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UNDER/ SEC 63642  
22 OCT 1996  
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From: Peter Smyth  
Political Affairs Division  
21 October 1996

ASST 68 506/10  
SEC 25 OCT 1996  
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.cc

- PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (DFP, B&L) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L) - B
- PS/Malcolm Moss (DOE, DHSS&L) - B
- PS/Baroness Denton (DED, DANI&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir David Fell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Wood (B&L) - B
- Mr Beeton - B
- Mr Priestly - B
- Mr Hill - B
- Mr Masefield
- Mr Lavery - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Ms Bharucha - B
- Ms Mapstone - B
- Mr Whysall - B
- Mr Lamont, RID - B
- HMA Dublin - B
- Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B
- Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
- Mrs McNally - B

C

1. cc to Alexander

cc to Carson

~~cc to [redacted]~~

28/10  
Mr Alexander

Mr Jones  
LD28/10

Wonderful!

↓  
L.H.W.

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY ANNUAL CONFERENCE: GALGORM MANNER HOTEL,  
SATURDAY 19 OCTOBER

Summary

This was a decidedly post-Drumcree Conference. The number of motions chosen for debate which were directly political was greater than I recall in recent years, and more prominence was given to young speakers than ever before. While on one level, this gave an appearance of dynamic engagement with current political issues, it also revealed two interesting subsidiary themes. First, there was a largely undeclared uneasiness about Drumcree, and a general casting

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about for scapegoats. Conspiracy theories sprouted like mushrooms, and the taxonomy of demonisation ran from Sinn Fein through to the Chief Constable, not forgettin the BBC, the NIO and even the Protestant clergy who had refused to wholeheartedly support the events of last July. Second, and parallel with that, was some awareness that the image of Unionism had been damaged by Drumcree and ought to be repaired. The ballotted motion, selected by a majority of the delegates, called for the appointment of a full-time PR officer to be appointed at Glengall Street; and throughout the day, tributes were paid to the work of the offices in London and Washington in promoting the Unionist message.

2. Nevertheless, Trimble in his leadership speech felt no need to engage in an elaborate justification of the UUP stance during the Talks; nor, despite genuflections towards the SDLP, did he impart any real sense that SDLP support was a prize he was actively seeking. However, his central idea that the UUP should remain in the Talks on the same basis as hitherto, preferably without Sinn Fein, was one which was unanimously endorsed. Given that it is the function of a party conference to engender such positive feelings, it would have been surprising if such support had not been forthcoming; but some delegates were polite rather than enthusiastic in their applause, and a few admitted privately that there was still a worrying lack of clarity about Trimble's vision for Unionism.

Parades

3. The tenor of the debate on parades was prefigured in the terms of the motion, which called on HMG to ensure that law abiding, tax-paying citizens in this part of the UK are allowed to proceed peacefully along the Queen's highway, without let or hindrance. William Thompson (the UUP candidate for the new West Tyrone seat) claimed that Unionists had an unfettered right to march - the RUC should be informed of such marches, but the idea of seeking police permission was misguided. He backed up this assertion with a detailed and confident exegesis of the public order legislation, the

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effect of which was diminished only slightly by virtue of being utterly wrong. Jim Rodgers asserted that details of 14 Orange marches had been submitted to Maryfield for adjudication, and 9 had been re-routed as a result. Such interference was difficult to take from British and Irish Foreign Office officials, but it was the perfidy of the small handful of Northern Ireland-born civil servants who colluded in the arrangement which he found really upsetting. Both Wilfred Breen (Omagh) and David Brewster (Limavady) in different ways made the point that the provisions of the public order legislation which bore on the role of those seeking to prevent parades should perhaps be given more attention.

4. A different dimension to the debate was given by Mark Neale (Portadown) who charged HMG with responsibility for protecting the civil liberties of Protestant. Martin Smyth's comments on parity of esteem for Protestants echoed this. The point was also picked up by David Burnside, who tacitly admitted that Drumcree had been disastrous for the image of Unionism abroad, but who felt that the message that Unionists believed in civil liberties for all was one he could sell. (Neale himself told me, shortly after Drumcree, that he had tried to deploy the civil liberties argument, and had been rebuffed when local Orangemen realised that the logical outcome of this line of thought was recognition of the right of Roman Catholics to hold parades and marches). But if this indicated a flicker of new thinking, it had to be set in the context of a debate where the loudest applause was given to the suggestion that the Chief Constable should have resigned after Drumcree; and where collective amazement was displayed at the thought that anyone could possibly regard Orangism as being in any sense triumphalist.

