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SPEECH BY

THE LEADER

MR DAVID TRIMBLE LLB BL MP

**TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF THE ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY**

**AT THE MAGHERABUOY HOUSE HOTEL,
PORTRUSH**

SATURDAY 21 OCTOBER 1995

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR REFERENCE TO
CONTENT BEFORE 4.30 PM, 21.10.95**

I think it is only right that I should begin this speech by expressing for myself, for all members of our party and for by far the greater number of the people of Ulster, our great appreciation for the leadership over the last sixteen years of Jim Molyneux.

His role in stabilising Ulster politics and bringing the whole community into sight of the oft promised peace has not yet received the recognition it deserves. But Jim knows that he occupies an important place in our affections and will retain an honoured role in our counsels.

Party Structures

When I stood before the Ulster Unionist Council in the Ulster Hall just six weeks ago I put at the beginning of my speech the reform of our party structures. I want to make that subject my first priority this afternoon.

We have been looking at this subject for some time. Consultation papers have been circulated, responses considered. Our working party have modified the proposals in the light of the responses, in particular dropping the suggestion for a candidates list. Consultation is good but it should not be endless.

I think the time is right to act. At the Annual General Meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council in March 1995 we resolved in principle to make changes. We should now aim to bring these changes before the next Annual General Meeting in the spring of 1996.

I want to highlight two principle features of the changes.

First the common basis for membership. We are not that large a party that we cannot put in place systems that enable us to know who all our members are. If we did know who all our members are we would then be able to contact them. Information could go to all members. All members could participate in key decisions such as leadership elections and, within a constituency or District Electoral area, selection of candidates. Bogus membership and entryism, which may exist in some areas could be rooted out more easily.

Secondly, the new delegate structure.

Under the proposed changes the governing bodies of our party would be composed solely of delegates sent by branches and associations wholly within the Party. This not a matter of expelling the Orange delegates or cutting the link with the Orange Institution.

It is our earnest hope that the present Orange delegates, who under our present rules must all be members of our Party will come through the branches. Constituency representation on the Council will be expanded to allow for this. Indeed we would like to see many more Orangemen participating directly in politics and expressing their own views rather than leaving the job to the comparative small number of Orange delegates.

If these changes are approved I would propose that we find another way of reflecting the historic association between the Institution and our Party, perhaps through an arrangement to consult together on ways of furthering our common aims. The commonality of those aims and the underlying social reality will ensure a continued association.

If we make these changes it will roughly coincide with the creation of the eighteen new constituencies. There is something to be said using their formation as the time for a new start.

Talks

Six weeks ago I said that I would seek meetings with all the major constitutional parties in Ulster, the rest of the UK, the Republic and elsewhere, in order to make sure that I understand their position and that they are informed as to my views.

I have held such meetings with every significant constitutional party in the British Isles except the Scottish and Welsh nationalists, the Liberal Democrats and the Irish Labour party and meeting have been arranged with the latter two. The meetings generally were cordial and covered many issues. We have agreed to pursue our discussions with the SDLP and the DUP on our own agendas so that the social and economic needs of the Ulster people are not neglected. But inevitably the meetings focused on what is called the peace process and I want to consider this in some detail.

Decommissioning

The key issue is that the peace process is stalled because of the refusal of Sinn Fein/IRA to meet the clear requirements of paragraph 10 of the Downing Street Declaration.

I make no apologies for referring to the Declaration. It is a very uneven document. We have never endorsed all its contents and have been very critical of parts of it. Nevertheless there are some few things of value in it and Paragraph 10 is one. I quote it because it was agreed by both the British and Irish Governments and endorsed by the US Government. And I think it is

essential that they and the world be constantly reminded of what those governments originally set out as the path that Sinn Fein/IRA and other such groups would have to go along in order to enter fully into the political process.

There is a clear sequence to paragraph 10, first it mentions "a permanent end to violence", second that Sinn Fein must "establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods" and, thirdly, show "that they abide by the democratic process". Then and only then can dialogue be joined.

Sinn Fein/IRA claim that the requirement to de-commission weapons was never mentioned to them and that there would not have been a cease-fire if they had known that this was the position.

This is absolute rubbish.

