

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

BRIEFING NOTE REGARDING THE PROGRESS OF NEGOTIATIONS

12 JUNE 1996 5.00pm

FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY - NOT FOR RELEASE.

It was thought that it would be useful to produce a brief note for Forum delegates and the constituency offices so that you are kept abreast of proceedings in the discussions that have been taking place at Castle Buildings this week.

Our party, the DUP and Mr McCartney's party took a united stance in the opening session on Monday. This was in line with the agreement I came to with Dr Paisley and Mr McCartney at a joint meeting on Saturday. Our sole purpose was to open up a discussion of the procedural guidelines which were released to the parties on 6 June 1996.

These guidelines were unacceptable to us as they gave to the overall Chairman such powers as to make him/her an overarching 'peacemaker' or 'supremo'. In this role he would have been left open to take on board the agenda of the Irish Government and Sinn Fein/IRA. Crucially, the Chairman had to be satisfied that "a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations is genuinely being offered to address the legitimate concerns of their traditions and the need for new political arrangements with which all can identify." This would have left the agenda so open as to allow any matter - including the very Union itself - to be up for negotiation.

Having successfully made it clear that there was no consent within the Unionist family to proceed on the agenda agreed by the two Governments - an agenda dictated to the British Government after the Irish Government walked out of their negotiations - bilateral meetings were conducted between all the parties, Senator Mitchell and the Governments. It seemed that no agreement could be found.

The Ulster Unionist Party proposed that the procedural guidelines from the 1992 Talks be adopted. These had proved acceptable in 1992 to the SDLP, DUP and the Irish Government but this compromise was rejected by the Nationalists.

In all these discussions the UUP was motivated by a desire to concentrate on the rules and agenda rather than the personalities. While we never rejected Senator Mitchell as Chairman, and made this clear at our meeting with Dr Paisley and Mr McCartney on Saturday, we understood those concerns expressed about the symbolism of Mitchell as Chairman given his background. Of more importance than Mitchell as Chairman was the merit of

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

giving such an important political role to any individual, be he/she an Irish-American or whatever else. Unlike the DUP, the UUP never at any time made reference to Mitchell's religion. It was crucially important that the agenda for the Talks was one agreed by the democratic representatives of the people of Northern Ireland and not the two Governments, Mitchell, or Sinn Fein/IRA.

Once we received indications that the Irish Government was open for compromise, after a long period of utter belligerence and intransigence backed up by the SDLP, we entered into several rounds of discussions with their representatives. After each meeting we conferred with Dr Paisley and Mr McCartney's parties. At each such meeting there was no mention of betrayal. Indeed, Dr Paisley expressed disbelief that we could extract so many concessions from Dublin and the SDLP.

After returning to the conference room to ratify the agreement we had secured, Dr Paisley and Mr McCartney walked out and began bitterly attacking our representatives and claiming there had been a 'surrender'.

There has been no surrender of principle. The UUP has maintained its consistent position that it expressed at the meeting last Saturday. Dr Paisley and Mr McCartney have both committed themselves to the Mitchell principles in a full session under the chairmanship of Mitchell. This indicates that their criticisms of early Wednesday morning were rhetorical and that their previously stated positions - that they would never enter into any discussions while Mitchell was in the chair - were nothing but hot air.

Senator Mitchell will be chairing a procedural meeting on Monday to agree an agenda. He has given a commitment in the conference room that in terms of the procedural guidelines and the agenda the participants would be starting with a 'blank sheet'. The 6 June document will now have no more status than a proposal on a par with other proposals from the parties. It is no longer a fall-back position to be implemented if no agreement can be found between the parties as was the case in earlier Government documents submitted to us on Tuesday.

We have until Friday to prepare our position paper as to what the agenda and rules should be. The UUP will be submitting proposals which will leave Strands 1,2 and 3 under the chairmanships of Sir Patrick Mayhew, General de Chastelain and the two Governments respectively. Senator Mitchell will have a constrained role as convenor of the plenary session while as much decision making as possible will be devolved to the committees dealing with each Strand.

In all our discussions we will be seeking to maintain the maximum cohesion of the Unionist viewpoint while bringing on board other participants where this proves possible.

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

In summary, the UUP has succeeded in recovering the ground that HMG surrendered last week. We have been criticised by other parties for our efforts but we now have an agreement that will enable all parties, including those led by Dr Paisley and Mr McCartney, to make their full contribution to the setting of a reasonable agenda for discussion. Control of the Talks is back in the hands of the Northern Ireland people. It is our belief that the chances for agreement on an agenda and procedures has been enhanced now that the threat of imposition has been removed.

I enclose a copy of the agreement reached early on Wednesday morning.

DAVID TRIMBLE
LEADER, ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY

Enc. The paper agreed at 12.30am on 12 June 1996 "A Possible Approach for Resolving Procedural Difficulties".