

ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY STATEMENT STRAND THREE PRELIMINARY MEETING

The purpose of strand three

"to consider a new and more broadly based agreement" (Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, (Mr Brooke) 26 March 1991). This new agreement will then replace the 1985 Agreement.

Procedure in strand three

Originally it was agreed between her Majesty's Government and the Unionist parties that strand three would be between the two governments, with the two Unionist parties forming part of the British government team. Later this was modified. The Unionist parties would appear in their own right, but it was said that they and the other Northern Ireland parties would, in strand three, have the right (a) to attend some meetings as "observers", and (b) to make representations to both governments. Presumably the attempt to restrict and limit the right of Northern Ireland parties to participate in strand three was because negotiations leading to the making of an international agreement between two governments is seen as a function of government.

We have two observations on this.

Firstly there is precedent for the involvement of more than sovereign independent governments in such agreements. The 1925 Tripartite Agreement was made between Her Majesty's Government, the Government of the Irish Free State and the Government of Northern Ireland. The procedure in the current talks by way of three sequential strands was, in our view, intended to create an analogous situation. Although new institutions of government in Northern Ireland would not actually be established, it was envisaged that before the commencement of strand 3 proper there would be a

sufficient measure of agreement concerning the establishment of such institutions so that the Northern Ireland parties would be able to enter this strand as collectively representing the putative future Northern Ireland administration.

Secondly, one reason for the search for "a new and more broadly based agreement" is to avoid a vice of the 1985 Agreement in that it was drawn up behind the back of the Northern Ireland parties, without consultation with them and has signally failed to gain acceptance from the people of Northern Ireland. It follows therefore, that in order to be "new and more broadly based" there must be adequate participation for the Northern Ireland parties in the discussions concerning the new agreement.

We do not require to be involved in all discussions, for we recognise that it might be prejudicial to the public interest for the Northern Ireland parties to be involved in some of the discussions on certain security matters. But we do require to be notified and consulted in advance of any such meetings. Consultation of course requires that we be given sufficient information to enable us to make meaningful representations. We also require an explicit undertaking that there will be no secret meetings or discussions between the two governments relating to these talks.

It is because of the regrettable background of bad faith on the part of both governments, both in forming and failing to honour previous agreements, that we must insist on the clearest demonstration of good faith now.

The new agreement

Agreement to consider a new and more broadly based agreement is an implicit admission in our view that the 1985 Agreement is defective. In our view the new agreement must be "more broadly based" in more than just the range of support for it. It must be a genuine British Irish agreement covering the full range of issues and relationships between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and

Northern Ireland, on the one hand, and the Irish Republic, on the other hand. In other words those matters comprehended in the phrase "the totality of relationships". The interrelationship of the peoples of the British Isles is manifest throughout these islands and not just in Northern Ireland. Consideration will also have to be given to the inclusion of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands within the scope of the agreement, for although outside the United Kingdom their position geographically and within British society means they cannot be ignored. We appreciate that Her Majesty's Government handles their foreign relations and has the power to extend anti-terrorist legislation to them, but it would accord better with principle to consult them. Consideration may have to be given to consultation with other interests within the United Kingdom.

The new agreement must be clear and not be cursed by the fudge and ambiguity that was such a feature of the 1985 agreement, particularly with regard to article 1. There must be an unequivocal recognition and acceptance of Northern Ireland's position as an integral part of the United Kingdom.

It goes without saying that in our view an absolutely indispensable requirement is the ending of all territorial ambition.

Irredentist attitudes enshrined in the present articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution are contrary to the accepted principles of international law. They provide an appearance of mandate for the terrorist war being waged against Northern Ireland, a "war" for which the border is an important resource and which involves the Irish Republic in a breach of its obligation not to allow its territory to be used as a base for attacks on its neighbours. There can be no place for any form of proxy warfare within the British Isles.

In addition to being comprehensive and clear the new agreement must be fully reciprocal and characterised by fairness, openness and transparency.

We will, as appropriate, table papers dealing with matters relevant to the new agreement as strand 3 proper progress, and we are ready to discuss our views in detail.

Matters for discussion

While not at this stage proposing a detailed agenda, we envisage that discussion will focus on (a) mutual recognition and acceptance, (b) security, (c) economic and European Community matters and (d) the human dimension.

The final phrase is a deliberate echo of that used in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and we suggest that it be a model for discussions in strand 3.