The need to deal with the weaponry was spelt out in the Government's secret "contacts" with Sinn Fein long before the Declaration. They were told that after a permanent end to violence there would be exploratory talks to deal with "the practical consequences of the ending of violence". On the day of the Declaration Major repeatedly referred to the need for evidence of a renunciation of violence and a "laying down of weapons". Dick Spring the Irish Foreign Minister who now denounces decommissioning said that very day,

"Questions were raised on how to determine a permanent cessation of violence. We are talking about the handing up of arms."

After the Declaration Sir Patrick Mayhew said, in an interview, "the exploratory dialogue will be so that we can discuss with Sinn Fein how the IRA will hand over their weapons." Adams went into print on 8 January 1994 to denounce this statement. So much for not knowing that it would be an issue!

The requirement in paragraph 10 actually is to "establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods". Dealing with the weapons issue is merely a means to show such a commitment. An important means, because how can you have peaceful intent if you insist on retaining weapons.

Please note that originally both Governments demanded - in Dick Spring's words - "the handing up of arms." Decommissioning is actually a concession, a retreat from that original demand.

Since then we have seen further retreats. Decommissioning has been reduced to the three fold tests stated in Mayhew's Washington speech at Easter. These are first a commitment to decommissioning, secondly agreement on the methods of decommissioning and thirdly the beginning of a process of actual decommissioning. The third to begin before the commencement of an all party talks process

The three Washington tests are currently under attack in two ways.

Firstly through the twintrack concept.

This involves setting up an international disarmament commission to deal with decommissioning and at the same time beginning all party talks on preliminary matters. The obvious danger here is that Sinn Fein will slow down the decommissioning track while eroding the distinction between preliminary and substantive matters on the talks track. You may also consider that the distinction is one that is difficult to draw in practice.

Secondly, I suspect that certain elements in the Irish and US administrations are hoping that the International Commission, shorn of the terms disarmament or decommissioning will proceed to take evidence from the paramilitaries and then make a report that they are satisfied with their commitment to peace and urge the start of talks. The British Government will then be under enormous pressure to accept this as a substitute for the third Washington requirement. Whether Sir Patrick Mayhew realised this and was preparing the way for another retreat when he said on Tuesday that "a Commission might find some other means by which the necessary confidence can be generated" only he can say.

He has said that the government position remains that Washington three must come before substantive talks. He has also said that the Government's position is that the terms of reference of the Commission will be tightly drawn to ensure that the Commission will only deal with the mechanics of decommissioning and will not have a wider remit. But to use a phrase attributed to a senior source at the time of the abortive Chequers summit, I suspect that "the rats are at work" and that efforts are being made to fudge this matter. I must warn Sir Patrick to stick to his guns. May I suggest to him that he would find it easier to do so if the took a stronger grip on his Department.

For our part, we are not going to be party to a fudge.

We are not going to be part of negotiations unless the other parties are committed to exclusively peaceful methods and have established that commitment. And we will make our own judgement on when to enter a talks process and when there has been a sufficient commitment by others to peaceful methods. No-one else will make that decision for us. We are our own people not a client group to be delivered by others.

Many years ago a leading member of the IRA demonstrated his contempt for democracy by declaring that they would take power with an armalite in one hand and a ballot paper in the other. What

Sinn Fein/IRA must now accept that they must throw away the armalite and trust exclusively to the ballot paper. Their difficulty is that with only the ballot paper they have little prospect of power.

Good Faith

There is one passing comment I have to make. I have quoted from a statement made by Dick Spring a year ago. Today his statements are quite different. I know that politicians are sometimes subject to a temptation to rewrite the record. But in this case what is being rewritten is part of a solemn declaration made by two governments after a long and difficult process of negotiation. It hardly encourages one to enter into negotiations with a person if he has shown that within a short time scale he may depart from crucial aspects of that agreement. The need to build confidence applies not only to those who seek to enter the process. In this case it applies to the Irish government. For Mr Spring's cavalier treatment of Paragraph 10 of the Downing Street Declaration is of a piece with the failure of the Irish government to engage itself in the talks in 1992. We will need to know that there is a viable interlocutor and a willingness to talk in good faith in the event of any future talks.