Economic Boycotts and Church Blockades

5. The unfocussed nature of this fairly brief debate indicated that Unionist delegates were as unclear as anyone else about the nature and extent of the boycotting of Protestant businesses. A couple of speakers saw it as a well-orchestrated plot by Sinn Fein to cause community division and promote ghettoisation of Protestant

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interests. There was a general recognition that Unionists should not be provoked into retaliation (although when Marian Smyth (North Down) said that the boycotting image was bad for inward investment and must be permanently exiled from Unionist thinking, the applause she was given was decidedly dubious). The blockading of Catholic churches as a means of counter-protest was widely condemned. When it came to solutions, there were suggestions that the SDLP and Catholic hierarchy might be asked to use their influence with the boycotters; or that the UUP itself might provide financial support to distressed Protestant businessmen - there were probably "only a few".

[REDACTED] The local CBI and commercial interests were criticised for their lack of engagement with the issue; although no-one in the course of the debate proved able to define with any precision precisely what the issue was.

#### The Forum

6. With its call for HMG to recognise the worth and work of the Forum by extending to it a meaningful role in policy formulation, this motion demonstrated the Unionists' capacity to see the world not as it is, but as they wish it to be. Both Donaldson and Empey eschewed analysis for rhetoric, and rattled on about the SDLP desertion of the Forum preventing the potential growth of accountable democracy.

[REDACTED] To his credit, Peter King rejected the analysis that we were witnessing a Humean plot to stifle political progress, and instead advanced the altogether more original thesis that it was the NIO who intended the Forum to fail, in order to use the inability of Unionists to work constructively as evidence of the need to continue with Maryfield rule.

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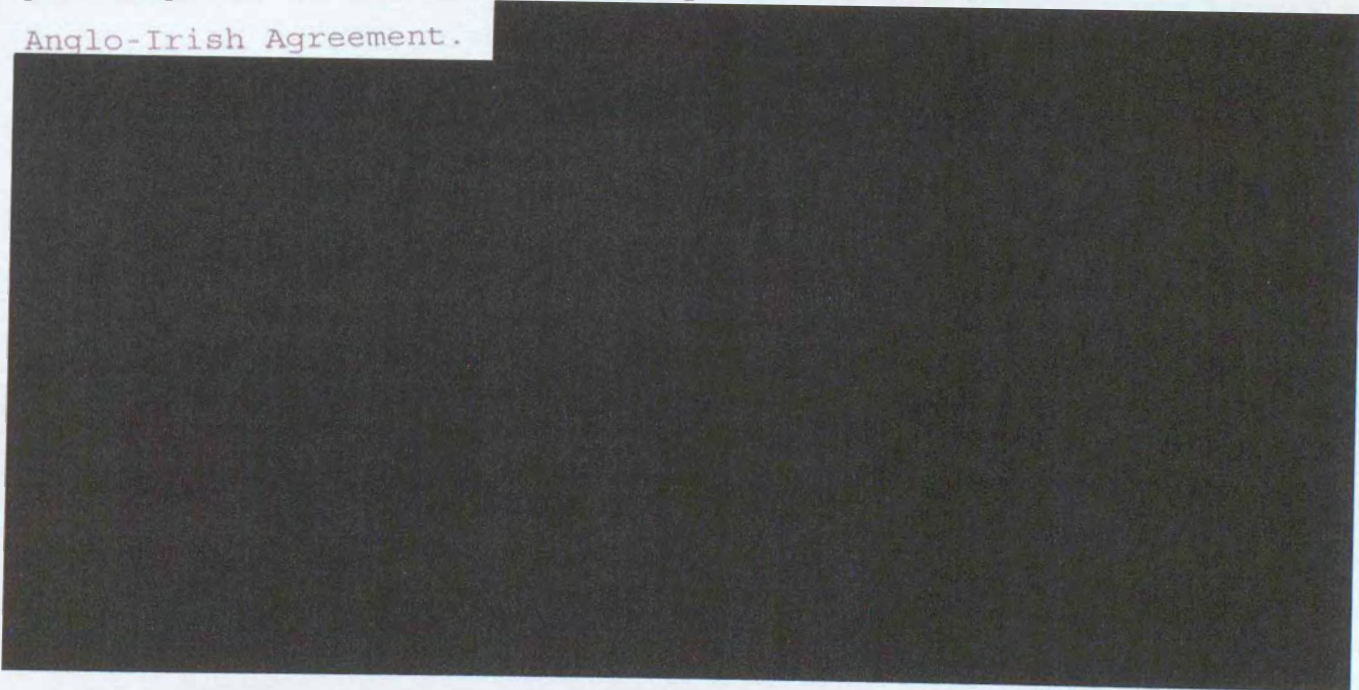


