

Ulster Democratic Party

Decommissioning - Paper for Discussion

28th August 1996

Introduction

The Ulster Democratic Party is at times equated by some with Loyalist paramilitarism and as such some ambiguity may surround what role the U.D.P. may be expected to play when we discuss issues such as decommissioning. Therefore it is important that there be no confusion in this area.

The Ulster Democratic Party is a constitutional political party, dedicated to further its policies through democratic means alone. The U.D.P. rejects the pursuit of political objectives through force.

The U.D.P. has played a significant role in achieving the removal of loyalist violence by offering political analysis to the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Freedom Fighters.

The U.D.P. while offering analysis to these organisations has no authority over their policies or activities. The facility we offer is a voluntary one. The decision of the U.D.A. or the U.F.F. to, from time to time, accept or reject that facility is one upon which we have no control or indeed responsibility.

Decommissioning

The Ulster Democratic Party, along with the other participants in the negotiation process, has publicly subscribed to the six principles outlined in the 'report of the international body', published 22nd January 1996. One of which states commitment 'to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations'.

The U.D.P. recognises the significance of the decommissioning issue, as a matter of confidence building, and as a symptom of distrust within our society. We believe it vital that all significant issues, including decommissioning are addressed within negotiations, and we expect all participants to do so seriously and constructively.

The U.D.P. made a lengthy submission to the 'International Body' on 16th December 1995. In that submission we stated, *'The U.D.P. recognise and share the desire to remove all illegal arms from our society and shall continue to do everything in our power to achieve this.'*

However we also recognise that it should not be interpreted that because the participants in the negotiations are committed to the objective of total disarmament, that such an objective is therefore achievable. That has not yet been established. It is only those who are in possession of the arms who can ultimately determine whether

they shall be decommissioned. If agreement can be reached between the participants on ways to move forward on the decommissioning issue there still lies the difficulty of securing the agreement of armed groups to implement a programme of physical disarmament.

Because neither the C.L.M.C. nor the I.R.A. have been elected to take part in the negotiation process and therefore shall not directly contribute to the debate which we as participants shall engage, we must accept that any decisions we may come to will be flawed in this respect.

With this in mind, it is nevertheless important that the issue of illegal arms be explored and as such the participants should embark upon a process which would develop a fuller understanding of this issue and contributing factors.

Additionally there could be merit in examining the practical considerations of potential decommissioning, were the position to be reached where physical disarmament was a realistic possibility. The Ulster Democratic Party usefully discussed 'modalities' of decommissioning with the British government during the process of 'exploratory dialogue.'

The next step

While no agreement has as yet been reached upon the agenda for the remaining of the opening plenary, it is anticipated that it will include discussion of the report of the international body.

The U.D.P. view discussion of the report and its recommendations as useful. While no participant is bound by the recommendations contained in the report, it is helpful that as a signal of good faith, all participants have voluntarily endorsed the proposal outlined in paragraph 20 of the report by publicly subscribing to the principles of democracy.

The U.D.P. has outlined in its submission of 31st July, entitled 'Proposed Agenda for remainder of Opening Plenary', that when considering the report of the International Body participants should

- (a) Discuss the proposals
- (b) Discuss methods which may enable further progress on decommissioning alongside negotiations in three strands

While it would be inappropriate to pre-empt what the outcome of such discussion may be, we have already indicated two potential focuses for future progress; exploration of the decommissioning issue and contributing factors; and, examination of practical considerations of potential decommissioning.

In addition we would point out that it should be remembered when the report of the international body is being considered, that at the time of its inception, preparation and presentation the IRA was still engaged upon a cease-fire.

It is our view that Loyalists would consider the deteriorating political climate and the threat of attacks on the community from the I.R.A., I.N.L.A. and R.S.F. to be serious factors, which should weigh heavily in everyone's minds as we seek, through discussion, to find ways to progress the decommissioning issue.