

FROM NIO PRESS OFFICE

(SUN) 01. 19' 07 11. 11. 1997

**INSIDE POLITICS: SATURDAY 18 JANUARY 1997****Jim Dougal**

The political talks resumed this week amid fresh claims that the loyalist ceasefire was over. The -political parties remain divided over the issue and it appeared that the RUC and the Northern Ireland Office differed as well. The Chief Constable, Ronnie Flanagan, maintained recent bomb attacks on republicans were carried out by extreme loyalist groups. The Secretary of State, Sir Patrick Mayhew, was reluctant to say that meant the ceasefire had been ended, suggesting that since it had been called by the Combined Loyalist Military Command it would be up to that group to say it was over. That stance drew criticism from the DUP and the UK Unionist Robert McCartney who accused the Government of attempting to keep loyalists in the talks in the hope of getting republicans in as well. While the Ulster Unionists believe the loyalist ceasefire is slowly disintegrating they hope it won't break down and people should not rush to expel the UDP and the PUP from the talks. Meanwhile, in the Commons the death of another Conservative MP Ian Mills means the Government will be relying more than ever on Ulster Unionist votes. John Major knows well that David Trimble could hold the key to the date of the general election. Mr Trimble joins me now.

David Trimble, isn't that a major setback for the Prime Minister - the death of Conservative MP Ian Mills?

**David Trimble**

Yes, it was really quite unexpected, Ian was only 56 years old, and quite a surprise and quite a shock that he died.

**Jim Dougal**

It does now put you in even a more pivotal position, if that was possible, doesn't it?

**David Trimble**

It puts all the small parties in an uncomfortable position and, as I say, on this matter, there are half-a-dozen small groupings and any one of them is potentially significant in this situation and all are equally significant, and it depends on the circumstances, it depends on the issue. Now, from our part, there's no point trying to get involved in sort of second guessing these things or too elaborate manoeuvres. We'll continue to look at issues on their merits.

**Jim Dougal**

Couldn't you use that position that you have to make sure that Mr Major continues to do nothing that you would want him to do, that you wouldn't want him to do in terms of the peace process, in terms of trying, for example, to get Sinn Fein into the talks?

**David Trimble**

John Major looked at this suggestion that came forward in precisely what terms we do not know. We don't know exactly what proposals were put in front of John Major last autumn. He considered them and made a formal statement in the course of November. Now he made that statement, I think,



FROM NIO PRESS OFFICE

(SUN) 01. 19' 97 11:01/ST. 10:04/NO. 3580112734 P 3/10

with reference to the merits, or otherwise, of the situation. I don't think he made it because of any pressure that I or others brought to bear and I don't think the parliamentary situation came into it. Because - I think this is important that people realise this - on any issue with regard to Northern Ireland, Mr Major is guaranteed the support of the Labour Party and Tony Blair has made that absolutely clear. He said that there'll be a seamless join between Government policies and his policies and so that he is going to support. So if John Major wanted to do something with regard to what is called the peace process he can do it in absolute assurance that the Labour Party will support him on that and frustrate any revenge that any Northern Ireland Party might want to take.

Jim Dougal

Indeed, but you're not going to tell me, are you, that you would not use your position to put pressure on Mr Major to do what you wanted him to do?

David Trimble

Look, whatever influence we have in terms of the talks process doesn't come from parliamentary arithmetic, it comes from the fact that there is not a credible talks process without us. That is the important fact and that will be the case irrespective of the size of the Government's majority, that if it's carrying out a political process in Northern Ireland, it needs the participation of the largest party in Northern Ireland and that gives this party, and quite rightly gives this party, some influence.

Jim Dougal

OK, well can I go now to the loyalist ceasefire and the notion that it has been broken. Do you think it's been broken?

David Trimble

It's clearly under considerable pressure. I used the phrase earlier of saying that it appears to be disintegrating and I stress the word 'appears'. It appears to be disintegrating. We don't want it to disintegrate, we don't want it to collapse. I think every responsible person in Northern Ireland wants to see that ceasefire maintained on an honest basis. Now at the moment there is the question do we have a loyalist ceasefire or not, and we don't have a clear answer to that. And I'm just saying that because we want to see that ceasefire sustained we shouldn't rush to conclusions because if we were to do so in the way that some other Unionists suggest, then you would accelerate the breakdown of that ceasefire, and do you really want that? And I think those people who are rushing prematurely to exclude the loyalist political parties from the process, knowing that the consequence must be to accelerate the disintegration of the loyalist ceasefire and more violence, really ought to explain to people why they're following a course of action that will actually make the security situation much worse. I have said, and we will ask the Secretary of State to make a formal assessment and to give the participants in the talks a formal assessment because he has available to him sources of information that are not available to us and I want him to say to the participants in the talks process just exactly what the assessment of himself



FROM NIO PRESS OFFICE

(SUN) 01. 19' 97 11:01/ST. 10:04/NO. 3580112734 P 4/10

and the security forces actually is, and I think that should be the starting point for the discussion.