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7. But even at a UUP annual conference, the truth is many-sided and John Bell (Castlereagh) earned respectful applause for his courage in opposing the motion. He maintained that the Forum was a waste of time, and a distraction designed to divert Unionist attention while the two Governments proceeded with their infernal machinations. Given the instinctive reverence the UUP feel towards any elected body with the potential to become the next Stormont, this was a brave thing to do. I found myself wondering about how many of those on the platform knew precisely why, in the overall scheme of things, the Forum would continue to exercise a limited role, but who chose not to point this out to their less analytical brethren.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement

8. Whether by accident or design, none of the UUP first team participated in the debate calling for the abandonment of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.



9. On a more thoughtful note, Arlene Kelly sounded like a disciple of McCartney as she expressed her difficulty with the underlying premise of the two Governments that the desire to maintain full British citizenship was somehow equatable with the

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aspiration to an Irish nationalist identity. William Thompson queried the frequency and status of President Robinson's visits to Northern Ireland. David McKerrin made a positive suggestion - the UUP should produce a paper setting out their own version of the three sets of relationships, so that the replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement could be seen in context. But perhaps most typical of all was a statement from Dermot Nesbitt, who castigated a comment made recently by Maurice Hayes to the effect that Unionism needed to re-position itself in the later 20th Century. Dr Hayes had it wrong, maintained Nesbitt - the need was not for Unionism to re-position itself, but for all the other players to shift their ground.

Trimble's speech

10. Trimble's speech (text attached at Annex A) was interesting for what it did not say as well as for its actual content. There were no references to modernising the Party or reconsidering the relationship with the Orange Order. (We did get praise of John Gorman and Patricia Campbell as Catholic Unionists, and Trimble claimed that Catholics had always been prominent in Unionism: the fact that he looked back to pre-1921 for his example of the phenomenon (Dennis Henry) might have struck some listeners as undermining his own point.)

11. While there was some sniping en passant, there was no sustained attack on the position of HMG, or indeed of the Irish. True, there was the allegation that the 30 June election process had been rigged by the "the Anglo-Irish machine" with a view to damaging the UUP and to boosting its rivals; but later on, in a curious passage, Trimble appeared to question the axiomatic truth of the assertion that the policy of the two Governments was hostile to the Union - the assumption "may or may not be correct; time will tell".

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12. But perhaps the most interesting omission was in regard to the Party's strategic plan for political progress. Trimble gave a brief account of how important changes had been made to the procedural guidelines, agenda and opening scenario of the Talks, but then retreated into generalities regarding the future. In essence, the message was that there would be no softening of position on a ceasefire or decommissioning, but progress in the few months before the forthcoming general election cast its shadow would depend on the decision by HMG and the SDLP to move forward without Sinn Fein. How important Trimble actually feels the SDLP to be in the scheme of things is difficult to judge on the basis of the speech. Certainly there were few honeyed words to persuade the Party to abandon Sinn Fein and throw in its lot with the Unionists. The glittering prize offered by Trimble at the end of the trail - "a flourishing Northern Ireland, rooted in a stable political order, based on respect for individuals and the whole community" was offered in combination with a critique of the current Anglo-Irish process as "the very way to prevent political accommodation within Northern Ireland", and an unflattering contrast between the multi-cultural attractions of Unionism and the narrow sectarian vision of Irish nationalism. As a gesture towards Nationalism it was a non-starter; but some at least of the UUP strategists might have been more concerned that as a rallying call for Unionism, its effectiveness seemed even more questionable.

