



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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#### Summary of DUP Opening Statement - Paisley

After the depressing opening contribution by Molyneaux, Paisley's statement represented an almost refreshing contrast. The language was more open and outward-looking than anything we had seen from him before, even if the explicit messages delivered as to options the DUP were prepared to consider remained strongly familiar. The following were the main themes from the statement, which ran to 27 pages:

- He began with a long section condemning violence and in particular the IRA;
- He devoted several paragraphs to arguments against the Agreement, which he said excluded Unionists, while at the same time allowed Nationalists, through Dublin, to be "represented at the very highest echelons of the decision and policy making process";
- The familiar Paisley was evident in the language he used to describe the British Government's role in the Agreement process ("betrayal", "poisoned chalice" etc);
- He recounted Unionist attempts, after 1985, to bring forward an alternative to the Agreement, but accused Tom King of not "meaning business".
- By contrast, he had warm praise for Mr Brooke's role, although critical of the NIO;
- There followed an interesting section, where new language was discernible. Referring to "the divisions and difficulties of life in Northern Ireland", he acknowledged that "we each perceive their causes and nature differently". He went on to claim, however, that the situation in Northern Ireland was underpinned "by inescapable realities that are not the subject of dispute". These he listed as, firstly, the wish of the "overwhelming majority" to remain part of the UK, secondly, the "geographical and historical relationship between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic" and thirdly, the need for "institution building" in Northern Ireland ("the purpose of this Strand of the process").

- The section on North/South relations was particularly interesting. He disputed the notion that this was of interest only to Nationalists. He said that "no one would be more pleased than I" if "a sound basis" could be established for "friendly relations" with the South. Elsewhere in the statement he said "let no one doubt our desire to live in harmony with those with whom we share this island" and "I would never repudiate the fact that I am an Irishman". Overall he spoke more positively about the North/South relationship than he appears to have ever done before.
- A large section of the statement was devoted to the "third reality" above. He said that they were "looking for the highest possible degree of devolution within the UK" and subsequently outlined the DUP's views as to the nature and scope devolved institutions might have.
- He ruled out a return of Stormont style government and said that Unionists had faced up to that fact, adding "I am not afraid to admit that the old Stormont system had its faults". By the same token, he argued that Nationalists had to face the "reality" that "a united Ireland cannot come out of these talks".
- Reiterating a theme which ran through his statement, Paisley argued that "realism" and the aiming for what was "attainable" must "permeate" the talks, and that the logical consequence of such an approach was that "Ulstermen" should solve the problem themselves.
- However, to prove that his vision of "realism" had somewhat narrow bounds the very next paragraph began "Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom"!
- He argued that it was "essential" that the people of Northern Ireland "have the opportunity to pass judgement" on whatever "package" emerged.
- He addressed a strong plea to Mr Brooke to reconsider any

plans to restrict local control of the police (in a devolved arrangement) - "you must very definitely keep the door open for the return of full law and order powers to Northern Ireland"

- Paisley concluded with a reiteration of his view that the "challenge to each one of us in these talks is immense". He said that "difficult matters will have to be faced and decisions made from which it would be easier to run away". He pledged his full efforts and those of his colleagues to bringing the talks to a successful conclusion.

#### Comment

As indicated, the language and tone of Paisley's statement was a good deal more positive and forthcoming than we have heard from him in the past. Unlike Molyneaux, he was at least prepared to recognise that what was at issue in the talks was of profound importance for both communities. His statement is punctuated with calls for "realism" and for the need for both communities to confront "difficult" decisions. As mentioned, his language on North/South relations was certainly interesting.

At the same time, however, it was clear that, behind the new, more open language, there was no real movement on the fundamentals - the Agreement, an "Irish dimension" and institutionalised power-sharing were all ruled out. Moreover, it was manifest that the calls for "realism" and the facing of "difficult choices" were aimed primarily at the Nationalist community. Indeed, the only "difficult reality" which he identified as being faced by Unionists was that there would be no return to Stormont!

What came across starkly in the statement was the wide gap which exists between the DUP and the UUP (certainly Molyneaux) on the form of the internal arrangements for Northern Ireland which might come out of this process. Paisley's statement clearly flagged the DUP's desire for full-blown devolution.