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INSIDE POLITICS: SATURDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 1996**Jim Dougal**

The political talks resumed this week amid acrimony over the presence of the loyalist representatives. The DUP claimed that because the loyalist groups had failed to condemn a paramilitary threat against Billy Wright and Alec Kerr they had breached the Mitchell Principles and therefore forfeited their places at the discussion table. The two Governments didn't see it that way however and dismissed the DUP proposal. The arguments took up most of the business during the week but while there was pessimism among some about the future of the process the Irish Prime Minister John Bruton, who was in Washington, was making optimistic noises, saying he believed there was a clear interest in peace among people in Northern Ireland. Well the talks will resume at Stormont next week. It's then that the Alliance Party is expected to allege Unionists breached the Mitchell Principles because of events surrounding Drumcree. I'm joined now by the Alliance Party leader Dr John Alderdice, who from next month will be Lord Alderdice. John Alderdice, why are you persisting in putting forward this complaint against the DUP and the Ulster Unionists?

John Alderdice

Well, first of all, we raised this matter, the whole matter of Drumcree and what came from it, immediately after it happened and at that stage it was not clear what the procedures were for following it through. There were some inquiries. We met with the British and Irish Governments and with Senator Mitchell. We were pursuing the matter, but when the new rules were agreed Senator Mitchell asked us if we would instead of pursuing it under the previous uncertain arrangements if we would undertake to follow it through the new rules and procedures and we said we were perfectly happy to do that. Now, you ask why we're doing it. Well, first of all, this is an enormous matter of principle. Northern Ireland was brought to its knees, its economy was wrecked, the reputation of the police was badly damaged and democratic politics was dragged in the gutter. That's a very serious matter, but further than that the Mitchell Principles were established precisely to rule that sort of thing out of order. Unionists, of course, saw the Mitchell Principles as ruling it out of order on the part of republicans, but as far as I'm concerned what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander and if it is to be out of order for republicans to do these things, as indeed it should be, then it should be out of order for Unionists and of course the important question now, after the Government's ruling in respect of the loyalists is this: do the Mitchell Principles actually mean a great deal, are the Governments going to rule that Drumcree was a breach of the Mitchell Principles in which case the Unionists must come into line and recommit themselves to democracy under the rule of law. Or was Drumcree not a breach of the Mitchell Principles, in which case, quite frankly, it's hard to see how you can breach the Mitchell Principles and that will have very important implications, I would have thought, for Sinn Fein and the republican movement.

Jim Dougal
What are they?

John Alderdice

Well, clearly at present, if there are those within Sinn Fein who want to come into the political process they have to have a ceasefire and secondly, sign up for, and abide by the Mitchell Principles. Now, if it is the case that Drumcree is not a breach of the Mitchell Principles then one has to ask what on earth would be a breach of the Mitchell Principles. If the Unionists are not drawn into line over that question, then I think Sinn Fein could legitimately look at it and say "well actually all we're being asked for is a ceasefire, because frankly, no matter what we do it's not going to be a breach of the Mitchell Principles and therefore we can simply continue in the way that we have been heretofore."

Jim Dougal

Wasn't it though suggested to you during the week that because people were trying to move the process forward on to other spheres if you like that you should not proceed with it?

John Alderdice

Oh, yes, there's no doubt there were lots of people who didn't want us to proceed with it, most significantly the Unionists didn't want us to proceed with it, because of course they want to forget about what happened. They don't want to forget about the effects but they want to forget about the bad publicity and there are others who don't want to address it. They'd rather blur these matters over.

Jim Dougal

Do they?

John Alderdice

Well, I think that at times the two Governments are more eager to see things moving forward than they are to stick with certain fundamental rules.

Jim Dougal

Is it true then that the Governments didn't want, the two Governments, didn't want you to go ahead with it?

John Alderdice

Well I think that the two Governments were setting their sights very much on some kind of agreement between the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists as something that would get us all out of the hole. Now in my view an agreement between the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP would be wonderful. It would be a tremendous step forward and it certainly would be of great assistance to all of us and it is the key axis, let's be very clear about it, but if that is not based, and all that is built from it is not based on the rule of law and a confidence that all

of us will be subject to the rule of law, all of us will have to tell the truth in these matters, all of us will have to abide by the principle of the rule of law, then the whole thing will be unsustainable and will fall to pieces. We are the guardians at present of democracy and the rule of law.

