



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/99/24

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.



②
③
④
25

PSM, PSMOS, P556.
S/S GALLAGHER, COUNSELLOR
A-I, MESSRS TEAHON,
MANERGH, DALTON, AMBS
LONDON, WASH, JOINT SEC
BELFAST. SECTION.

Ulster Unionist Party

Conference 1997

*Saturday 25 October 1997
Slieve Donard Hotel, Newcastle*

*Ms. McLaughlin
panel on to
the Taoiseach
30.10.97*

Speech by David Trimble MP

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR
REFERENCE TO CONTENT
BEFORE 12:00 noon 25 OCTOBER 1997**

ULSTER'S VOICE - ULSTER'S FUTURE

It is great to see so many people here today. Indeed, I am told that our annual conference is now becoming so popular that even the Leaders of other Unionist Parties want to come along and join in!

The last time I addressed you, we were looking forward to the May Elections and the possibility of taking new seats.

Well, we fought two very hard elections and as a united Party we retained, as I knew we would, our position as by far the largest Party in Northern Ireland.

So the first thing I must do is to thank all those involved in our successes in both the General and Local elections.

I want to single out the West Tyrone Association.

Its success in securing the new eighteenth constituency seat for Willie Thompson was outstanding.

I also want to mention our many new councillors, especially the younger councillors both male and female. As in last year's Forum Elections, we can see that the future of Unionism is bright. The Party is renewing itself.

I am delighted to see the broad range of good, able and determined young men and women coming up. Indeed, some are already on the platform, more will be in the future.

This evolution of our Party is natural, it is healthy, it is promising, and we should welcome it and take strength from it. We must also evolve in our methods, particularly in campaigning, for the elections revealed some weakness. We need to have a better picture of our electorate so that we can target our electioneering effectively. We also need to communicate better with our members.

It is now only five months since the Election but the pace of political developments has been swift. The pressures brought to bear on this Party have been great - but we have not flinched. It is no surprise that the Labour team in Stormont is pursuing a more pro-nationalist line, given some of the political baggage left over from the McNamara era.

But, in recent years the reforms and re-shuffles made by Tony Blair have gone some way to addressing this. But not far enough, to guarantee equality of treatment to the Unionist community.

Nevertheless, we have adapted to the changing political landscape and, in the circumstances, adapted well.

The arrival of the new government has had both positive and negative implications for Unionists.

An encouraging speech at Balmoral in May, in which the Prime Minister said he valued the Union and Northern Ireland's place within it, was followed by the government changing its position on terrorist disarmament and the terms of entry for Sinn Fein to the Talks process.

Now, these have always been matters uniquely for the government. We have never had the power to either make or prevent them happening. What we fought to achieve right through from October last year until July of this year, was agreement with the SDLP on disarmament. They refused to agree anything with us which would commit IRA/Sinn Fein to disarm before they were allowed to enter the Talks. Consequently when the choreographed ceasefire was called on July 20, the political landscape changed once again and we were faced with a major decision.

As you know, the DUP and UK Unionists immediately left the process. We could have done the same. We could have taken the simple, easy option. We could, perhaps, have collapsed the Talks by leaving.

I know that all of you like me, were faced with a difficult decision.

For many of us our hearts led one way and our heads the other.

It is the hallmark of this Party that it does not take the easy option. It never has, and never will, shirk its responsibility to the pro-union people of Northern Ireland, who have suffered so much. As a Party we must adapt, we must fight with our heads and with our mandate. The risks are high, but our cause and our objectives are greater.

Should this process collapse, it will in all likelihood be replaced by another. Does anyone really think that a new process, made necessary by unionist boycotts will be any more favourable to unionists?

The crucial reason for Unionists staying in these Talks is that nothing can come out of them without our consent. This veto means that everything must pass through the Ulster Unionist Party Talks team before it can go to the people in a referendum.

As Jeffrey Donaldson pointed out, Gerry Adams said, before the IRA ceasefire, that if there was another ceasefire, Unionists would leave the Talks because of Sinn Fein.

They, along with the SDLP, the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Office expected us to leave. They wanted us to leave.

The final remaining obstacle in their way was the Ulster Unionist Party - was our veto over anything within the Talks. They are desperate to find a way around that veto and the collapse of this process would give them the opportunity.

