

draft, January 11th '97, revised 19th January '97, revised
20th January 1997.

ANALYSIS

The Talks presided over by Senator Mitchell were created to provide a mechanism for the involvement of Sinn Fein/IRA in the political process.

Senator Mitchell in his report made the assumption that the IRA was genuinely committed to peaceful means (his report was signed in January 1996, before the breakdown of the cease-fire). Both HMG and the Dublin government were working on the assumption that violence would not return if Sinn Fein had access to the Talks, and designed the process accordingly.

Whatever one might say about these judgements, the current position is that SF/IRA is embarked upon a vicious and provocative campaign whose first objective is the full scale re-engagement of the Loyalist paramilitaries in terrorism.

In these circumstances, Ulster Unionists cannot allow themselves to be drawn into a process which provides for the arrival at the table of these provocateurs, as they clearly have no real commitment to promote their political objectives by exclusively peaceful means, and have comprehensively demonstrated their rejection of the principle of consent.

We note the views expressed by the Prime Minister before Christmas on the terms he might apply to the possible entry of SF/IRA, but would observe that things may change, the government may change, and more importantly there is no consensus between the parties on the circumstances under which SF should or could join.

In essence, UUP sees no prospect of or justification for SF involvement in the negotiations, while SDLP, Dublin and some others see them at the table immediately after a cease-fire, (even if that is tactical), and a signing up to the Mitchell principles. These differences represent the chasm between us, and a bridge over it is not apparent to us.

The current Talks process is a means to an end, not an end in itself. We find ourselves at an impasse, and it is our collective duty to overcome obstacles. We suggest below a possible way of achieving this. We cannot allow the current Talks structure to become an obstacle to progress itself.

ALTERNATIVES

This hiatus should not be allowed to bring to a halt the political life of our Province however, as there are other ways in which we can proceed. UUP feels that there are a wide range of general confidence building measures which can be taken, the effect of which would be the generation of trust and confidence within the political system.

A protracted general election campaign should not be allowed to paralyse good government in Northern Ireland.

Given that even changes in government have only a marginal effect on the day to day life of the citizen, it is imperative that institutions in the Province be united in ensuring that priority is given to sound administration, unhindered by negative controversies.

It is vital that all those committed to democracy can play a role together to build on the wide areas of common interest that exist, and ensure that there is no political vacuum. In short we must decide on a series of things that we can actually DO.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

UUP believes that a wide range of issues can be addressed, and addressed now. We have proposals which make suggestions covering 'all three strands', together with proposals in the areas of 'justice and rights' which, because of their special significance, merit particular attention.

These suggestions do not constitute a final resolution to the many problems we face; rather they represent an interim set of proposals, designed to help us work towards solutions, but in a way which involves no constitutional compromise on either side. We sketch out our suggestions hereunder;

Strand 1 matters.

There is a general desire amongst local politicians to have some influence over our economic, social and political fortunes. Local economic development has been one of our success stories over the last few years. Councils have been particularly effective here. Good cross party support exists for such measures.

Measure 1. UUP envisages that a structured relationship should be put in place between Government and local politicians,

which would be flexible enough to allow for the 'social partners' perhaps represented by the G7 or similar groups, to make a contribution, as required. The aims would include:- helping in the search for inward investment, the development of partnerships and a place where local politicians can learn more about the administration of Northern Ireland, and themselves, or with others, begin to contribute to policy formation in the social and economic fields. Political matters could also be raised or referred.

Measure 2. Local Government has been hampered in recent years by the failure of ALANI to attract widespread support. This should be rectified. UUP is willing to discuss with others a revitalised or replacement body. A new constitution for this body should confine its role to local government matters and ensure that it is representative of all Councils. Its principal committees and office-bearers should be reflective of the main political traditions as well as geographic diversity in Northern Ireland.

Strand 2&3 matters.

Measure 3. Working within the same structured relationship referred to above, UUP is willing to explore (outside the scope of the Anglo-Irish Agreement) how matters of mutual interest and benefit can be discussed or pursued with the appropriate representatives of the Republic of Ireland; these could be either transferred or non transferred matters.

Measure 4. UUP also envisages a particular emphasis on European issues in this area, and as would be the case in our interim Strand 1 proposals, see a specific role for our MEPs, whose co-operation has already set an example of what can be achieved.

UUP would be prepared to exchange views with other elected politicians on how we could address the void of misunderstanding that presently exists between politicians in Northern Ireland and those in the Republic of Ireland.

JUSTICE AND RIGHTS ISSUES

The whole question of human rights, group rights and other justice issues are very sensitive matters in our situation, but precisely because of this, we must seek a suitable mechanism to ensure that they are addressed.

Measure 5. The incorporation of the European Convention into UK domestic law would be our first preference, but a local option may also exist. Furthermore, a special protocol would need to be incorporated to take account of group issues; European examples from OSCE for instance, are worth discussing.

UUP is anxious to see discussion facilitated on matters such as:- victim support, the 'disappeared', prisons and prisoner issues, beatings, policing and police governance, relevant legislation, and inter-jurisdictional co-operation on terrorist issues.

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