

ARTICLE FOR THE STAR - 7\6\1996
BY JOHN HUME

As we approach the talks after the election, the two governments and the parties have a clear responsibility to put the search for agreement back on track. The role of the governments is crucial. They cannot create agreement, but they can make it possible and desirable for everyone to participate in serious talks about an agreement.

They can do so by agreeing a framework for talks which takes account of all legitimate interests and which is based on one essential principle - that any participant can put any issue on the table, but no-one has an automatic right to satisfaction on any issue before serious negotiations take place. The vast majority of citizens, in Northern Ireland the Republic and Britain, and the overwhelming majority in both parliaments, favour such an approach.

The Republican Movement has a vital role to play in reinvigorating the peace process. The ending of the ceasefire was a bitter blow, especially to those communities the Republican Movement claims to represent, and the insecurity thus created is a substantial barrier to the search for agreement. Last week, Sinn Fein asked for a "Vote for Peace". The IRA should therefore respect that vote, and the votes for other parties, as a vote against violence. My simple request to the IRA is to respect the clear, strong wishes of the Irish people on this matter and quickly restore the ceasefire, without preconditions.

The issue of decommissioning cannot be avoided, but it cannot be allowed to halt the peace process. The demand that decommissioning take place first is as unrealistic as the proposal that it take place last. Decommissioning has to be both part of the confidence-building process, and a measure of how far that process has moved forward. The ultimate objective is to remove the guns and bombs from Irish politics and Anglo-Irish relations. The arms issue, therefore, will have to be resolved to the satisfaction of everyone, as proposed in the Mitchell Report.

The Unionist parties also have an essential role to play. No arrangements can be imposed upon them without their consent. Indeed, my party and I have always argued that any new arrangements agreed in the talks should be submitted for approval by referendum. The Unionist parties now have the mandate they said they needed to enter talks. They have, therefore, an unprecedented opportunity - and a duty - to articulate a positive vision of the future and to make constructive proposals about relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South and between Ireland and Britain, in the wider European framework. It is no longer sufficient for any of us to pretend that only one or other of these relationships matter. They all do, and they all must be accommodated in a balanced framework. Efforts by Unionists to articulate a positive programme which reflects the realities of our society can only be welcomed. We may not agree with their proposals, but rational political discourse about each

other's proposals is essential to the finding of a solution.

Finally, all the constitutional parties on this island have a duty to put forward an agenda for the next century, rather than one rooted in the past. We all have to work seriously with our fellow citizens, from whom history, violence and discrimination have divided us, in order to create a functioning democratic order.