Jim Dougal

Can I just go back to the point I was trying to make to you and that is did the British Government ask you not to do this?

John Alderdice

Well, it was clear to us, let me put it in this way, it was clear to us that the two Governments were focusing their minds on moving things forward with SDLP and the Ulster Unionists. We were at no stage told that this was something that we couldn't do or anything of that kind, because that was clearly not the case. The people were wanting to focus on other things. We also want to see those things moving forward, but you can't just brush aside the rule of law, the wrecking of our economy, the damage to the police and the profound political polarisation that Drumcree has brought about and we're not prepared to ignore that matter.

Jim Dougal

But you say it was quite clear to you that the British Government didn't want you to do this?

John Alderdice

That's not what I said. What I said was that the two Governments quite clearly in our judgement wanted to focus on other issues.

Jim Dougal

But aren't they in a way right. I mean with the experience of what happened with the complaint against the loyalist parties isn't the same thing, the same result going to come from your complaint and isn't it going to be a waste of time?

John Alderdice

Oh, well, if the result comes it will not be a waste of time, it will be highly significant as a precedent, because if it is the case that what happened over Drumcree is not ruled to be a breach of the Mitchell Principles, then I think people will say to themselves "what do you have to do to breach these Mitchell Principles"? If it is the case that almost anything goes and there is no breach of the Mitchell Principles, then of course I think that would be a very powerful indicator to the republican movement of what they need to do and what they don't need to do in order to come into talks.

Jim Dougal

You want the Ulster Unionists and the DUP to be found guilty if you like of a breach of the Mitchell Principles over Drumcree, do you?

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John Alderdice

Our position is this. We believe there was a breach of the Mitchell Principles. We believe that there was a breach of the Mitchell Principles by the loyalists. The Governments have ruled differently and we have to accept that; there is no right of appeal on these matters. However, it does seem to us that if those matters are not a breach of the Mitchell Principles then people must begin to wonder what these Principles actually do mean and how far you have to go to breach them.

Jim Dougal

But aren't they holding up progress? I mean people accept that we had a very bad summer and a lot of them just want to move on from it?

John Alderdice

But you can't just move on from it, I'm afraid. We have had a bad summer, the polarisation is worse than it has ever been. I warned people before Drumcree of the disaster that was going to come and I think proved absolutely right. Our economy has been wrecked. You can't simply turn to business people who were going to invest here and aren't now, to tourists who were going to come and aren't now, to the communities that are riven apart and say "oh, friends, let's just forget about it". We've got a long road of rebuilding and as for things being held up, the truth of it is this. The business of the allegations made against the loyalists didn't hold up the question of the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP meeting. Otherwise, you wouldn't be talking so much about it. The fact is if people want to meet these formal matters can continue on without any obstruction. If of course people want to play games about it and if you look at what goes on in the Forum, for example, and you see the way the Unionists behave there, you must wonder sometimes whether people are more interested in playing games than making progress. Then of course they could use the excuse of this, but no, this is not something that will hold things up. This is something that will set it on a proper footing. We all know exactly where we stand, including those who are currently outside the talks.

Jim Dougal

You have mentioned the Forum. How long are you going to stay there?

John Alderdice

We will be available for that Forum at any time when it is prepared to do proper business. What we are not prepared to do is being audience to a pantomime show and at any time when serious business is being done, we will be there to contribute to that business and to make it what it was meant to be, a place where politicians could begin to move things forward together in Northern Ireland where they could work with the people, where the people could have a voice, but the way the Unionists are using and abusing it at the moment is quite appalling. I think many people who voted for the Unionists would be quite shocked if they saw the vitriol and abuse, the sheer childishness at times of some of the behaviour that is there. We're not going to participate

in that, but we are continually ready to participate in constructive components of the Forum if and when they are there.

Jim Dougal

I'm joined now by the leader of the UDP, Gary McMichael. Gary McMichael, are you happy with the way the complaint against your party and the Progressive Unionists was resolved?

