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**PUP DELEGATION SPEAKING AFTER LEAVING HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE MEETING
WITH DAVID ANDREWS - 7 JANUARY 1997**

DAVID ERVINE

I think if I just tell you what happened as opposed to taking a series of questions because it is very simple. We laid in front of the Irish Government our cause for disquiet. I think they listened intently. There were elements of the meeting which I would describe as good and positive and those issues I will not deliberate upon. I think we now need to go and talk to our own people and I imagine given that the Irish Government cannot alone solve our problems that they now have people to talk to as well.

MEDIA

What recommendation will you be giving to your party executive?

DAVID ERVINE

I think that we will keep that between ourselves and our party executive.

MEDIA

Are you happier emerging than when you were going in?

DAVID ERVINE

I don't think I could describe it as being happier. I think that there were elements of positivity within that meeting that would almost suggest that there were elements of negativity within that meeting. I think we will leave it at that. I think there is more work to be done, that the Irish Government and the British Government are now fully aware, face to face, in private circumstances exactly the disquiet that the Progressive Unionist Party have. Nobody can be under any illusions there can be nobody can put there spins upon it, it has been clearly stated.

MEDIA

Do you feel though that you have got enough from this particular administration that if it is matched on the British side to bring you into the administration to bring you into the talks process on Monday?

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DAVID ERVINE

Well I think we will hardly balance that between the two Governments. we will wait and see what the next couple of days bring.

MEDIA

But did you get enough here to build upon, if the British reciprocate that you could be in there next week?

DAVID ERVINE

To answer that question would be to be pejorative in one way or the another. I am not prepared to do that. I am saying to you clearly that there are elements of positivity in this meeting but the Irish Government alone cannot solve our problems and I think now is the question for both Governments.

MEDIA

What were the negatives? Positivity yes, what were the negatives?

DAVID ERVINE

I am not prepared to deliberate.

MEDIA

Has the situation been clarified about the confidence-building liaison committee and its role in the future?

BILLY HUTCHINSON

I think you should ask the Irish Government that?

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DAVID ERVINE

I think they are coming out behind us and certainly there was a lot of debate around that. I will not breach confidentiality it is something that we won't do, that we don't do. We have had a decent conversation with two Governments where they are left under no illusions about the genuine and honourable position that we have. They now have the difficulty I think of deliberating among themselves and finding out whether or not they can move to what is an honourable position.

MEDIA

Why do you say difficulties though David?

DAVID ERVINE

We are not the only participants in the talks. I should have thought it was very clear.

MEDIA

Who's fault was it?

DAVID ERVINE

The question would be why did we ever have confidence-building measures housed outside the process in the first place. If some participants want them inside it would seem that because they are outside some participants wanted them on the outside and that is why I say the two Governments now must deliberate on what they can do to deal with, what we believe a wholly honourable position by the Progressive Unionist Party.

MEDIA

Are you putting back the meeting of your executives to hear from the two Governments?

DAVID ERVINE

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Our executive meeting hasn't been called, it is supposed to be on Monday night but it will have to be earlier than that won't it?

MEDIA

Is it not tonight?

DAVID ERVINE

No it is not tonight. The executive committee meeting has not been given a time but undoubtedly we will return to our offices and deliberate over what has happened today. We will have to make a designated time for that executive meeting.

MEDIA

Are the loyalist ceasefires more solid now as a result of the meeting?

DAVID ERVINE

I am deeply worried by that question and I don't make any slight on you for asking it, because a lot of people have been suggesting that what we are saying is related to the ceasefires. And I emphasise to you that what we have been saying two weeks ago, before the current brutality began I say clearly had nothing at all to do with threatening of ceasefires. It is about the difficulties that we have about a process that is not showing the people of Northern Ireland that it can deliver. And there are many reasons for that and one of them and we believe one of the core ones is that confidence-building measures are not being housed within the process.

MEDIA

In a sense do you want to halt, if you are not getting a reciprocal corresponding treatment in terms of prisoners and on the process generally do you want a halt from the Irish Government or halting from the Irish Government and the British Government in terms of their dealings with Republican prisoners, repatriation, transfer all of that?

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DAVID ERVINE

We don't believe that confidence-building measures is simply about prisoners. What we do believe in a divided society the nature of which is zero summed to give to one is felt or perceived to be a denial to the other and I think that if you treat people equally by the amount you give or about the amount you don't give.

MEDIA

Billy can I ask you there's been a question of disagreement between yourself and David?

BILLY HUTCHINSON

Just to start there is no disagreement with me and David. David and myself have got exactly the same position. This is about process not about release of prisoners, it is about process. We are treated as bit players and I think that after the executive taking the decision we will produce evidence which shows that we were treated as bit players and we will show that people have told lies to us during this process.

MEDIA

Are you more confident that you will not be treated as bit players after today's meeting?

BILLY HUTCHINSON

Well what I will say to you is my position has not changed after the meeting with both Governments. My position is exactly the same. I will be lobbying for us not to be there on Monday. But what I would say is it is not the question of walking away from the talks, it is the question of getting the two Governments to take responsibility and make sure that all the confidence-building measures are housed within the talks and that people can't run crying either to the Taoiseach in the Republic or to a British Prime Minister.

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MEDIA

Do you anticipate any further meetings with the British Government today or tomorrow?