Then it would be back to passing bits of paper between Dublin, Maryfield and Stormont, without Unionists ever setting eyes on them until they are presented to us like the Anglo-Irish Agreement, like the Framework document. That process is much more appealing to the backroom dealers in the SDLP, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the NIO and Sinn Fein.

We must have a veto and the process of negotiation must be transparent. Despite its flaws, this process provides that.

Those who thought they could portray Republican terrorists as reasonable and constructive, and unionists as irrational and negative, have been confounded.

We can be just as unpredictable and just as hardline as our opponents.

The Ulster Unionist people who elected us last year, did so because they wanted us to negotiate a democratic settlement with constitutional nationalists, so that democratic and accountable structures of government could be returned to Northern Ireland and so that the damage done to the Union by direct rule and the Diktat could be repaired.

May I bring you up to speed on events this past week, when we submitted our papers on Constitutional issues on all the Strands, but perhaps most significantly, we presented our perspective on Strand Two and Three constitutional issues - Let me read it to you.

"The British Isles is divided into two sovereign states, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on the one hand and the Republic of Ireland, on the other. In international law there are and ought to be no constitutional issues between these two states.

In so far as it does not already do so, the law and practice of each state should conform with the above statement."

That is our view of constitutional issues in these Strands. And if the Irish Government don't like that, then too bad. If they really think they have an imperative claim on Northern Ireland, then they can jolly well take it to an International Court of Law!

You know, as well as I do, that the chances of them doing that are non-existent - especially as they know that their claim is contrary to the principles of International Law in the first place!

Now there have been those of late who have been critical of our efforts at Stormont and I want to deal with some of them.

There are those who say we are going to renegotiate the Union.

Let me say this -

We are not going to renegotiate the Union. We have no mandate to do so. That is a matter subject, under law, to the inviolable right of the greater number of the people living in Northern Ireland to determine their constitutional destiny.

It is not something for the Ulster Unionist Party, or any other party to negotiate.

Some have alleged that we are negotiating with Sinn Fein. We are not, neither are we fraternising with them in any way.

As a minority Party on the nationalist side, their agreement is not required under the rules of the Talks, for anything. They of course try to pretend otherwise in their posturing and playacting to the press: but in reality - and they know it - they are only bit players in this process.

This is the real world Mr Adams. I'm not surprised you don't recognise it.

And there are others who have accused our Talks Team of being 'rubber men', of being 'toy town politicians'.

I did not lead this Party into these Talks to face the full range of nationalist parties with a weak negotiating team.

There are some veterans from 1992, and there are new faces, and we have new, clear, hard-edged views.

I retain overall control of the operation. Reg Empey leads a strong Strand One team with Dermot Nesbitt, David Brewster and Peter King.

On Strands Two and Three, John Taylor leads another strong team, with Jeffrey Donaldson, David Campbell, Antony Alcock and Peter Weir.

In the Liaison committees dealing with confidence building measures and disarmament, where much of the actual confrontation with Sinn Fein takes place, Ken Maginnis is supported by Dermot Nesbitt and Antony Alcock.

Behind them is an extensive support and research team.

I pay tribute today to these people, some of whom have survived IRA attempts to kill them. They are no softies. I reject the scurrilous allegations made against them.

I would also like to pay tribute to the members of the Ulster Unionist Forum Party who have been working so hard over the past year to debate, research and assess issues of concern within Northern Ireland.

Unfortunately however, nationalists and in particular the SDLP, have abandoned their responsibility to their electorate and Northern Ireland as a whole, by not participating in the Forum. Their actions are regrettable and reprehensible.

Mr Hume is always so keen to highlight the need for inclusive dialogue - well what is the problem John? What are you achieving by avoiding weekly public discussions with your Unionist neighbours?

If you have confidence in your arguments as we have - then stand on your own feet, engage us, for all to see. Let's see how serious you really are about dialogue.

I have always been of the view that this must not be a secret process. The public must be involved.

I am glad that after a year's obstruction from various quarters we are starting to use the Forum as the means by which the public can make an input.

We found that the party's consultation exercise with groups outside the party was extremely well received. Those same groups will, I hope, now be consulted about the substance of the talks through the hearings that will be held by the Political Affairs Committee of the Forum.