Gary McMichael

Well I am pleased that it is resolved. Our position has been that we weren't challenging the right of the DUP to bring forward allegations in light of the recent circumstances which we think that is important that if people have something to say that they say it and if they have accusations to make that they make them and if those who are accused have an opportunity to defend themselves. We have done that and we have done so successfully and we knew we would do. So I'm happy that that's out of the way. Unfortunately we do have a potential repeat from a different quarter on Monday and Tuesday of next week but again that too we're happy to go ahead, because it's important that if the Alliance Party are aggrieved or feel that there are matters of principle at stake, as John Alderdice has said, that they are aired and that the DUP and the UUP have an opportunity to defend themselves again.

Jim Dougal

Do you believe that the DUP and the UUP broke the Mitchell Principles at Drumcree?

Gary McMichael

Well, you know, I think there are question marks in people's minds, but at the same time, you know, I'm quite confident that the UUP and the DUP will put up convincing arguments in their defence and I think we'll have to wait and see what the Governments, and in particular where the prime responsibility is on the British Government to decide how ours should be progressed, but I'd have to say that I would anticipate that the UDP will be arguing that the Unionist Party and the DUP should not be excluded from negotiations.

Jim Dougal

What's your reaction to the suggestion, particularly from the DUP, last week that what happened and the result of their complaint, if you like, has set a precedent for the inclusion in the talks of Sinn Féin without a ceasefire?

Gary McMichael

Well, Jim, I mean I think that the DUP and the UK Unionists have been deliberately misleading the public on this matter. I think it's important that it should be put to bed. There is no comparison between the decision taken and the reasons behind the decision taken on the allegations made against the UDP and those which pertain to the position of the IRA and of Sinn Féin. We do not set a precedent for the IRA or Sinn Féin coming into the process and we are firmly opposed to Sinn Féin being included in negotiations without an IRA ceasefire. There are a number of points that have to be considered. The

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loyalist ceasefire is intact, it remains in force. Secondly, the relationship between the UDP and the CLMC is in no way comparable to that between the IRA and Sinn Fein. When Sinn Fein talk to the IRA they talk to themselves,

Jim Dougal

They obviously would deny that of course?

Gary McMichael

Well of course the dogs in the street know the score on that, but most importantly, and this is the most important fact, the inclusion and the conditions for the inclusion of Sinn Fein in negotiations is dealt with in the Entry to Negotiations Act 1996, the basis upon which negotiations are formed. There can not be any inclusion of Sinn Fein without an IRA ceasefire. That is written into law and I think that the DUP are being deliberately mischievous on this point.

Jim Dougal

Let's go back to the loyalist paramilitaries because you're there at Stormont, you represent their views. They issue a threat which puts in question your position at the talks. Now surely, the least that does is to question the extent of the belief in that process of the loyalist paramilitaries?

Gary McMichael

No, I don't believe that that is the case. While of course I oppose all forms of violence and threats, the violence, if one looks at the individual matter concerned it would appear that the threat which was issued by the CLMC and directed against two individuals was made on the basis that those individuals themselves posed the threat to the process and a threat to the loyalist ceasefire and that disciplinary action was being taken by the organisation to stop that and therefore I would see that perhaps it was a demonstration that loyalists are still committed to the process. Although I would have to say of course that confidence is weakening when we consider that there's little progress being made in the negotiations that fellow loyalists and Unionists have been pushing for the exclusion of us from the process and that there is no indication that the IRA or Sinn Fein are interested in peace.

Jim Dougal

A lot of people would be quite aghast that disciplinary action includes a death threat?

Gary McMichael

Well I mean I am totally opposed to violence and the threat of violence and I think that, you know, that can't be pinned upon us. The role which we have played over the last two years is incomparable to that of any other political party. We helped create the conditions where through our position in the violence we actually facilitated a ceasefire and we have went to great lengths to try and ensure that a ceasefire hasn't broken over the last two years and we will continue to do so.

Jim Dougal

What do you think is the position, the status if you like, of that death threat now?

Gary McMichael

I have no indication. The decision's taken on that matter by the CLMC. I have no input or no influence upon that. The door in that respect is largely closed although we will be continuing to use whatever influence we do have to see that there is no violence.

