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UNITED KINGDOM UNIONIST - NORTH DOWN



11 FEBRUARY 1997

HOUSE OF COMMONS
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PRESS RELEASE ON BEHALF OF THE UK UNIONIST PARTY

The Stormont Talks ceased to exist in any meaningful sense prior to Christmas 1996. By that time, it had become clear that there was no possibility of agreement being reached on the requirement for paramilitary organisations to commence decommissioning prior to their front parties being permitted to enter substantive negotiations. Since that time, the parties at the Talks have simply been marking time and performing no useful function.

The impending General Election in the United Kingdom will, doubtless, be used as an excuse for the suspension of the Talks which will, almost certainly, move from that condition to one of termination. If a New Labour government has any political wit, it will not adopt a policy for Northern Ireland which is rapidly becoming a smoking bomb and which the Tories hope will explode in someone else's hands.

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The proper course is for everyone concerned to draw a line under this wrongly named and totally ill-fated process and commence afresh.

The UK Unionist Party position on the process has been consistent throughout. The leader of the Party has been heavily critical of the process from its inception in the Downing Street Declaration which the Ulster Unionists under James Molyneaux endorsed, a position which Mr. David Trimble, the current leader has recently confirmed.

The central core of the entire strategy has always been the contents of the Framework Documents which offered Irish unity by instalments to the IRA as the price of a cease fire. To support the Talks continuing with or without Sinn Fein, is to accept that any accommodation within this format will be fatal for the future of the Union. The UK Unionist Party unequivocally reiterates its election manifesto that it will not negotiate on the Union and it will not accept any cross border institutions which offer any prospect of executive power over Northern Ireland's internal affairs to the Republic of Ireland.

The present leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party has equivocated on both of these issues and many pro-Union people feel that such leadership cannot be trusted. Both Mr. Trimble and Mr. Taylor apparently wish the present Talks to continue after the election but they refuse to spell out clearly to the people before the election what exactly they intend to do after the election has taken place. Despite their brave words, their policies appear to be those of the frightened and the defeated.

According to an editorial in the *Sunday Telegraph* of 9 February 1997, the Ulster Unionist leadership believes that some form of "constitutional deal in Northern Ireland is inevitable". They would prefer to achieve a settlement now with "moderate nationalists through debate" rather than have a change forced upon them later by British and Irish officials or by IRA violence.

If the above is their policy then they must tell the pro-Union people before the election what sort of constitutional deal they have in mind and explain to the electorate why they have so little confidence in their own

ability and in the courage of their electorate as to believe that something worse can be forced upon them either by the Northern Ireland Office or the IRA.

The UK Unionist Party believes that, if the pro-Union people are given strong leadership which is, nevertheless, fair and just to all sections of the community and which observes the principles of democracy, Northern Ireland can and will remain firmly within the Union upon conditions that will see the prosperity of the entire community.

F.A.O.

MARTINA PIROT.

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