

THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND

- Twin
track
process

Council on Social Responsibility

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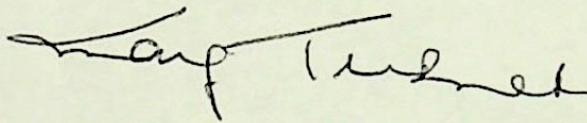
31st January, 1996.

Dear DR Gledhill,

Please find enclosed a copy of the Council on Social Responsibility's "Submission to the International Body on De-Commissioning" for your information.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,



T. David Cooper.
Secretary.



METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND - COUNCIL ON
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (NORTHERN EXECUTIVE)

SUBMISSION TO THE INTERNATIONAL BODY ON
DE-COMMISSIONING

FRIDAY 15TH DECEMBER 1995

1. INTRODUCTION

a. The Council on Social Responsibility of the Methodist Church in Ireland (Northern Executive) would like to thank the International Body on De-commissioning for the invitation to make a submission. We welcome the Joint Communiqué on the twin track initiative issued by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on 28th November 1995. We wish the International Body well throughout its deliberations and we wish to record our gratitude to its members for making their contribution to peace on this island.

b. We understand the International Body's remit to be two-fold as outlined in Paragraph 7 of the Joint Communiqué, mentioned above.

c. We wish to record, and ask the International Body to consider, five principles which have guided our reflections and analysis on the evolving political situation since the mid-1980's. They are as follows:

- i. No change in the link between Northern Ireland and Westminster unless a majority in Northern Ireland agrees.
- ii. The two traditions must have a share in the responsibility of Government.
- iii. A system of Government in which both traditions are involved and with which they can identify is an urgent necessity. The Institutions of Government must reflect the two traditions. The way forward may be to seek means whereby the two traditions could achieve a common allegiance not only within Northern Ireland but also in a wider context.
- iv. All must give full support for the rule of law impartially enacted and administered.
- v. All must denounce violence as a means towards political ends.

2. POLITICAL CONTEXT

a. We would like to draw to the attention of the International Body the initial position of the Methodist Church in Ireland to the Joint Declaration which initiated this present phase of political development. It read as follows:

"The Council on Social Responsibility of the Methodist Church in Ireland welcomes, in general terms, the Joint Declaration of the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach with its emphasis on democracy, dialogue, consent and the *repudiation of violence*.

D. We would like to present to the International Body copies of a more detailed analysis of the Joint Declaration which was received by the Methodist Conference in 1994 unanimously and recommended for study by our people.

3. COMMENTS RELEVANT TO THE ISSUE OF DE-COMMISSIONING OF ARMS.

- a. Whilst recognising the widely expressed desire to see all arms removed from Irish politics, and for de-commissioning to commence as soon as possible, we accept the reality that this is most unlikely to occur before all-party talks in whatever format.
- b. Therefore, we believe it is imperative to talk and to put the issue of de-commissioning of arms very high on the agenda.
- c. Unilateral and / or multilateral gestures, whilst welcome, may be difficult to verify and satisfy - all the more reason to go to the table and negotiate this issue.
- d. The Council does not accept that those weapons held by the agencies of the state in both jurisdictions can be equated with paramilitary weapons.
- e. The Council notes that there has been a sustained period of cease-fires.
- f. The Council notes that there has been some scaling down of the security infra-structure.
- g. The Council hopes that any agreed policing arrangements will be in the overall context of agreement on other issues and that any future police force will be completely civilianised.
- h. In the process of establishing bona fides and developing trust, a distinction may be made between offensive and defensive weapons.
- i. The Council is aware of the sensitivities within the nationalist community regarding legally held weapons and encourages agreement on more effective control.

4. COMMENTS RELEVANT TO THE CLEAR COMMITMENT ON THE PART OF THOSE IN POSSESSION OF SUCH ARMS TO WORK CONSTRUCTIVELY TO ACHIEVE THAT

These comments concern Sinn Fein particularly who may have influence in this regard.

- a. The Council acknowledges the process of reflection and questioning core practices within the republican movement over a period of years.
- b. The Council believes that the present Sinn Fein leadership is clearly committed to the process of peace.
- c. When considering the possibility of Sinn Fein's re-habilitation, the Council believes that it could assist itself in that process in the following ways:
 - i. by avoiding forms of triumphalism,
 - ii. by avoiding deliberate provocation,
 - iii. by speaking out more forthrightly about punishment beatings,
 - iv. by being more pro-active in the determination and location of the missing *persons*.

This list is neither exhaustive nor has it been prioritised. Much could be achieved by an unequivocal commitment to exclusively peaceful means and to the principle of consent, which is supported with such a clear consensus throughout the island of Ireland.

- d. Equally, the Council has tried to encourage those in the unionist community to be more positive about including Sinn Fein in the democratic process and will continue to do so.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

- a. Ultimately, the de-commissioning of the intention to use weapons is more important than the weapons themselves.
- b. History is not on the side of de-commissioning - few, if any, in Irish history, unionist/nationalist, protestant/catholic, have de-

commissioned. However, we should not allow ourselves to be prisoners of our past.

c. All are parties to the conflict - all need to be part of the solution. We all need to admit our wrong-doings and seek repentance. :

d. An opportunity for peace has presented itself. There is a overwhelming desire for peace. Any return to violence would plunge society to un-known depths of inhumanity.

e. Trust must be developed through dialogue and action. All are required to play their part to build peace.