

# Dublin offers to suspend pact for Ulster talks

## Anglo-Irish agreement could be suspended

by Liam Clarke, Belfast

THE Irish government is prepared to suspend the workings of the Anglo-Irish agreement to make possible a new round of talks between Unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland, according to official sources in Dublin.

Gerry Collins, the Irish foreign minister, will make the offer to Peter Brooke, the Northern Ireland secretary, at a meeting of the Anglo-Irish inter-governmental conference in London on Wednesday. Brooke and Brian Mawhinney, the Northern Ireland security minister, will tell Collins that talks in the new year are possible despite the approaching British general election. The meeting will then decide on whether to suspend the workings of the agreement.

Mawhinney will also brief Collins on the security situation, and is likely to request more Irish army patrols along the border during the Christmas and New Year period to stop the movement of arms and ammunition into Northern Ireland.

Hugh Annesley, the chief constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, who will also be present, will brief Collins and Ray Burke, the Irish justice minister, on the threat posed by loyalist paramilitaries to the Irish republic in the run-up to Christmas.

Although the prospects for political talks will dominate the agenda, other topics under discussion will include the long-standing Irish demands that all army and Ulster Defence Regiment patrols should be accompanied by RUC officers, along with a number of other issues which the Irish believe are necessary in order to build nationalist confidence in the security forces in Ulster.

It is expected that the ministers will agree to hold a further Anglo-Irish conference in January and that if a suspension is agreed it will take place immediately after that.

Both governments are anxious to create an impression of political movement in Northern Ireland in order to take the initiative away from the terrorists, who have escalated their campaign since the break-up of the last talks in July. Many politicians and civil servants fear that the political process will be discredited if it is not seen to produce some movement or hope for the future.

Despite the urgency of the situation, officials in both the

British and Irish governments and many Northern Ireland politicians have no real conviction that any sort of definite outcome can be reached if talks are held before the election.

"Put it like this, it's our job to be optimistic," one Irish official said resignedly. A leading Unionist said: "Anyone who is asked if he wants talks has to say 'Yes' or he is seen as an obstacle. But in reality the idea of doing anything in the next few months is tokenism."

In an interview with the Sunday Times, Mawhinney, who has been involved with Brooke in contacts with the local political parties, said that he had detected a greater eagerness for talks since September.

"I think there is an understanding that three, four or six months of political vacuum would not be good for the province or for its people. And I think that there is a willingness among all the political parties to look for a basis on which we can have talks starting in the new year. The question is whether we can find that basis and I think that with enough political goodwill we can," Mawhinney said. He predicted that the basis of new talks would "clearly have identifiable similarities" with the arrangements for the last round of talks chaired by Brooke.

Tomorrow afternoon Mawhinney and Brooke will meet members of the moderate Unionist Alliance party of Northern Ireland to gauge its views on the chances of progress. Its leader, Dr John Alderdice, said yesterday: "I am ready for talks, I hope they are soon, and I hope they are serious. I will be putting down no preconditions."

However, he went on to cast doubt on the sincerity of some of the other potential participants, especially Ian Paisley, the leader of the Democratic Unionist party. Last Thursday Paisley expressed optimism about the prospects of talks after a meeting with Brooke in Westminster.

"In the last few days Dr Paisley has been going around saying there are going to be talks very soon. I hope that he is serious about that, but we have had the situation before of Dr Paisley putting down a string of precon-

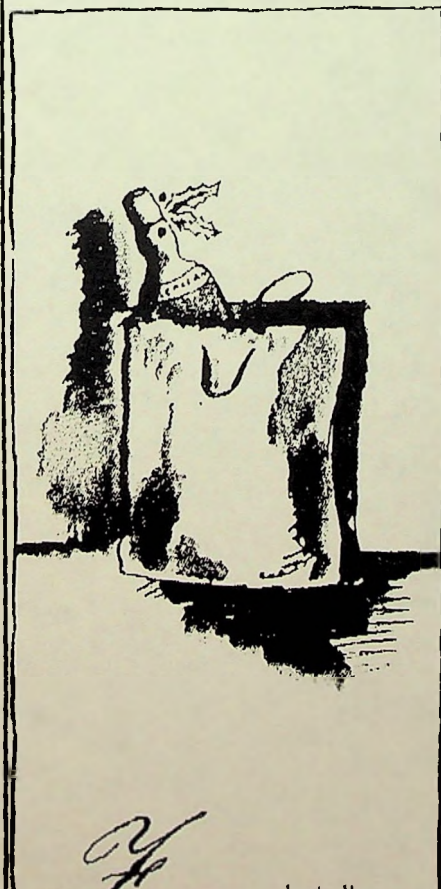
ditions, declaring that there were going to be talks and a few weeks later saying that somebody else had wrecked the talks because they didn't accept his preconditions. He leads you up to the top of the hill and he leads you down again. That looks very like playing games and I am not prepared to be knocked about by whatever mood takes Paisley's fancy," Alderdice said.

Meanwhile two part-time UDR soldiers from Cookstown, Co Tyrone, have had their period of detention without charge under the Prevention of Terrorism Act extended from three to seven days. An RUC officer said they were being questioned

about "serious terrorist offences, including murder, which took place in the Co Tyrone area". He said that they would be either charged or released on Monday or Tuesday.

It is understood that the detectives questioning the men are investigating a number of murders carried out by the illegal loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force. The killings under investigation include the murders of John Quinn, Dwayne O'Donnell, Malcolm Nugent and Tommy Armstrong after a republican meeting at a bar in Craggagh on March 3 this year, and the murder of another Catholic man, Sean Anderson, in Pomeroy on October 25.

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