Other debates

13. (i) Educational Reform

The motion condemning the proposed reforms in educational administration was notable only for allowing Roy Beggs to advance yet another conspiracy theory. The proposals, he maintained, were intended to create divisions among Unionists - between those representing areas which would be gaining and those losing jobs as a result of relocations; and although the mathematics were unexplained, Beggs feared that the proposal to increase the

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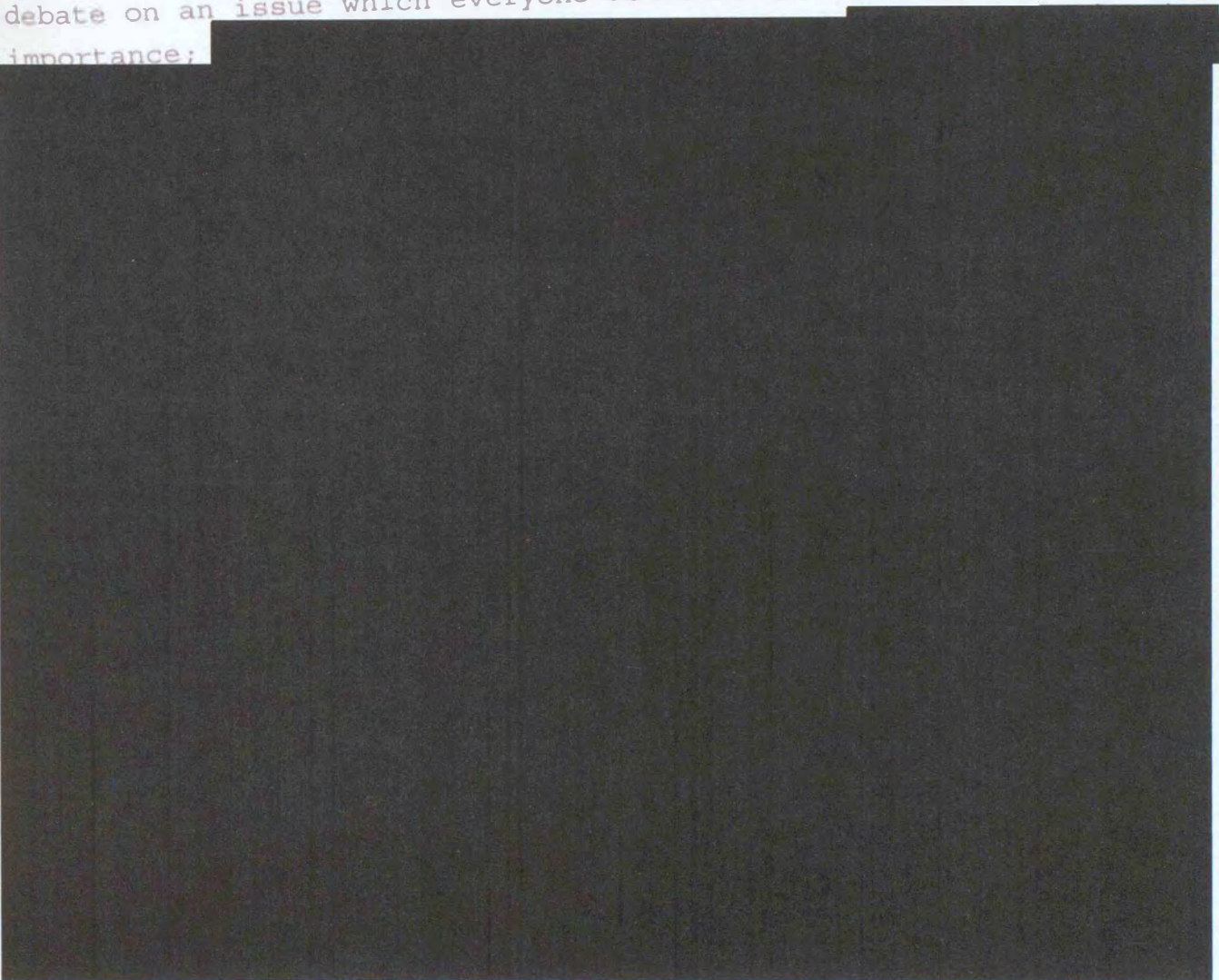
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...portion of public representatives on the new Boards could actually result in a loss of Unionist control over educational administration. The response given by Michael Ancram to the Forum report on the proposals, and the performance of DENI in submitting evidence to the Forum Committee were both denigrated. (In private, one delegate informed me afterwards that there was less opposition to the reform proposals than the debate might have indicated, and that even Trimble had some sympathy for what the Minister was trying to achieve.)

