

# Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

Statement  
by the

## Ulster Unionist Party

### Launch of Strand 1 Talks

7 October 1997

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The Ulster Unionist Party is participating in these talks because the best way to defend and promote the cause of the Union is not by abstention, but by fighting for our cause from within the talks process. Too often, we have seen the wishes of the greater number of people of Northern Ireland ignored and the imposition of so-called solutions, such as the Anglo-Irish agreement, forced upon them. These talks require the principle of consent to be accepted by the participants and the reality that the Union will continue for as long as that is the wish of the greater number of the people in Northern Ireland. By attending these talks the Ulster Unionist Party is determined to challenge the sincerity of Sinn Fein/IRA's declared commitment to peace and to the democratic process. We view consent and actual disarmament as a test of Sinn Fein/IRA's commitment to exclusively peaceful means as required by the Mitchell Principles. Terrorists must not be allowed to use, or threaten to use, their weaponry in order to extract concessions at the table of democracy. If Sinn Fein/IRA is truly committed to democratic and exclusively peaceful means of achieving political accommodation within Northern Ireland, it no longer needs to retain its murderous arsenal.

The Ulster Unionist Party and its supporters oppose a United Ireland because we are British. We actively espouse the United Kingdom and the Union that exists between the people of England, Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland. We believe that the United Kingdom, by adding up those four parts, equals more than the sum of those four parts, and it reflects the interaction which has existed in the British Isles throughout history. The Union with Great Britain is a Union in the hearts and minds of the Unionist people. The feeling of Britishness is not a device or artifice which has been imposed on an unsuspecting people by successive British governments. Britishness is at the heart of the Unionist philosophy, the feeling of belonging; the feeling of sharing with our fellow-citizens in Great Britain in great national events; of being part of something larger than simply the six counties in the north-eastern corner of this island. It is a shared psychological bond; a shared emotional bond, common bonds of history and of shared adversities, shared triumphs and shared sacrifices.

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Since 1177, when the Normans came to Ulster, eastern Ulster has been loyal to the crown of, firstly England, and then, Great Britain. But, our Britishness is more than loyalty to the Crown. It is a sense of communion with the rest of the peoples of the United Kingdom, built up over centuries. Northern Ireland itself has been a part of the United Kingdom from before the time when Nelson defeated the French at Trafalgar and before Wellington defeated Napoleon at Waterloo. Our ancestors shared in the project of the Empire; sacrificed themselves for King and Country on the battlefields of Europe, whilst Republicans rose in revolt in Ireland; and stood alone with Britain during the Second World War, while our southern neighbour remained aloof from the battle to preserve European civilisation. Indeed, as Winston Churchill said,

*'But for the loyalty of Northern Ireland....the light which now shines so brightly throughout the World, would have been quenched.'*

In short, our sense of Britishness was forged in sweat and blood.

Yet we are told that we are not British. We are told that *'The Loyalists have a desperate identity crisis. They agonise over whether they are Ulster-Scots, Picts, English or British...yet they are not British. Loyalism is not found in Britain itself, except as an Irish export. There are no cultural links between the Loyalists and the British, no matter how much the Loyalists scream about their 'British way of life'..the Loyalists are Irish....'* This is a denial of a basic human right - the right of a community to define itself. The British people of Northern Ireland are not part of a minority within an Irish nation. The United Kingdom is a multi-national and multi-ethnic community. It is no contradiction to be English and British, Scottish and British, Welsh and British, Ulster and British, or indeed Irish and British. The British in Ireland are not merely the British troops and administration; they are the greater number of people in Northern Ireland who consistently exercise their democratic right to retain their British citizenship through the ballot box. Nearly thirty years of attempts by Sinn Fein/IRA to bomb and shoot them into a United Ireland have failed to dislodge them from their place in the United Kingdom. It is not the British government which stands in the way of a United Ireland, it is the British people of Northern Ireland.

The failure to recognise that those who support or desire the continuance of the Union will never consent to a United Ireland, is also a fundamental and enduring mistake of Irish nationalism. Furthermore, the failure to recognise that those who support and desire the continuance of the Union, will never consent to any process or settlement which would precipitate movement towards a United Ireland, is similarly a fundamental error. From a Unionist perspective the legitimacy of Irish nationalism is not rejected in the sense that nationalists are entitled to aspire to a United Ireland, though Unionists, by definition, do not accept the validity of the nationalist argument.