Jim Dougal

What about the loyalists themselves and indeed the CLMC. ....?

David Trimble

Well of course they could. Of course I would be delighted were they to do so and I think by referring to the so-called CLMC you're putting your finger on the persons who can resolve the ambiguity and they have been silent and that of course, their silence, reinforces those who think that the ceasefire, the loyalist ceasefire, is in the process of breaking down. It would be much better if we had something clearly coming from them but it's not just a matter of what is said. What is said is important, but what is said has got to be credible.

Jim Dougal

Indeed, would it have to be tested then?

David Trimble

Yes, well I think it has got to be credible and we have got to make an assessment of it.

Jim Dougal

Over time?

David Trimble

Well, this is also .....it, but it's a question of where you're coming from.

Jim Dougal

You see, you appear to be trying in your approach to be encouraging the loyalists to maintain the ceasefire; many people would support that and say it's a very, very proper thing to do. But on the other side of this argument there will be people who find it difficult to understand why you can't be more amenable in helping republicans to call a new ceasefire?

David Trimble

Well republicans have had plenty of opportunity to call a ceasefire and to make it credible. We're dealing with a situation where the loyalists did call a very clear and unequivocal ceasefire and maintained it against considerable provocation for a considerable extent. So I think the loyalists start with the advantage of having established their good faith. Now, Sinn Fein/IRA never did that. And so in terms of making assessment these are factors to take into account and you are saying that you make the assessment over time. Yes, and we're doing that, having come from a position where there was a credible ceasefire which is breaking down. So we're not going to make a snap assessment as to whether it has broken down. Similarly, if you're moving in the other direction from a situation where there is no ceasefire, where you have got a terrorist campaign ongoing and people are calling a ceasefire, again in terms of assessing whether they're putting in place a genuine ceasefire you



FROM NIO PRESS OFFICE

(SUN) 01. 19' 97 11:02/ST. 10:04/NO. 3580112734 P 5/10

make an assessment over time too. So I'm trying to ensure that we do apply the same standard to a complex situation in a non-partisan manner. Now there's a lot of people running around being very, very partisan on this issue, as you would expect, but I think we have got a responsibility to try and proceed in a way that has concern for the interests of the people as a whole as well.

**Jim Dougal**

Doesn't it follow though that you should support John Hume in his concern for the interests of people in trying to ensure that the IRA call another ceasefire?

**David Trimble**

Well, when John Hume embarked on this path, OK there were deep reservations about it, but when the matter appeared to come to fruition in terms of the Downing Street Declaration, because the Downing Street Declaration was would it bear in mind the point at which Governments and others who were making a formal response to it, bear in mind that the Ulster Unionist Party underwrote the principles of the Downing Street Declaration, despite the fact that we came in for massive criticism from other people for so doing, so we have created the space and the opportunity for Mr Hume to operate. Now, our recent criticism of Mr Hume particularly in terms of the end of last year is that the credibility of the operation was ..... It might have been possible to suspend judgement in August 1994 but as we saw over the eighteen months that followed the absence of good faith, and then after the 9th of February last year and all the bombs that have followed from then, the credibility of the operation was seriously diminished.

**Jim Dougal**

And you think that there is no chance that the IRA will call a ceasefire now, do you?

**David Trimble**

I wouldn't rule out the possibility of another tactical manoeuvre particularly geared to the general election, because there has been a fair amount of speculation that we might see a ceasefire called just in the run-up to the general election purely for the purposes of enhancing the Sinn Fein vote and embarrassing John Hume again.

**Jim Dougal**

Do you think by the way that the loyalists will be put out of the talks?

**David Trimble**

Well, I don't want to make a prediction on that because I'm still hoping that we can sustain a loyalist ceasefire on credible terms, so I don't want to make a prediction.