14. (ii) Beef Industry

Insofar as I followed it, this appeared to be a somewhat surreal debate on an issue which everyone acknowledged was of great importance;



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(Signed)

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Annex A

It has been an eventful year with ups and downs yet a positive year.

Unionism has progressed. This Party has enhanced its capacity to present the unionist case.

You can see from the displays at this conference the party's use of new technology, including the Internet which we can address the whole world.

Building on the valuable work of Jim Molyneaux we have raised our profile in Washington. Our North American Bureau has been established. Policy makers in Washington now know that there is another side to the story.

No doubt many still hanker after romantic nationalist simplicities, but they know that our views cannot be ignored. Events have enhanced our credibility and diminished the credibility of Irish Americans.

The clearest symbol of the change was to be found at this year's White House St Patrick's reception. Remember 1995 - Gerry Adams was a privileged guest. 1996 - he was outside and John Taylor, Jeffrey Donaldson and I were on the inside.

May I thank Jeffrey for his work, and also a very special word of thanks to Ann Smith who runs the North American Office.

There has been similar progress at home. The Unionist Information Office, Great Britain has opened. It will provide a vehicle for the many people across the water who wish to identify with and support the Union.

The first issue of its magazine The Unionist is impressive. We hope that this will develop to influence opinion formers and decision makers in London.

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Again we are building on the successful work of others. During the difficulties of this summer, Unionism received more sympathetic support from the press in London than the media in Belfast. Many people in Ulster still do not realise it, but in England, unionism is winning the intellectual argument.

A sign of this can be found in a recent interview given by Tony Blair, when he said that he regarded himself as "a facilitator for the will of the people of Northern Ireland".

Again, I thank David Burnside and Patrician Campbell for their work at the Unionist Information Office.

In September 1995 I called for elections before talks.

It was not a new call. Ken Maginnis had made the same point in his paper published just before the doomed Frameworks document.

Critics dismissed the call, but we have succeeded in bringing the Forum into existence. It is not perfect. It is not exactly the body for which we argued.

But after a political vacuum lasting ten year there is now a democratic institution which can represent the views of the people of Northern Ireland.

The elections were rigged against the Ulster Unionist Party by an unholy alliance of our political rivals within Ulster, together with the Anglo-Irish machine.

Their object was to damage this party for they knew, even if their unionist collaborator did not, that this Party is the real bulwark of the union.

Had they succeeded then the Union would be at risk today. But they failed. The Ulster Unionist party emerged triumphantly -

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indisputably the largest party in Northern Ireland, despite the shredding of the unionist vote.

I must pay a special word of thanks to the party officers and others who formed the election committee that organised the campaign, ably led by Dennis Rogan and Reg Empey.

One disappointment was that the media failed to recognise the renewal of Unionism with out Forum team. Over a dozen of our candidates were under 35, including the youngest candidate to stand for any party.

We saw the effect of this in the Forum a fortnight ago when it debated the multi-party talks. What appears to be the next generation of the Democratic Unionists harangued us like an adolescent hooligan. In contrast, there were thoughtful contributions from our benches from Peter Kind, David Brewster and John Hunter.

I cannot leave the Forum without paying tribute to its Chairman. It is only right that the Chairman should be drawn from the largest party and I was delighted when our nominee, John Gorman was appointed.

John had not previously been in an elected body; but he has coped magnificently assisted by a sense of humour that is endearing itself to all the delegates present.

May I say how good it is to see Catholic Unionists like John Gorman and Patricia Campbell who are prepared to identify themselves publicly with the Ulster Unionist party.

This is nothing new. There have always been Catholic Unionists who have supported our party electorally and financially. In the part there have been many Catholics who have been prominent in Unionism.

