

**SUMMARY RECORD OF PLENARY SESSION -
WEDNESDAY 18 FEBRUARY 1998 (1345) - DUBLIN CASTLE**

Those present:

INDEPENDENT CHAIRMEN	GOVERNMENT TEAMS	PARTIES
Senator Mitchell	British Government	Alliance
Mr Holkeri	Irish Government	Labour
General de Chastelain		Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
		Progressive Unionist Party
		Sinn Féin
		Social Democratic & Labour Party
		Ulster Unionist Party

1. The Chairman reconvened the meeting at 1345, and said the meeting would continue until this matter was concluded. Sinn Féin said it had demonstrated its total and complete commitment to this process, and had shown in word and deed its ability to do that. The party had worked very hard over a long time to bring about this process, despite their lengthy exclusion from it. Despite having no input into the Rules of Procedure, the party had committed itself to abide by them, and had demonstrated its ability to do so. No-one could dispute that. The basis of the indictment was the firm view of the RUC that Campbell and Dougan had been murdered by the IRA. Even within the indictment there was no suggestion that Sinn Féin were involved. It was a scandal that 200,000 voters on this island could be held hostage to the actions of another organisation, and disenfranchised. There was no case in democratic practice or natural justice to exclude the party, which had not breached any rules or procedures. The attempt to do so was a deliberate action of discrimination against the party and

its electorate, and would greatly diminish the credibility of the process. Sinn Féin said it had always advocated a structure for the talks setting aside preconditions. The party had honoured its commitments and behaved honorably. The nature of the indictment was bizarre and unacceptable, depending on the RUC which was anti-nationalist and violently anti-republican. The RUC had been indicted by every possible human rights organisation for torture and collusion.

2. Sinn Féin said that the earlier intervention by the PUP had been very powerful, especially in reference to the death of friends, and was sorry that these deaths had occurred. Both sections had failed to understand the trauma of the other. The PUP had made this point well, and had asked Sinn Féin to continue to use its influence. Sinn Féin would remain wedded to peace, would use its influence, and would continue the work it had been engaged in for a long time. What the PUP had expressed was a plea for the peace process to continue. The SDLP had suggested Sinn Féin could help by disowning the murders. Sinn Féin had, and did again, disavow and made clear it had no association with the killings, and had called for and worked for an end to them. This was not just when catholics were killed, or people known to party members. The party had said the same when Billy Wright was killed, and Guiney, and Campbell and Dougan.

3. Sinn Féin said the comments of the SDLP and others had dealt decisively with the indictment. The party had asked earlier if the British Government would withdraw its indictment, but perhaps this could not be done. If it could not be withdrawn, then the British Government should clearly show that there had been a clear

demonstration by those who asserted it that the party had dishonoured the Mitchell Principles. Of course, the British Government had already accepted what the Chief Constable had said, and so was consulting with the party and going on to take a view on a question in relation to which it had already reached verdict. The Government had to show that the party had intentionally acted other than in accord with its public commitment to non-violence. How could the Secretary of State assert that? Was the Irish Government going to say that Sinn Féin had broken its commitment? The British Government had said it would respond to the questions raised at the end of the debate. Sinn Féin said it wanted to be in a position to make a thoughtful response when the Governments delivered their decision, and accordingly asked to hear the decision face to face from the Governments. This was the honest way to proceed. If the party were to be expelled, it wanted to be part of managing the consequences, and not just let its supporters hear through the media.

4. Alliance said it wished to comment on points that had been directed at it, as it might otherwise appear not to be contesting them. Part of the formal representation made by the party, and Sinn Féin's response to it, had centred on whether Sinn Féin could be held accountable for the reputed actions of the IRA. The party believed that the recent murders were the work of the IRA, and was not persuaded that the views expressed by Sinn Féin satisfied the Mitchell Principles. The party had gone itself to the RUC to ascertain the facts, and had not waited for an announcement. It was no secret, and had not been denied in the form of legal actions, that members of the Sinn Féin delegation had been members of the IRA. Sinn Féin asked if the issuance of solicitors' letters

did not constitute legal action? Alliance said it had not been persuasively denied. The party had tried to distinguish between a political process and a peace process, but the present talks had been described as a peace process. A peace settlement can only be achieved by the involvement, directly or indirectly, of the belligerents. The IRA and loyalist paramilitaries had to be represented. This was why the whole issue of decommissioning was part of the process - how to deal with the weapons. Alliance said that if this was a peace process, then the belligerents were involved and weapons were involved, and how was the IRA represented in this process if not by Sinn Féin? It was impossible to believe therefore that there was not a fundamental link between Sinn Féin and the IRA. If there was not, then the IRA was not represented and the process was a charade. It would not be a peace process at all. Alliance said it took seriously the evident feeling in Sinn Féin that the party was not being treated with respect and dignity in these proceedings, but that was not the attitude in which Alliance was here.