An Assembly

Meanwhile we will continue the contacts we have established in recent weeks with the Government and other constitutional parties. We will continue these discussions on our agenda. For we are anxious to see the political process move forward. Indeed we have made our own proposals which may incidentally ease the deadlock in the talks process. I refer, of course to the Ulster Unionist suggestion for an assembly.

This is not intended be a so called internal solution in which Unionists evade awkward issues. We do not run away from difficulties. We do not run away from the electorate. We are ready to prove our democratic credentials and obtain a mandate from the people. Some of those who criticise our ideas do so because they are scared of an election.

Such elections will give Sinn Fein the opportunity to show that they will abide by the democratic process and will give everyone the chance to see if they accept the principle of consent. It will be interesting to see if Mr Adams still denounces, as he has done in his books, the concept of parliamentary democratisation and what he called "ballot box mechanics".

To show our good faith we are prepared to accept limitations on the duration and scope of the Assembly. As Reg Empey said this morning - its essential functions would be to act as a Convention for public debate. It should, however be more than a talking shop. There should be clear purposes. It could, for example, gather evidence and maybe make reports on matters germane to further negotiations, for example it could consider the issue of what new relationships could be established within the British Isles. For this purpose the powers in the 1982 Act could be utilised to take evidence from interested parties.

An aspect of the so-called peace process that is offensive to many people in Northern Ireland is that they are constantly being left out of the picture while people who do not come from Ulster or who represent very few within it strut on the stage. This is a particularly appropriate point in a week which has seen another meeting of the despised Anglo Irish Intergovernmental Conference. Its Joint Chairmen appear to regard themselves as surgeons operating on the people of Ulster. They think they can cut up and rearrange the organs of an inert anaesthetised body politic.

Of course we hope that such an assembly will be a vehicle to further the co-operation on social and economic matters that we have had with the SDLP and other parties. We got the impression that the SDLP welcomed such co-operation. Consequently it is very difficult to see the basis for John Hume's opposition to this idea.

But instead of engaging in megaphone diplomacy I propose we talk this over together. Indeed it may be a good idea for all four constitutional parties to share their thinking on this matter. Perhaps we will all be able to share this initiative and carry it forward together rather than wait for the Government to take a course that the apparachnics at Stormont will resist. The opportunity is there for I have been pleasantly surprised by the extent of the support for this idea.

The Union - Best for All

In discussions, whether in an Assembly or elsewhere, our object should not be simply to react to the arguments or pressure of others. Our overriding objective must be to carry our message. We must tell people the simple fact summed up in our Conference motto - The Union - Best for All. It is not just another political slogan - it is a fact. The Union is better for ALL the people of Northern Ireland. It is better for them socially, it is better for them economically, it is better for them as the place to accommodate diverse identities.

Lets look at the facts. Start with tax rates. In the United Kingdom the basic rate is 25%. In the republic 27%. Britain's basic rate applies to the first £20,000 of taxable income, the Republic's just to the first 8,000. The higher rate in the UK is 40%: in the Republic it is 48%.

A single person earning £20,00 in Northern Ireland takes home £14,100 whereas in the Republic of Ireland it would be only £12,148. In other words such a person is 16% better off being British.

Add in better social security benefits and it is not surprising to learn that consumer spending per person in the Republic of Ireland is 20% lower than in Northern Ireland.

But that is not the whole story. You must add in public services. Public spending is higher in Ulster. Expenditure on education and housing is twice as high in Northern Ireland as in the Republic. Spending on health is 50% higher in Northern Ireland. This was Sir James Craig's great achievement in the thirties - step by step - the same benefits for the same taxes. Let those foolish greedy businessmen who want to tamper with the tax part of that equation remember the social consequences of unhitching us from British taxes and benefits.

Taking consumer spending together with better public services, living standards in Ulster are between 25 and 30% higher than in the Republic.

As John Whyte, a foremost Catholic political scientist, has pointed out in *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, "... research shows the Republic to be, not just a relatively poor society, but also a relatively unequal one ..." That research he sums up as greater inequality of income, less social mobility, housing and education policies that reinforce inequality, one third the proportion of public housing, a smaller proportion of working class students in higher education - though this was before the UK started to provide an increasing proportion of the higher education for Republic of Ireland school-leavers.