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Let me digress to tell you of one - Sir Denis Henry. He was at the creation of the Ulster Unionist Council in 1905. He unsuccessfully contested elections for what is now West Tyrone on 1906 and 1907. In the latter being defeated by just 7 votes.

He was elected to Westminster to represent South Londonderry in 1916 and 1918, recording the largest Unionist majorities ever for that Westminster seat.

In the Unionist tradition, Sir Denis Henry's selection was hotly contested. He was selected as candidate for South Londonderry at a meeting Kilrea Orange Hall by a margin of 7 votes. He was a vigorous fighter for the cause, in the 1918 campaign he told a meeting of Casteldawson that

"He had seen himself described in the Westminster Gazette as 'a truculent Orangeman'. Well, if that meant that he stuck to his guns and was as good a unionist as any Orangeman, well and good".

I must also note some of the less happy aspects of the year.

This Summer saw another attempt by republicans assisted by the Anglo-Irish machine to diminish expression of Ulster's distinctive heritage and identity.

Unfortunately, some of the protests against this were marred by violence which was all condemned. But this violence resulted in an orgy of anti-unionist criticism.

But the critics refuse to acknowledge two important truths.

First, that matters would have been much worse but for the responsible leadership of Martin Smyth and others.

Secondly, the events of July did not create tension in the community.

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That tension existed before and helped to cause the July events. The tension was created by republican aggression, the machinations of Maryfield and convolutions of the so-called peace process.

The events of July have been followed by boycotts and blockades which Conference today has rightly condemned.

Boycotts are part of the republican plan to turn Ulster into a patchwork of sectarian ghettos. Unionists who respond in kind only do the IRA's work for it.

Sadly since the summer we have seen a sharp deterioration in the quality of BBC Northern Ireland.

It is not just a matter of an anti-unionist bias, although there is such a bias and it is massive; it is a complete loss of normal news values.

Don't just take my word for it. Listen to Eilis O'Hanlon writing in the Dublin Sunday Independent in September after a murder by the IRA.

"The following Friday David Dunseith of BBC Radio Ulster's Talkback programme asked,

'Four days on is Sean Devlin's death forgotten?'

Four days? David Dunseith should have been listening to Radio Ulster's own news the morning after Direct Action against Drugs (ha!) murdered Devlin.

There was a hundred new jobs for Ballymena. This is what Radio Ulster considered the main story of the day. Sainsbury's had run into difficulties in their attempts to set up shop in Northern Ireland. This is what Radio Ulster considered the second main story of the day. And of the man murdered by those preaching peace? Not one word. What does the IRA have to do before the BBC considers its vile,

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self-righteous atrocities worthy of remark?"

We can add, what has to happen before Ormeau Avenue concentrates on reporting Northern Ireland events with objectivity and impartiality and stops creating events? I am sure that the makers of this week's Spotlight set out to create the event that has put North Belfast unionism in turmoil.

But a bigger problem is the defeatist attitude of some unionists.

A week ago when the Forum was debating the IRA atrocity at Lisburn, Mr McCartney declared that the event would have no effect on the plans of "the two governments": that they would persist in their "inexorable process" to the detriment of the Union.

There are three assumption in that statement. First that the bombs would have no effect on government policy; and secondly that that policy is hostile to the union.

These two assumptions may or may not be correct: time will tell. But I am not going to debate them. It is the third assumption which horrifies me.

The assumption that this hostile policy is "inexorable". Something that is enexorable cannot be stopped. To say that your enemy's plans are inexorable is to say that you cannot prevent him winning. It is rank defeatism. It is the language of those who say that sell out and defeat are inevitable.

This is not the Ulster Unionist attitude.

The whole point of being in politics is to make a difference - to make changes - to win for Ulster and the Union.

So Bob, if you don't believe we can win, if you don't think you can made a difference, you owe it to the people of North Down to make way for someone like Alan McFarland who does!

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And we have made changes.

Look at the talks. ON 6 June the Government issued a set of procedural guidelines, an agenda and an opening scenario. It was the usual Anglo-Irish stitch-up.

On 12 June we agreed to allow George Mitchell into the chair in exchange for the chance to re-open that stitch up.

On 12 June we agreed to allow George Mitchell into the chair in exchange for the chance to re-open that stitch up.

