amendments which makes clear that the participants are not governed by any overriding document such as Ground Rules. While the status of Ground Rules is still disputed, Senator Mitchell proposed a compromise whereby the Rules of Procedure should be drafted in a single document sufficient to enable the Chairman to conduct business. Agreement on this point seems likely. Ground Rules exists, therefore, solely as one of a series of policy statements produced by the Governments and it has, in our view, no special function or status.

The Rules of Procedure which are likely to emerge will have changed significantly from those which the Governments were trying to impose from June 6 and may be acceptable to the Ulster Unionist Party. However, we will be withholding our agreement until the Agenda for the remainder of the Opening Plenary session is settled. The major issue here is the significance attached to decommissioning and the way it is to be handled.

We want to ensure that the participants collectively, including the Ulster Unionist Party, have a large measure of control of that agenda so that any subsequent attempt to smuggle Sinn Fein/IRA into the Talks without passing the decommissioning requirement will fail. While we want to tie up the decommissioning issue satisfactorily, we do not want to do so in such a way as to drive the small loyalist parties out of the Talks, thereby jeopardising their ceasefire.

The DUP and UKUP are now fully engaged in the process and they have now ceased to denounce it as 'fraudulent'. We listened with interest to Bob McCartney paying tribute to Senator Mitchell for his integrity and his record of public service, claiming that he had never been against him personally! Ian Paisley has now been caught referring to Senator Mitchell as 'Mr Chairman'!

While we are concerned at the slow pace of progress, the Ulster Unionist Party claims credit for enabling the Rules by which these Talks are governed to be opened up. It was without the assistance of other Unionist parties. The irony is that they are now taking advantage of our success and attempting to change the Rules to suit their own party advantage. Such is the lot of the responsible Unionist party.

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