What nationalists refer to as the 'Unionist veto' is simply an acceptance of reality. A vote in Westminster to expel Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom is inconceivable, but even if it happened, it could not stop those who support the Union from being what they are, nor would it convince Unionists of the desirability of Irish Unity. The real border is not the line on a map, but the mental border between the British people of Northern Ireland and the rest of the island. Northern Ireland is not an artificial entity; rather, it is the folly that the geographical land mass called Ireland somehow equates with an autonomous Irish political nation, which is the great deceit.

We do not and will never accept that Northern Ireland can give up its right to self-determination. The constitutional future of Northern Ireland is entirely a matter for the people of Northern Ireland and must be fully respected by Sinn Fein/IRA and constitutional nationalists.

Any arrangement arising out of these talks must attract the consent of the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland. This can only be accomplished by addressing and resolving, within Strand 1, the democratic deficit which exists under Direct Rule within this region of the United Kingdom. It will necessitate, within that Strand, the establishment of structures and institutions of Government which are open, responsive and answerable to the electorate. For the internal Government of Northern Ireland the UUP proposes a Northern Ireland Parliament/Assembly, to be elected by proportional representation, for fixed 4 or 5 year terms. The Parliament/Assembly would exercise wide-ranging responsibility via the transfer of power from Westminster, with a role for all sections of our community in conjunction with a Bill of Rights. When the Parliament/Assembly - and other aspects of Government - are seen to be clearly defined and workable, (by which we mean that it should be operationally viable) when lines of responsibility are clear; mechanisms relatively straightforward and simple to understand; and procedures not subject to easily induced paralysis; then consideration could be given to other powers being devolved by Westminster. Any Parliament/Assembly should be durable and stable. This implies that any new Parliament/Assembly should hold out a reasonable prospect of being able to withstand the stresses and strains of normal government. The system should also be self-sustaining, able to cater for an orderly transfer of power after elections and should not be dependent on a specific inter-party deal or on particular personalities.

The Ulster Unionist Party will seek the ending of Direct Rule in Northern Ireland which sees the citizens of Northern Ireland ruled in a manner which permits little local accountability in the administrative and legislative process. Northern Ireland's citizens are denied equality of citizenship within the legislative process at Westminster as compared with our fellow citizens in England, Scotland and Wales. We will seek the termination of the Orders-in-Council system which allows only the minimum of normal Parliamentary scrutiny and its replacement with a Special Standing Committee for Northern Ireland to consider legislation on a basis which is equitable with the legislative procedures which operate in the rest of the United Kingdom. With regard to the overall governance of Northern Ireland, the aim should be to give wide ranging

executive/administrative functions to a Northern Ireland Parliament/Assembly. The workings of Government in Northern Ireland should continue to be monitored, as at present, by the Northern Ireland Select Committee, which should be expanded to include the workings of the Northern Ireland Parliament/Assembly. The legislative responsibility for matters not transferred to the Parliament/Assembly would remain at Westminster and there should be a statutory responsibility for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to consult with the Parliament/Assembly at the beginning of each Parliamentary session on the legislative programme for Northern Ireland each year.

The Ulster Unionist Party wants to see accountable Government for the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland. In May 1997, the Prime Minister, made his first official visit, outside London to Northern Ireland. During his keynote speech in Belfast, Mr Blair outlined the way forward for Government in Northern Ireland,

*'Our destination is clear; to see in place a fair political settlement in Northern Ireland - one that lasts, because it is based on the will and the consent of the people here....My message is simple. I am committed to Northern Ireland. I am committed to the principle of consent. My agenda is not a United Ireland - and I wonder just how many see it as a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future. Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom as long as a majority here [in Northern Ireland] wish. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, alongside England, Scotland and Wales. The Union binds the four parts of the United Kingdom together. I believe in the United Kingdom. I value the Union.'*

*'I want to see a Union which reflects and accommodates diversity. I am against a rigid, centralised approach. That is the surest way to weaken the Union. The proposals this government are making for Scotland and Wales, are designed to bring Government closer to the people. That will renew and strengthen the Union. I support this approach for Northern Ireland with some form of devolution.'*

*'...let me make one thing absolutely clear. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom because that is the wish of a majority of the people who live here. It will remain part of the United Kingdom for as long as that remains the case. This principle of consent is and will be at the heart of my Government's policies on Northern Ireland. It is the key principle.'*

We stand where the Prime Minister stands. The Union belongs to all the people of Northern Ireland. Our aim is to fashion a settlement firmly within the Union. Based on the fundamental principle of consent, a settlement will put in place sensible, practical arrangements, providing stability and accountability. The principle of consent means that Sinn Fein/IRA's campaign is doomed to failure. The principle of consent means that democracy must and will prevail.