

BACKGROUND

We would refer delegations back to all papers which have been submitted by Ulster Unionists during the present Talks Process. Within these we were careful, since we were often challenged on the matter, to identify what Ulster Unionism is and what are the principles which we believe must be followed in relation to the good government of Northern Ireland:-

- 1 Those responsible for the government of Northern Ireland must be the democratic choice of and accountable only to the electorate of Northern Ireland.
- 2 The right of self-determination for the people of Northern Ireland must be inviolate.
- 3 There must be protection for the rights and aspirations of groups and communities within Northern Ireland, in accordance with the principles established by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.
- 4 There must be open and unambiguous acknowledgment of the status of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
- 5 The government and administration of Northern Ireland must be conducted in accordance with the international obligations of the United Kingdom.
- 6 There must be no special arrangements which would derogate from the democratic rights of the people of Northern Ireland.

While Ulster Unionists would have been content to be governed as a properly integrated region of the United Kingdom, with the delegation of appropriate powers to Local government and with primary legislation for Northern Ireland replacing the Orders in Council mechanism, we have faced up to the reality that a significant proportion of the Roman Catholic community in Northern Ireland may aspire to a United Ireland.

Hence, we accepted without equivocation, the three main demands of the SDLP that there should be put in place a means whereby:-

- a Minority rights would be guaranteed.
- b Nationalists would have a meaningful role in the administration of Northern Ireland.
- c There would be a recognition of the desire by the Nationalists community to forge closer and more visible links with the Irish Republic.

We tabled proposals for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland,

proposals for a Northern Ireland Assembly where the SDLP would have a meaningful role and proposals for an Inter-Irish Relations Committee which would represent a formal link between the new Assembly and the Oireachtas.

We expected reciprocation from the Irish Republic's government which had previously articulated a desire to be "generous" to Ulster Unionists if we proved willing to talks with it. Our request to Dublin was to define a means whereby the aggressive and irredentist Articles 2 and 3 in the Irish Constitution would be removed. From the SDLP we asked for a de facto commitment to a Northern Ireland where all constitutional parties would be able to play a meaningful role.

Neither our concessions nor our requests have, to date, brought a single positive response. Is the SDLP prepared to squander an opportunity to participate in cross community/cross frontier structures and does the Irish Government, pre-occupied with its own internal problems, intend to remain totally intransigent on all issues?

CLARIFICATION

- 1 It was frequently conveyed to Ulster Unionists that the Irish Republic's delegation believed our negotiating team, "might not have the confidence and support of the party Leader and would be unable to deliver on any commitments given".

Despite the implied insult to the integrity of Ulster Unionists and to their leader, Jim Molyneaux, the latter accompanied Ken Maginnis to a meeting with the Irish Republic's Ministers in order to reassure them on the issue. But the gesture proved futile, producing no change in attitude or response!

- 2 The offer by Ulster Unionist to agree to set up and participate in an Inter-Irish Relations Committee (within the framework of a new relationship covering the entire British Isles) comprising members from both the Oireachtas and a new Northern Ireland Assembly has been ignored.

The Inter Irish Relations Committee would be able:-

- i To facilitate a new understanding which will help to develop greater trust and co-operation, between Unionists and Nationalists, based on mutual respect, and the development of a practical basis on which the two political entities in Ireland can implement agreed joint or complementary action on issues of common interest.
- ii To initiate studies on matters of mutual interest and benefit to the peoples of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic and on the peaceful resolution of matters which

continue to cause misunderstanding between Nationalists and Unionists.

- iii To consult with heads of departments/ministers and their officials on matters relating to areas of mutual interest including the implementation of any working arrangements.

Our proposals mean that, on the issue of executive co-operation, where matters of mutual benefit and/or common interest arose or where problems occurred, the appropriate heads of departments/ministers would meet as facilitated by the Inter-Irish Relations Committee, with officials from the bureau and their own officials in attendance.

We envisage three methods whereby decisions could be arrived at:-

- a Where the Northern Ireland Assembly defines an area of mutual interest, or an area of self-interest where the Republic may have a co-operative role to play, it may direct the head of department to explore the issues with his southern counterpart and to proceed to make an arrangement within parameters which it will define.
- b Where a head of department or his southern counterpart initiates talks on a matter of mutual interest, or a matter of self-interests to either party where the other may have a co-operative role to play, they may bring to their respective assemblies for approval any proposed arrangement on which they are in agreement.
- c Where, in a or b above, it requires new legislation to be brought forward, the issue would be referred back to each assembly for further and full consideration.

We also recognised that it may be necessary to consider whether mutual interest requires the delegation of executive authority to an autonomous agency, on a basis similar to the Foyle Fisheries Commission. We could foresee merit in a similar approach on various issues.

Our proposals are based on what we believed to be practical and workable arrangements. Explicit details on the membership and size of the Inter-Irish Relation Committee cannot be given in the absence of SDLP agreement on Strand 1 proposals.

AN AGREEMENT

Ulster Unionists believe that there is a basis for, at least, an interim agreement. No one can be ~~bound~~ at this stage but, if delegations are serious in their desire to negotiate, then we believe that convergence is possible and vital, and that we have made our contribution.

Only when every detail is complete, with the draft legislation

drawn up, can a final decision be taken. The rule that, "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed" still applies.

The purpose of an interim agreement will be to create confidence in the democratic process, and to unite the law-abiding people of Northern Ireland, and the two sovereign Government, in such a compact as will thwart those evil elements within our community who are wedded to political violence and who will be the principal and immediate beneficiaries of failure to agree.

The Ulster Unionist Party believes that an interim agreement should provide for the commissioning of the necessary work by officials, with guidance from the participating delegations, to adapt to a workable and practical form these proposals and the Strand 1 proposals of 10 June 1992.

It is clear that there are various other areas of concern to all delegations which, in an ideal world, should be addressed at this stage. However, the reality is that such matters will only be successfully resolved when a greater degree of trust and cohesion has been attained as a result of working together.

THE INTER-GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE

Ulster Unionist believe that, on the basis of what is outlined above, the Inter-governmental Conference should meet as soon as possible after any interim agreement is entered into, in order to tidy up outstanding business and to begin discussions on the winding up of its affairs, preliminary to its replacement by the Council of the British Isles which we have proposed in Strand 3.

The communique following such a meeting would be expected to include a declaration of acceptance of the interim position, and arrangements for referenda necessary to remove Articles 2 and 3 and to put any final agreement to the electorate in Northern Ireland.

CONCLUSION

Ulster Unionists have placed their proposals on the table in good faith and in the interests of the entire Northern Ireland community. We will be totally committed to making them work and in playing our full part in creating a fair and equitable society in Northern Ireland which can live in amity with its neighbours.

We look to others to reciprocate.