**Jim Dougal**

Now on those talks themselves, you're in a situation where there's violence outside, where you have failed to agree with the SDLP on a way forward on



FROM NIO PRESS OFFICE

(SUN) 01. 19' 97 11:02/ST. 10:04/NO. 3580112734 P 6/10

decommissioning, where there's the possibility of the Prime Minister calling an election, wouldn't it be better to put those talks in cold storage for a while?

David Trimble

Well, this is the point that in a sense I raised around about Christmas of saying that we had to consider where we were in terms of the talks. We are in a deadlock. It's not because of a failure to agree with the SDLP, it's actually because of the position primarily of the Irish Government, to a certain extent, the SDLP, and also to a certain extent the British Government that we haven't had a realistic approach being adopted to the decommissioning issue and that's because they have a different set of priorities. That's the basic problem, a different set of priorities. Now in that situation I think we do have to draw back and have a look at the situation. I am reluctant to see the political process collapse and so consequently I don't want to see the talks go down without there being something positive put in their place; I don't want to see them formally suspended without something positive being put in their place. I would rather see the talks as it were ticking over, while, if we can't make progress on that, so that they're there in case the opportunity to make progress should develop, but if we can't make progress on the direct constitutional issues which the talks relate to then let us look at other areas where it might be possible to make progress.

Jim Dougal  
Like what?

David Trimble

Well, if you take what's going to happen in the course of this coming week, this Thursday coming there's going to be a meeting between the Prime Minister and myself and John Hume and Ian Paisley on a specific issue.

Jim Dougal  
Education Boards?

David Trimble

Education Boards. Now this is the sort of ad hoc co-operation that has taken place between the major parties in Northern Ireland from time to time on socio-economic issues: it happens over beef, it happens over fisheries, it's happening over education: it happens from time to time. Now, why don't we look at the possibility of doing that in a slightly more thorough-going and slightly more structured way?

Jim Dougal  
At the talks?

David Trimble

At or alongside the talks. Now it's difficult to do it at the talks because the talks are formally about constitutional issues and an agenda has been adopted there which can't be changed. But you could use the opportunity that the fact that people are gathered there together to do something alongside - I'm not



FROM NIO PRESS OFFICE

(SUN) 01. 19' 97 11:02/ST. 10:04/NO. 3580112734 P 7/10

simply saying launch new structures. When I say in a structural way we can do it in a sub-formalised manner but we don't necessarily need legislation for this or anything like that. Let's see if we can do something to show to people that politicians in Northern Ireland can work together in a regular and regularised manner and to show that the political process is viable. I think we have got an obligation to look at this rather than just to sit back and say: 'oh, we're stuck now' and throw up our hands and do nothing. I think we have got an obligation to see if we can do something of a positive nature.

**Jim Dougal**

And do you think at the same time that those talks should not be abandoned or put on hold? Do you believe they should continue?

**David Trimble**

I don't want to see that process disappear without something better in its place and I think to leave a vacuum is actually to hand the initiative to people who don't have our best interests at heart.

**Jim Dougal**

Well I'm joined now by one of the representatives of the loyalist parties at the Stormont talks, Billy Hutchinson of the PUP.

Billy Hutchinson, David Trimble has suggested that it would be a good idea if the CLMC made a statement about the loyalist ceasefire to clear this matter up. Is it over or is it not?

**Billy Hutchinson**

I think that there are two issues here. I think that what some people want to see CLMC to do is to make a statement reference the two bombs under republicans' cars back in the latter end of '96 and I think that, you know, irrespective of what the CLMC do, people won't want to believe it particularly some of the leaders of political parties. I think that what we must do is that we must look at the actions of the CLMC over the Christmas period and over the New Year period. And what I would say is that the amount of provocation from the IRA and the lack of response from the CLMC proves to me that the 13th of October statement '94 still stands, and I don't think that anybody should be under any illusions. I think that the PUP and also the UDP represent the CLMC at the Stormont talks and we can say categorically that that ceasefire still holds and it stands, and you know, I think that people should accept that and we should get on with building the future.

**Jim Dougal**

It's hard for people to accept that after what happened and in the light of it seems a refusal by the CLMC to make a statement?

**Billy Hutchinson**

Well I think that what happened is unclear; I think that those bombs put under two republicans, one in Belfast and one in Londonderry, and what I would say to you is that there hasn't been any incidents since then. Now the