

FAO: Kate  
March 99

## Round Table/Bi-Lateral Questions from the Women's Coalition

### 1. What does the term 'decommissioning' actually mean?

- 1. To dismantle (an industrial plant or a nuclear reactor that is no longer required for use) to an extent such that it can be safely abandoned
- 2. To remove (a warship or military aircraft) from service

(Collins English Dictionary; updated edition 1995)

Both of these definitions don't imply 'handing over' or 'surrendering'. Instead, what is implied is 'a lack of use', an 'abandonment' and a 'removal from service'

These terms are significantly more neutral than the political hype that has been given to the term 'decommissioning' in the context of the establishment of the new NI Assembly.

2. What form of words and/or action(s) will be enough to satisfy the UUP backwoods men that Sinn Fein are serious and committed democrats – and how much can Sinn Fein (and the provisional IRA) be expected to say or do without any possible interpretation of 'surrender' or 'capitulation' to Unionism?
3. The recent provisional IRA declaration that from now on local 'policing' matters should be referred to local restorative justice schemes rather than directly to themselves should be seen as one element of 'decommissioning'.
4. Does anyone have the right to deny access to the new Executive to any political party which achieved sufficient votes at the Assembly elections? For instance, no one suggests that the DUP should be denied their two seats on the Executive and yet they are clearly committed to bringing down the Assembly and the whole peace process. All the evidence hitherto confirms that Sinn Fein is committed to making the Assembly work.
5. Over 70% of the electorate in NI voted for the Assembly and all the other related machinery of government to come established. What right have the politicians – any politicians from any party to deny such an overwhelming democratic mandate! You have been elected to get on with and make the Agreement and the Assembly work. Get on with it!
6. Why all this macho David v Gerry stuff? What about all the other pro-Agreement parties – SDLP, WC, DUP, Alliance – have they got no say, nothing to contribute? What arrogance!
7. Billy Hutchinson made the famous comment on the steps of Stormont last year 'My mandate is the silence of the guns'. In another context, apart from the

obvious democratic mandates won at the Assembly elections, is Sinn Fein's 'mandate' not now also the silence of the guns and the sentex?

8. Why is decommissioning not being left to de Chasstelain (spelling?) to handle? 'Policing' left to Patten, 'Equality' to the new agency. 'Human Rights' to the new Bryce Dickson agency etc. etc.

9. Senator George Mitchell has stated that, in terms of the peace process we are 99% there. What are you prepared to sacrifice to ensure that we achieve the remaining 1%. (Question for parties and general public)

10. What strategies do you intend to put in place to ensure that any political solutions arrived at will translate favorably at community level?

11. If Sinn Fein are to be denied their legitimate seats in the new NI government, then there is no encouragement for them to consider any other form of political accommodation within the 'state' of NI for the foreseeable future (generations).

12. If Sinn Fein and/or the provisional IRA say that the 'war is over', what will the Unionists say/offer in return – the 'union' takes second place to equality and democratic participation and political accommodation, perhaps using a suitably short phrase eg 'majority political domination is now over' or 'sectarianism and bigotry are defunct' etc. etc.

Women's Coalition North Down