

## The International Body

Meeting with Representatives of the Alliance Party  
January 14, 1996  
Belfast

Participants: John Alderdice

### Summary

John Alderdice, Leader of the Alliance Party, told the International Body that the recent upsurge in "punishment beatings" suggests that the peace camp in the republican movement was losing ground; advised that the IB should avoid any categorical statements about elections and the peace process; underscored the importance of loyalists at any negotiations regardless of the size of their vote; thought that the UUP was under no pressure to participate in talks and that therefore such participation would represent a big concession; said that any progress on decommissioning during the process of negotiations would be helpful as long as the goal of total decommissioning remained in view; and recommended against an IB position on the principle of consent in relation to Northern Ireland's constitutional status.

### Account of Meeting

Alderdice said that the recent upsurge in "punishment" beatings and killings seemed to indicate that the balance in the republican movement was shifting as those in support of peace were being undermined. The IB's "position is being prejudiced by their actions." The Alliance Party continues to impress upon Sinn Fein the importance of decommissioning, though not as a precondition. Alliance contacts with Sinn Fein have assisted Sinn Fein in sticking to the peace process.

In response to Senator Mitchell's question whether the IB should step beyond its remit to address the elected assembly issue, Alderdice said decommissioning and elections are closely linked. The IB could say something about ways in which the political track could move, but taking a firm stand would put the IB in a difficult position. Some sort of elected body may be the only way to bring unionists to the table with Sinn Fein. Elections of representatives to all-party talks would be a possibility. Nationalists, especially John Hume, are very negative, but if the two governments could propose something along the lines of the aforementioned, it might find acceptance. Representation of loyalists in such a body is a cause for concern but the Alliance Party is not convinced that, for example, a 45 member body would automatically exclude loyalists. In a 90 member body, the PUP would be likely to win two seats. The UDP would have difficulty, but the two loyalist parties should run a common slate. Another possibility for loyalists would be some sort of observer status, along with churches and other relevant organizations.



The UUP is not under acute political pressure to enter into talks. If unionists entered into talks, that would be a huge concession. Unionists need a mandate to talk to Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein wants to be treated on the basis of its electoral mandate and the possession of weapons. An elected body in Northern Ireland could provide the basis to get over the change in Westminster following the next general election.

In response to General de Chastelain's question about the possibility of progressive decommissioning during negotiations, Alderdice said that it is important to go as far as one can. There would inevitably be untidiness in the negotiating process. Sinn Fein at the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin even has problems with the term "Northern Ireland." As long as people realized that there will be some progress, however small, on decommissioning during the process (with the prospect of full decommissioning at the end), pressure for more might be defused.

With respect to the issue of consent, Alderdice said if a majority in both parts of Ireland does not endorse it, the road to a united Ireland is closed. A change in the Irish Constitution of 1937 of course would require only a majority in the south. The Forum for Peace and Reconciliation is close to achieving agreement on a formula for consent so perhaps it would be better if the IB were not to touch the issue. In the Forum, if we fail to persuade Sinn Fein to agree to a Downing Street Declaration-type of formulation on consent, no obstacle will have been created, but if the IB were to recommend DSD-type language and Sinn Fein said no, then an obstacle to the peace process will have been set up.