I commend the Ulster Unionist Forum members who have worked tirelessly to draw up reports on Agriculture, Health, Education, Public Order and now Political Affairs. Their sterling efforts have not received the credit in the media they deserve - and quite frankly the blame lies at the door of the SDLP.

We must also remember the Westminster team. The six MPs, not directly involved in the Talks will, with our group in the Lords, have to carry the burden in London, in a heavy session with Bills on Parades, Emergency Provisions and the Police in addition to all the matters we call normal politics.

If I could now turn to the issue of confidence building measures taken by Government recently. Since taking office in May, Government has bent over backwards to appease and pander to Sinn Fein/IRA.

I will deal with some of these.

The call for action on Bloody Sunday has caused great concern - not because the events of that day were not tragic - they were; but because scores of terrorist atrocities have been carried out by the IRA against our community and who seeks inquiries into them?

Has there been a public inquiry into the 67 unsolved sectarian and terrorist murders in County Fermanagh? Has there been, an apology, let alone an inquiry into Enniskillen, La Mon or Bloody Friday.

Yes Gerry Adams, if there was justice about Bloody Friday, where would you be?

We have told the Prime Minister that any inquiry into Bloody Sunday must be met with an inquiry into the actions of Fianna Fail and the Irish Government in 1970.

We recall the farcical trial of the three Cabinet Ministers. When one, Charles Haughey, successfully defended himself on the basis that he did import guns for the Provos, but the operation was approved Irish government policy. We know of the deal that was done. If the Provisional IRA broke away from the Marxist Officials, respected the institutions in the South, they were promised support in their sectarian onslaught on the Unionist community.

If the Irish Government wants to start a witch-hunt against some squaddies trying to do their duty in difficult circumstances, then they had better be prepared to account for their support for the IRA in the past.

The long threatened legislation on parades has been published. This summer the point was made to government by the Loyal Orders that the proposals were one-sided - aimed at expressions of unionist identity and ignoring offensive expressions of nationalist identity. The Secretary of State promised that traditions would be respected, and that balance would be restored by giving the Commission a wider remit to include other expressions of identity apart from parades.

What happens. There is a reference to traditionality and that is a plus. But we do not know how the Parades Commission will interpret it. But the wider remit - to look at other expressions of identity is put on the long finger.

In July I asked Government for implementation of the assurances on parades given to the Loyal Orders. In September we received a letter that the Bill "will implement the approach the Secretary of State has explained to the Loyal Orders and others."

Note: "will implement" can only mean this year, not next year, sometime or never.

Mo - you have got to keep your promises!

I know you are under pressure from republicans north and south of the border. But they want to cause trouble not prevent it.

I know that some members of your Parades Commission are threatening to resign. But frankly they are no loss.

Remember Mo, who delivered the good outcome this summer? It is they who have the good of the whole community at heart.

They should be your priority.

Sadly, but unsurprisingly, the NIO seems unable to cope with the notion of being fair to Unionists. We have not been asking for special treatment.

We are simply asking for fair play and equal consideration.

The Government owes the decent law-abiding people of Ulster a debt. They have withstood the IRA onslaught for 30 years - buried their dead and picked up the pieces of their lives on every occasion, hard as it has been. When times were desperate, it was this Party that encouraged our young people not to take the law into their own hands, but to join the security forces to defend the rights of all to live free from terrorism.

And yet that seems taken for granted.

Well, we are in the Talks to demand that Unionist rights be recognised and respected. We demand that Government act to build confidence in the Unionist Community.

But you know, whatever the difficulties, we should not lack confidence.

We will continue to address the problems, but there are also opportunities and we must also work to make the most of them.

There is much in the political development of the United Kingdom and Europe for us to welcome at the moment.

We have a government and a Prime Minister committed to constitutional reform. The first tentative steps in Scotland and Wales have been completed.

Let me make it clear at the outset, I welcome the broad outline of these plans.

The commitment to devolution and decentralisation, a bill of rights, and greater openness with a Freedom of Information Act are good. But, the reform of the House of Lords, is questionable - after all, if it ain't broke, don't fix it!

We in the Ulster Unionist Party have long been in favour of sensible devolution. We are looking with interest at the proposals for Wales and Scotland. They create space for a new Northern Ireland assembly. Ulster could fit into a pattern.