Socially the Union is better too. In the republic all of the health service and virtually all of the educational system is run by or according to the tenets of one particular religious denomination. In Ulster there is greater choice, hence greater freedom in social matter. Most Ulster folk tend to be somewhat conservative, nevertheless we do live in and are part of a modern liberal society.

Standards in society are higher. Here we are not referring to the present difficulties of the Roman Catholic Church. Just think of the Goodman scandal and the fiasco of the Beef tribunal

where Ministers in the same government publicly accused each other of dishonesty. Add Greencore. Add the perceived existence of a politically favoured "golden triangle" in the Republic's business world. Add a culture based on clientism, "pulling strokes" and favouring relatives. Look at Irish labour elected in 1992 on a platform of higher standards in public life, yet immediately plunges into coalition with the party it denounced as having low standards and indulged in nepotism.

I know that British public life is not free from criticism. We have our subsidy junkies in business and family relationships have been a feature of Northern Ireland Office appointments. The southern Irish sickness is creeping into our public life. I wonder where from?

The United Kingdom is a genuinely plural state in which it is possible to be Welsh, or Scottish and British. Similarly one can be Irish, or Ulster, and British as well. Whereas the state to the south, which was founded solely in order to be Gaelic and Catholic never accommodated Britishness and could now scarcely accommodate the social range that actually exists within Northern nationalism.

Before the First World War Sinn Fein claimed that an independent Ireland would be a richer and socially a better place. As Roche and Birnie point out in their excellent book, *An Economics lesson for Irish Nationalists and Republicans*, in 1913 the 26 counties had a standard of living comparable to Italy, Sweden and Norway. The legacy from British rule was a moderately prosperous economy and a modern state. Seventy five years of independence has seen it slither down the scale, now below Spain and comparable with Greece and Portugal, with a social system to match.

The Greater Number

No wonder that in Jim Molyneaux's memorable phrase, the greater number prefer the Union. Jim was not inventing a form of words he was describing reality. Again look at the evidence.

A poll on political opinion in Northern Ireland, commissioned by Channel 4 and released on Friday 24 February 1995, asked how people would vote if a border poll was held. Only 25% wanted Northern Ireland to become part of an all Ireland Republic, while 63% favoured Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom.

Interestingly, Roman Catholics divided 56% for a United Ireland, 23% for the maintenance of the Union, with 20% don't know.

Other analysis of the figures indicates that 10% of Roman Catholics are adherents of pro-union parties, whereas only 2% of protestants are anti-partitionists.

The Irish Times of 12 October 1995 reports a speech of Mgr Denis Faul, of Dungannon in East Tyrone where we are told the IRA were reluctant about the ceasefire. He said that 60 to 70 % of the North's Catholic population did not actively want unity and if there was a referendum on the Border Catholics would abstain.

Eight weeks ago a Coopers & Lybrand poll said that 17% gave a United Ireland as their preference. By comparison a recent poll said that 34% of Scottish people favoured independence.

The figures are not new. They are consistent with a whole range of polls taken over the last twenty years. Overall the conclusion is that Irish Republicanism appeals to a small and declining percentage.

One of the Republicans' hero figures is Mao Tse'Tung who once referred to guerillas as small fish swimming in the sea. The IRA wrongly think of themselves as guerillas.

But what they know in their hearts is that the sea is becoming smaller. Violent nationalism is out of date in the modern world. Republicans are political dinosaurs struggling against the tide.

They know their support is diminishing. It is not possible today to keep people in ignorance of where they are better off. Or to deceive them with the political and economic moonshine that Sinn Fein has pedalled.

No wonder they need to cling to guns. Their arguments are duds. No wonder they are reluctant to face the ballot box.

Our job is to spread the message of the economic and social superiority of the Union - to put in place a fair, proportionate system of local administration, and to show how the British political system can be made open to all.

The Union is the best for all. It is the only way in which we in Ulster can hope to live together in prosperity and peace. We will not let monsters from the past, or cynical outsiders fishing for personal gain in these hitherto troubled waters deprive us of this opportunity to repair and strengthen the Union which is the best for all.