5. Sinn Féin said it could be doubted if it was a peace process. The UUP called it a political process, and that was a legitimate viewpoint. It could have been, and still could be, a peace process. But to reduce it to the simplistic logic of: Sinn Fein must represent the IRA or it wasn't a peace process was stretching the imagination. If parties wanted to know what the IRA was thinking, they should read the IRA's statements. Sinn Féin had always said it spoke only for itself. The party had developed a peace strategy, which it thought could lead to a way out of the conflict. Jointly with the SDLP leader, it had set about exploring how that could be done, and

developing a proposition. Sinn Féin had seen two necessary elements - a non-armed alternative way to seek justice, and an effort to bring about a peace settlement. The party had gone before the electorate on this basis, and had attracted a degree of support for it. In August 1994 the IRA had said it was prepared to facilitate a negotiation process, on the basis of the argument that there was another way to justice, and there would be real negotiations. It had taken a long time, and there had been many ups and downs.

6. Sinn Féin said that the people believed it was a peace process. Lives were still being lost, but in much smaller numbers than before. If Alliance's criteria had been adopted in South Africa or the Middle East, then for example Mandela and De Clerk would never have negotiated. In fact, more people had died during the negotiation phase there than before. Alliance's analysis was totally flawed. The real question was whether the parties involved, parties and leaders with admittedly imperfect pasts, were doing their best to bring about an inclusive process that could bring peace. If instead we applied the standards set by Alliance, the process would be an endless series of indictments. Sinn Fein noted that Alliance had gone to great efforts to establish the facts about the killings from the RUC. When the Chief Constable had said in May 1997 that all of the elements of the CLMC had broken their ceasefires, did Alliance go to him then to establish the facts? Why had it made no indictments? Alliance said there had been insufficient evidence then to bring an indictment against any party. Sinn Féin said it had been judged for three days on foot of a British Government indictment, but had seen no

evidence whatsoever. People were asking was the party to be thrown out of the talks on the word of a securicrat?

7. Sinn Féin said that an awful lot of people had been killed since May 1997. On each of these occasions, had Alliance asked the Chief Constable who was responsible? There were mind boggling double standards being shown in this process about the value of human life. There was a belief in the catholic community that a catholic life was not worth anything, and that unionist politicians who were vociferous in defence of their own were silent when catholics were killed. Sinn Féin said a bigger question than the reaction of Alliance and the UUP to the killings of catholics was the reaction of the British Government and the RUC. In recent months there had been people killed in the unionist community, but there had been droves of people killed in the nationalist community. No-one should underestimate the message that rings out when within hours of these two killings the newspapers had stories inspired by the RUC saying the IRA was involved. The SDLP and others had asked the British Government to explain its knowledge of the killings of catholics, but had received no satisfactory answer. When Eddie Treanor was killed at the beginning of January, the Irish News could report the next day that it was the work of the UFF, which set alarm bells ringing in the nationalist community, but nothing was heard from the Government or the RUC about who was responsible. Did the Irish News have better detectives than the RUC? When did the RUC know who killed him and when did they tell the Secretary of State? Why was there no attempt to indict the UDP? In their judgement on the UDP in February the two Governments had said the matter arose "in the light of the UFF statement", not on the basis of a securicrat

assessment. The death of Eddie Treanor sent a strong message to the nationalist community about the double standards of the British Government and the RUC on the killing of catholics. Sinn Féin said that great damage was being done by the British Government refusing to face up to the mess in its own security apparatus. Who was governing? Who was in charge? Was the Chief Constable out of control? How many more internal documents were going to be leaked to people opposed to the peace process? The party said it would like answers to these questions before the discussion ended. Sinn Féin said it believed there would have been no indictment against the UDP without the UFF statement. The party concluding again by asking for information about the killings of Eddie Treanor, and Seamus Dillon, and others.

8. The SDLP said the last three days of mutual recrimination had been exceptionally frustrating. It was a good job the people were not able to look in. We had been sent here to try and reach agreement. In moving towards that, parties here had shown courage. The party appealed to everyone to go back to working to ensure that we had inclusive talks in a peaceful atmosphere. The Governments should go away and take their decision, based on the key criteria outlined earlier. The UUP wished to make clear that the party condemned all murders and would continue to do so. When suspicion had arisen in January that some of the murders might be associated with a party at the talks, the UUP had asked on 19 January for a statement from the authorities. On 22 January the Chief Constable had delivered his assessment that the UFF had been involved, and had cited the requests of the UUP and Alliance as factors in the timing of his statement. For

the UUP, the admission by the UFF had helped make the situation clear but had not been a prerequisite.

9. The British Government said it had listened carefully to the points made in the debate.

[Secretary of State's speaking note not available to me]

[conclusion of Plenary being written up by Robert Travers].