Funnily enough the Tories prepared the way. They changed local government in Wales and Scotland into a single tier of district councils. In future now Wales and Scotland will have two tiers of local administration - the district councils and the regional Parliament or assembly.

Ulster could be the same. We could have district councils with more powers, just like the councils in Wales and Scotland alongside a regional Assembly.

We should rethink our plans in the light of the Welsh and Scottish models. Their size and voting systems will be on a different basis to our previous suggestions. But we should look at those matters again. We should also look at the range of matters proposed to be devolved in Scotland and Wales. There is guidance there for us.

One of our ideas we must keep is proportionality. Having the same broad approach does not mean absolute uniformity.

There will need to be guarantees of fairness. But the need applies equally to Wales and Scotland. Were there ever in Ulster, sectarian abuses of power like that at Monklands in Scotland? And of course the rights of British citizens cannot vary as they move from one part of the Kingdom to another. The United Kingdom is bound in international law to treat all its citizens equally.

That lesson is being applied in the adoption of the Human Rights Convention - policy of this Party for more than twenty years. Developments in Europe, in terms of the safeguarding of rights under international law, are also encouraging for Unionists.

Indeed two of our negotiators Dermot Nesbitt and Professor Anthony Alcock are at a conference in central Europe this weekend on the problems of minority rights in Europe. Similar situations in

Europe expose the flawed arguments of even the so-called post-nationalist Europeans in the SDLP. These European examples actually strengthen the Unionist case.

This is an exciting time for Unionists.

Constitutional change in the United Kingdom and Europe is to our benefit. Treaties recognising territorial boundaries and minority rights within them, between the Hungary and Romania, in South Tirol, are all working well. International events are moving in our favour.

That leaves the replacement of the Anglo-Irish Agreement by a broader based agreement that deals with the totality of relationships within these islands. The most contentious of these relationships is that between Belfast and Dublin. But in essence it is quite simple.

If you are dealing with practical co-operation on pragmatic grounds there is no problem. There never has been.

Indeed the difficulties usually come from the south - as evidenced by Dublin renegeing on the tourist logo!

But, and this is the crucial point, an elaborate structure is not needed for practical matters.

The problem is not practicalities. The problem is that northern Nationalists want something that validates their sense of their identity. It is a psychological problem.

That question of feeling is not going to be solved by piling on more and more elaborate structures for practical issues. Nor indeed can we design the detail of the solution for it is not our feelings that are at stake.

We need nationalists to tell us, in realistic terms, what would meet their need. And we will try sympathetically to meet them.

But let there be no doubt, we will not agree anything that undermines the rights of the people of Northern Ireland, still less any Trojan horse that would be, in the fateful words of Hugh Logue in 1974, a vehicle that will trundle us into a united Ireland.

During our consultation exercise, when speaking to some influential Catholics, the usual question came up, "what will you offer nationalists." A colleague began to talk of proportionality and so on, when I interrupted.

I said, "there are a lot of institutional matters, but the most important thing is this - a hand held out, an invitation to join with us in building a better future for us all here in Northern Ireland."

Our strategy is straightforward.

We have a vision for Northern Ireland within the Union.

We know what is required and we are determined to realise that vision. We are at crucial point in the development of our country and we can change things for the better - but we must pull all our people together, yes all our people together, to achieve it.

As in any such time of change and reform, there is risk. But we know what needs to be done and we are working towards it.

There are testing times ahead. But we are well used to them.

There will be many challenges to face in the months ahead. But those challenges are just as great, if not greater, for our opponents.

They will have to face reality sooner or later.

Don't let anyone tell you Unionism is losing ground. It is strong, it is vibrant, it is positive, it is confident. Its message transcends nationality and religion. By its very nature it is inclusive and by its very application it seeks to guarantee fairness to all.

Be proud of it. Be proud to be a part of it.

I know as a Party and as a People, we have suffered too much to give up fighting now for what we believe in.

Colleagues go from here today determined, firm in your convictions and resolute in your commitment to the Union and each other.

I said to you in March that together we could win more seats in the election. We did.

That together we were still the bastion of Unionism that nationalism could not divide nor undermine. We are.

That together, united, strong, we must build our future.

Together, we are doing just that.