

Molyneaux 'pessimistic' on prospects for NI talks

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From Dick Allstrom
in Belfast

THE Ulster Unionist Party leader, Mr James Molyneaux, has said that he is now "pessimistic" about any further progress being made towards talks arising from the initiative of the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Mr Brooke.

There had been a new "hardening of attitudes", he said, among rank and file unionists, caused by what he described as Dublin's "veto" on July 5th, when the Northern Secretary had been unable to make a statement to the House of Commons on political progress in the North.

However, Mr Brooke remains confident about his attempts to find a formula for political dialogue in the North. He implied that Mr Molyneaux's comments represented a position taken in advance of next month's restart of negotiations. During a visit to Belfast yesterday he said that he would "deal with September when it comes."

Mr Molyneaux told *The Irish Times* earlier yesterday that the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Collins, had "fired an Exocet" on July 5th, exercising a veto over House of Commons proceedings. Describing this as a "retrograde step" he also said that the Supreme Court ruling in Dublin earlier this year, which defined a constitutional imperative for Irish unity, represented a major problem which had changed unionist thinking.

"Whatever might have been

acceptable and possible is no longer possible because of July 5th," he said. He was "pessimistic" about the initiative continuing in its present form and felt that a whole new starting point would have to be found. "It is unlikely to be possible (to continue) in the light of July 5th", he said.

He had been approached by unionists calling for a tougher line in dealings with Dublin. "People have almost been warning me not to make any concessions", he said.

Mr Brooke said yesterday that Mr Molyneaux's comments might have represented a "rolling of the wicket" in the context of September, a comment interpreted by the Northern Ireland Office to mean that the unionist leader was stating a position in advance renewed talks.

He did not think that the parties involved would be "setting up further conditions or preconditions" to the process. He added, however, that all sides in the negotiations recognised that, if the talks were to "involve all the strands", then Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution and the constitutional imperative would become part of the agenda.

Repeating that he was willing to halt his initiative for a time to help overcome difficulties, he said: "We have made some progress. We haven't made as much progress as it would have been good to have made by this stage, but we have made progress. We haven't met any obstacle that absolutely blocked the way."