BILLY HUTCHINSON

I don't anticipate anything else. I mean I think that unless there is a change by both Governments in the 11th hour to suggest that we should come back into the talks on Monday then I will start arguing for to be back in. But what I am saying here now is that this is not connected to the ceasefires, it is not connected to concessions it is one where we think it is a point of principle here and that if people are going to be elected to a talks process then all the parties should have equal say. It is not just about the Progressive Unionist Party, it is about all other parties that don't have an equal say as well.

MEDIA

You didn't get any reassurances?

BILLY HUTCHINSON

I didn't say I didn't get satisfaction. I didn't say that I didn't get reassurances. What I want to see is action and we can't see that action until later this week. Obviously the SOS is meeting with the UDP today and we will have to hear what she has to say between today and tomorrow.

**DAVID ANDREWS INTERVIEWED AT HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE AFTER MEETING
WITH PUP DELEGATION - 7 JANUARY 1998**

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DAVID ANDREWS

Well if I could just very briefly in advance of a few questions, I think that we had a very useful meeting. It was good to talk face to face after so much debate in the media. We had a friendly discussion. I think it could be described as warm, but it was a very frank discussion. Plenty of straight talking as always one expects with the PUP. I think one of the main features of what came out of the hour and a half meeting was the genuine disquiet in the community which the PUP represents. It left it in no doubt about that but that there is a disquiet within their community. They made a point which I agree with, and another of their concerns is that the integrity of the talks process has been undermined by the fact that too much is happening outside the process itself and too little inside it. As I say I am strongly sympathetic to that position for to make a breakthrough in the negotiations over the next few weeks all participants in the talks will have to give their focus exclusively to the talks. So I restated to them the commitment of my Government to the negotiations and undertook to seek to ensure that all parties are treated as equal participants in the talks. I think it is fair to say that we have come through a rather rocky patch over the last three weeks and the best way to restore confidence is to make early progress in the talks. I spoke to your journalist colleagues at Iveagh House at lunchtime yesterday and I believe, I said to them that what we want to do now is get away from the generalities and get down to the specifics to accelerate the talks in the time that is left to us. I believe that there is a will. I believe that there is a method. I believe that there is a firm intention on the part of all participants to get down to the business of specifics. I appealed to the PUP in my strongest possible but civil courteous manner to stay within the talks. They made valid points, valid points were put to me. The PUP have an important role to play in these negotiations and I genuinely mean this I think they have a very important role to play in the negotiations and I do hope that after consultations with those people with whom they consult that they will be in the talks on Monday next and that they will be in Castle Buildings. So basically that is it and just to conclude as I say in my opening statement by saying that I was glad to come to this part of Belfast to meet with the PUP. I felt no matter where the meeting was asked to be held that I would be there I think it is an indication of my willingness to listen to be open and to be transparent, not only with the PUP but other partners within the talks process.

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MEDIA

Mr Hutchinson said that he'd had enough of words and wanted action. Were you able to assure him that action would be forthcoming?

DAVID ANDREWS

Yes well Mr Hutchinson made an interesting intervention which I took on board and he and his other colleagues made a number of points and my immediate action arising out of this particular meeting would be to make contact with the SoS for Northern Ireland to progress what we have heard within the talks here this morning.

MEDIA

Mr Andrews would you accept that you were wrong in terms of your administration, not to inform the confidence building committee within the talks process of your Government's intention to release 9 IRA prisoners within 24 hour? Was that an omission on your part?

DAVID ANDREWS

You see I would have to remind you that at the end of November last we submitted a plan of campaign, a document setting out our position in relation to the release of prisoners, the transfer of prisoners. And we set out from the beginning of the ceasefire the position on that regard. So there was no doubt in anybody's mind where we stood and I think it is fair to say that the PUP acknowledged that.

MEDIA

But was it discourteous given that you are supposed to be working collectively as teams, was it discourteous not to inform them at that particular meeting given the sensitivity of Northern Ireland at that point in time?

DAVID ANDREWS

Well of course I am very well aware of the sensitivities of the north of Ireland but as I say these are matters that are going to be dealt within and included within the peace process itself.

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MEDIA

... if there were further releases to be made, would you in future tell the confidence building committee of your intention to do that and say we are going to do that tomorrow, next week or whatever time?

DAVID ANDREWS

Well as a matter of policy of course it will be discussed within the confidence building committee but operationally it will be entirely a matter for Governments.

MEDIA

Minister were there any particular proposals or suggestions that you made during discussions to ease the tensions that the PUP obviously feel?

DAVID ANDREWS

Well I am not certain what the leader of the PUP said to you here and I don't want to be disclosing as it were every piece of conversation that took place to the advantage or disadvantage of what we seek to achieve, namely the return of the PUP to the talks on Monday next.

MEDIA

But do you think you were able to mollify some of their fears?

DAVID ANDREWS

I most certainly hope so. As I say I think it was good meeting. I understand that David Ervine himself has acknowledged that it was a good meeting, that it was a helpful meeting and I would just like to add the word hopeful.

MEDIA

There is some suggestion that both Governments will push the talks on now, even to try and get some kind of lead into an agreement as early as March is that possible?

DAVID ANDREWS

I am not certain if it is possible, but I think it is indicative of the thinking of the Governments and other partners within the talks that there is a need now for urgency in the light of what has happened over the last number of weeks when vacuums are created.

MEDIA

When are you meeting Dr Mowlam again?

DAVID ANDREWS

I haven't as I say made contact, it will be a matter of convenience between Dr Mowlam's timetable and my own. But will be urgent. I would make a contact with her either personally or by telephone. I have an awful lot of meetings today, you will find out in time, I am not being disrespectful or rude.