Success was not guaranteed. The defeatists were loud in their condemnations, for they assumed that we would fail.

Rather than help, their instinct was to make it more difficult for us to make changes.

Not everyone was quite so negative.

I remember one of their number acknowledging privately to me that if the changes we sought came about it would be a remarkable climb down by the Irish Government. However he doubted if we could pull it off.

But we put our heads down and over the next six weeks we worked at it. Gradually our unionist critics came into help. And now? Have you recently heard them repeat their criticisms.

A fortnight ago in the debate in the Forum I said, about this matter, that "We were proved right".

For good measure I repeated this, looking around at our critics to see if any would rise to intervene. No one stirred!

In the same way we are making changes for the better on the familiar issues of a cease-fire and decommissioning.

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I will not weary you with the details. The important point is this - these issues concern the basis on which we will proceed into substantive talks. That move will take place in lines mapped out by us.

We are not softening on a cease-fire or decommissioning. Rather we are insisting on an acknowledgement that the time has come to settle this and put Sinn Fein [IRA] behind us!

What happens in those talks also depends on how others respond to our approaches.

How can there be a commitment to negotiate along with a boycott of "The Forum for Political Dialogue".

Remember when John Hume said he was ready for talks "any time, any place, any where".

Unfortunately, it is anytime now. Anyplace but the Forum. Anywhere but where he will have to meet the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland.

He always seems to need the support of the Irish government . John you do not need this crutch. You should stand on your own feet and rely on your own strength.

Just like us. We are not looking over our shoulders.

We challenge the SDLP and the Government to go on now without Sinn Fein, and with no backward glances.

It will be worth going on. For we want to build a Northern Ireland comfortable with its unique heritage. We offer a genuine partnership to all the people of Northern Ireland.

There is only a limited time available. The prospect of an election

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will soon close down the political process. So, we have only a few months. But we are and have been prepared to do serious business, if others will respond.

I want to draw your attention to an interesting event. A member of our party has written a book which has been praised by nationalists.

The book is presented as thorough criticism of our policy.

The author argues that Ulster Unionists must accept, - a bill of rights - an Assembly based on proportionality - north-south bodies - involvement of local politicians in British-Irish relations.

This is presented as a vision of civic unionism. Commentators hail it as wonderful thinking.

I have news for the author. I have news for the political commentators.

They have not listened to what Ulster Unionist have been saying. If the author has cared to read our statements he would have seen that we have been promoting much of what he has only been thinking.

Unionism has long been committed to real civil rights for all and proportionality was at the heart of our proposals in the 1992 talks.

But we do not go down the path of political parity of esteem on the north/south axis.

To do so would contradict the very thing which he and which this party want to see - a flourishing Northern Ireland, rooted in a stable political order, based on respect for individuals and the whole community.

The pursuit of Anglo-Irishism is the very way to prevent political accommodation within Northern Ireland.

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Anglo-Irishism does not encourage nationalists to seek accommodation with unionists. It encourages them to look to Big Brother in Dublin. It encourages them to deny the value of internal arrangements. It encourages them to be intransigent.

The author is right in opposing a retreat into a sectarian laager. But he then make the familiar mistake of trying to find some sort of compromise between unionism and nationalism. But this is not possible.

A halfway house between the Union and a united Ireland as in the flimsy Framework would not be stable. We need a firm foundation. We can find that in the accepted principles of international law as applied today in Europe. They start with the recognition of existing fronteirs. The provide for the protection of human rights, community rights and fair participation within the state. Our state, of course, is the United Kingdom.

The narrow vision of Anglo-Irishism must be transcended by putting our relations with our neighbour within the totality of relations of the British Islands as a whole.

The answer is not watered down unionism but real unionism. Unionism by its very nature is inclusive. Not an obsessive concentration on the narrow ground. But an awareness of the wider horizon available to us through the Union.

It is only Unionism that can genuinely be multinational and multicultural. It believes that the sum of the whole is greater than that of the parts. This is a better vision than anything sectarian Irish nationalism can offer.

This is why we say that the Union is our future together - not the aggressive Anglo-Irishism that has and will only sharpen antagonism and conflict.

It is only the union that can provide a future big enough, a horizon

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wide enough, to encompass us all. It is only the union that can  
bind together all the people of this land.

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