Jim Dougal

And in fact that your influence to ensure that it isn't carried out?

Gary McMichael

Well certainly our opposition to the violence would be in question if we were to take any other position.

Jim Dougal

I'm joined now by Monica McWilliams of the Women's Coalition. Monica McWilliams, you party has described the Forum as being in part, at least sectarian. What do you mean by that?

Monica McWilliams

Well what we mean by that is that individual members last week on the issue of boycotting, made some very sectarian comments and that's of great concern to us because that Forum was set up to promote dialogue and understanding and consensus across the communities in Northern Ireland and from where we're sitting it's doing quite the opposite.

Jim Dougal

What's it doing?

Monica McWilliams

It's heightening tensions, it's calling on people to increase the boycotts, it's putting out warnings to people about what they will do and it's extremely sectarian in the way that it's running its business by allowing those kinds of comments to stand and in fact if anyone gets the records of proceedings and looks over not just last week but the week before the recess they would actually be quite shocked and horrified at some of the things that are being said.

Jim Dougal

Who do you blame for all this?

Monica McWilliams

Well, I think that this Forum isn't working in the way that it was meant to be. The terms of reference for the Forum which is in the legislation clearly stipulated that it was meant to promote dialogue and understanding. There have been a lot of tensions, the SDLP have left, Sinn Fein never came in and the small parties there, one of which are ourselves, are beginning to believe that we're propping up a Forum that hasn't turned out to be a civic Forum. It

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was meant to be actually something where people would come along, voluntary groups, community groups, trade unions, businesses and put their views to their elected politicians and I have to say that we don't like the committees that have been set up, one in Agriculture. Now it may promote dialogue and understanding across the two main communities in Northern Ireland but I'd have some doubts about that. There's Health, there's Education and there's parades, and I would have liked to have seen the public consulted to a greater extent about what they would have liked us to have discussed rather than the other way round.

Jim Dougal

Are you blaming the Unionists for this?

Monica McWilliams

I'm blaming the way that they have set up their committees. They have dominated those committees, they have put four from each party, from the Unionist Party and from the DUP and it gives the rest of us very little say and decisions are really taken without consulting the rest or without listening to other people.

Jim Dougal

But can you really blame the Unionists entirely for this because if the SDLP hadn't left there would at least have been a cross-community argument and debate?

Monica McWilliams

That could very well be the case. I mean I'm not going to argue the SDLP's case. I think that they felt that it also wasn't meeting its remit, but that's up to them to say that. All I can say is now we are left in this Forum and before they left it also has to be said that some of the discussions that were going on there didn't promote dialogue and understanding and I think right now in the absence of any nationalists in the Forum I think the Unionists are left talking to themselves.

Jim Dougal

And what do you think needs to happen? I mean what can be done in your terms about this?

Monica McWilliams

Well, the Secretary of State is going to have to make a ruling on whether it meets its terms of reference and indeed whether he agrees the rules. As you know, there was a great debate over one of the rules which he took the same decision as us that it should never have been a rule. That was the rule on the Flag. Now that's been taken out. Now one would have thought that they would have settled down and said: "OK, we accept it should never have been a procedural rule, it was the DUP who put that rule in, and let sleeping dogs lie." Instead of that they turned it into a motion and this is now an ongoing sore and in fact as a result of the stand we have taken a very brave stand I have to say. It was one of our women left in the Forum by herself who was the

only person to vote against that. The Alliance didn't bother coming in and I think that just heightens it, it's symbolic of the tensions that we're facing.

Jim Dougal

Very briefly, how long can you stay there?

Monica McWilliams

Well, we're going to stay there until the Secretary of State makes his decision and then we'll review our position.

Secretary of State

Mr Beston

PS/Michael Anderson

Miss Bharucha

PS/Baroness Denton

Ms Sear

PS/Mr Moss

Ms Marson

PS/PUS

Mr Dunn

Mr Thomas

Mrs Rogers

Mr Leach

Mrs Zac-Williams

Mr Campbell - Bannerman

Ms O'Sullivan

Mr Hill

Mr McNally

Mr Stephens

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