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# ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY

## PRESS RELEASE

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EMBARGO 8 pm 22 September 1995

DAVID TRIMBLE MP

Addressing a reception to mark the 90th anniversary of the Ulster Unionist Council

Today Sinn Fein/IRA say that the cease-fire is dead if there is an insistence on decommissioning. But there has always been such an insistence. On 15 December 1993 the very day the Declaration was published, it was said at the press conference that

"We are talking about a permanent cessation of violence, and we are talking about a handing up of arms ..."

Who said it? A Mr Dick Spring. Here is another quote from the same source on June 1, 1994:

"There is little point in attempting to bring people into political dialogue on the basis of giving it a try and if it does not work returning to the bomb and the bullet. There can be no participation by Sinn Fein-IRA in political discussions ... until they have made a firm commitment that violence has ended."

And just to vary the source, here is John Major in Belfast on 16 September 1994, saying that the Government cannot sit down at a conference table with Sinn Fein "under even the possibility of a threat".

All these statements stem from the Downing Street Declaration, which in paragraph 10 set out the path by which those hitherto associated with violence could enter the democratic process. It reads

"The British and Irish Governments reiterate that the achievement of peace must involve a permanent end to the use of, or support for paramilitary violence. They confirm that, in these circumstances democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic

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process, are free to participate fully in democratic politics and to join in dialogue in due course between the Governments and the political parties on the way ahead."

It is obvious that this paragraph envisages a sequence.

First there is an end to violence, secondly a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods is established and a willingness to abide by the democratic process is shown. Then and only then can the dialogue be joined.

There has been a major reduction in paramilitary violence which all welcome: but violence is not at an end. Since the cease-fire there have been three murders by the IRA - one has been admitted, two have not. In 1995 alone there have been 312 incidents where missiles have been thrown at police patrols, 293 petrol bomb attacks, both mainly by republicans, 153 paramilitary beatings, two-thirds by republicans and 86 arson attacks on Orange Halls, Churches etc. Earlier this year, after Sinn Fein comments about angry voices and marching feet there were efforts to create serious street disorder. Add the remarkable events at the beginning of this month when the IRA summoned two senior Irish civil servants to West Belfast and told them that if the Irish government agreed to British proposals for an International Decommissioning Commission the cease-fire would be over and there would be "bodies in the street". Unfortunately the Irish government gave way to these threats - a decision with potentially serious implications for the future health of democracy in the Republic of Ireland.

This violence and the threat of greater violence is wholly incompatible with a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods. The Government has chosen decommissioning as the litmus test of such a commitment and one cannot see how there could be such a commitment without a willingness to decommission. On this issue there is said to be deadlock. The Government has been flexible but it has reached a point where this requirement cannot be watered down any further. Our Government now appears to be standing firm. It has to. It cannot allow itself to be bullied into further retreat.

What Spring and Major said last year was right and it has to be stood over today. If necessary the Sinn Fein bluff must be called.

It must also be said that a satisfactory outcome on decommissioning does not meet all the requirements of Paragraph 10. It is still necessary for parties hitherto associated with paramilitarism to show that they will abide by the democratic process. Essentially this means accepting the principle of consent. Other parties have said that they accept this. We may be sceptical of the sincerity with which some have embraced the

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*A L has never had  
a mandate  
as a democratic  
party.*

principle of consent. It must be clearly defined for it can have several meanings. The crucial point is that Sinn Fein has not yet accepted it in any form and must do before there can be a meaningful dialogue. Another requirement in paragraph 10 is that these parties obtain a democratic mandate. The last mandate Sinn Fein received was as a support group for terrorism.

It could be that both these matters could be resolved in the one way. Sinn Fein could obtain a democratic mandate and show a commitment to the democratic process if there were elections, say, to a new Assembly. By standing, taking their seats and contributing to the debate they could show whether they are committed to the democratic process and the principle of consent. In such elections it would be very interesting to see what support Sinn Fein actually has. If they took their seats we would recognise their position and could debate with them across the floor and thus talk to them at a time when they have not fulfilled all the requirements of the Declaration and thus be unable to move into formal inter-party talks. An Assembly could bridge that gap until they do meet the requirements of the Declaration.

It might be objected that this is just the Unionists trying to get their Strand 1 objective and leave other matters behind. To meet that criticism we might have to accept limitations on the immediate functions of such an Assembly, it might be that the Assembly would not immediately have devolved to it all the functions possibly available, although I think there is merit in having some functions. We could also be prepared to see if there were other things that could be done to build confidence in our good faith.

This need not cause any delay. The legislation for such elections is on the statute book and could be activated virtually at a moment's notice. We often hear of the need to move the process forward, what better way of moving forward, for as things are it looks as if it will be a long time before Sinn Fein meets all the requirements in the Declaration.

This is actually how any serious negotiations proceed. Not in some "big bang" where everything is to be agreed by everyone at the same moment. You find something that can be done or agreed and you do that. Then you build from that to other matters. In that way trust and confidence grows. And crucially the initial stage in an Assembly could be open and transparent, essential matters for retaining confidence in the community.

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