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Ulster Unionist Party
The Conference 1999

Speech by

The Rt. Hon. David Trimble MP

Ms Whelan
11. 10 99

to the

Annual Conference

58

of the

Ulster Unionist Party

Saturday 9 October 1999

Killyhevlin Hotel
Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh

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Good morning.

Welcome to the Conference.

It is indeed a pleasure to be speaking to you today.

Mind you, if I had taken the advice of some of my Parliamentary colleagues, I would not be here now, for had I taken their advice, I would have resigned.

But, let me tell you one thing about David Trimble and resignation. I have resigned myself to the long political struggle to secure the best interests of Unionism and to make sure that our position within the United Kingdom is copperfastened and to promote the benefits of the Union to all.

I will not lead this party into a never-never land of false hope or imitation Carsons without the gritty realism of James Craig.
Nor will I court popularity by hyping solutions I know are not attainable.

I remember, over two years ago, when Daphne and I first discussed the possible outcomes of the Talks. She predicted that I would probably obtain just enough support at each stage to go on, but that it would be a constant uphill struggle. She was right. And we are both resigned to moving on with that dogged determination that is one of the defining characteristics of the Ulster British people.

I, we, are so heartened by the many unionists who have shown that dogged determination in difficult circumstances. I know so many of you share our goals and without your trust and confidence that uphill struggle could not continue.

But, we are all tired of the daily chorus of disagreement between senior colleagues that the media love to highlight. Of course there are genuine differences of opinion, but we must learn to treat each other with respect. There are many opportunities in this, the most democratic of parties to air and resolve these differences. Yes, express your point of view. But do so within the party, and not in a TV studio.

If you feel the need to make public attacks, attack republicans, not Ulster Unionists.

In March of this year, I was able to tell our Annual General meeting that we had done all we could to complete the transition.

I said, "We are ready for the transfer of power to the Assembly."

We still are. But it has not been possible to achieve this, because the paramilitaries have not yet honoured their obligation to exclusively peaceful and democratic means. They still maintain their private armies, and as Bertie Ahern said, the people did not vote in the referendums for an armed peace.

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Efforts were made at Hillsborough before Easter and at Castle Buildings in early summer to resolve this deadlock. In July, the government produced a formula, which we judged was flawed, and events proved our judgment was right.

Some predicted that we would collapse in face of the hideous pressure that would be brought to bear on us. Would they please note, the Ulster Unionist Assembly Party coolly made its own assessment, made its own decision and stuck to it.

Don't be misled by those spreading alarm and despondency. Our position has not changed. We want devolution. We want decommissioning. To me "jump together" or "choreography" or "sequencing" all refer to the same thing - making sure that devolution is accompanied by decommissioning.

But there is no point getting bogged down in the minutiae until there is a clear commitment by republicans to credible decommissioning.

Put clearly and simply, the position of the Ulster Unionist Party is and will remain – no guns, no government.

I have found, before and after July, that people in the street have repeatedly said two things to me. I can sum them up in six words,

"Don't give up. Don't give in."

In July we did not give in. The motion carried on the proposal of the Assembly Party shows that in the future too we will not give in.

Equally, we will not give up.

We will not give up on what we are trying to achieve.

Already we see glimpses of what can be done.

Despite the problems for manufacturing from the high level of sterling we still have excellent economic prospects. Let me give a couple of examples. Nortel Networks - one of the jewels in our crown. Their plant at Monkstown chosen as one of 7 centres of excellence throughout the world. Further investment is planned which could raise the output to some £3 billion!

Computer software - in the last four years employment has risen from 3,000 to 8,000. In each of the last three years turnover has risen by around 100%
A few weeks ago I opened a centre in East Belfast where a joint ICL/Microsoft venture is employing 225 on software solutions.

I wish the media would give more time to these good news stories!

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At the same time the Police Authority held its annual meeting. Twenty Sinn Feiners staged a protest inside for a few minutes and left. That was well reported. The mention of ICL/Microsoft was fleeting. It did not even appear on the Ceefax headlines!

When will the media, particularly BBC Northern Ireland get away from its relentless negativity that only encourages such wrongdoers and demoralises the wider community?

There is one industry where the prospects are really poor. Agriculture. There is little that the local Department can do. But when the new Welsh and Scottish administrations flexed their muscles MAFF responded. True, there was not much new money but it made a point - devolution can matter. Unfortunately we are still on the sidelines

Currently there is great concern about the pig sector. There is a need for an Office of Fair Trading investigation to see why the producer is getting such a raw deal. We also need a level playing field with the Republic of Ireland. They have lower costs mainly because they have to meet lower health and welfare standards.

That's why we pushed for cross border co-operation on food safety – and Irish government opposed co-operation on this. I am glad to see that Signor Prodi, the new President of the Commission, has called for this on a European basis. If we achieved devolution we could add to the pressure.

It is very frustrating to see Wales and Scotland go ahead – their European operations proceeding but ours not off the ground.

It was so much better at the beginning of the year when we were involved in the negotiations over structural funds. Seamus and myself went twice to the Commission in Brussels and I went on to Bonn to speak to the German European Minister Gunter Verheugen, now himself a Commissioner. I can say that we effectively secured the structural funds for the new period at virtually the existing level while in the Republic their allocation was slashed.

But, the official machine, which was happy to use us then, scarcely talks to us now. It suspects we will fail to achieve devolution and looks forward to resuming their unaccountable personal rule of Northern Ireland.

I want to disappoint them!

During these difficulties, we have a constant stream of advice from Bob McCartney, once too the leader of a party, now the scriptwriter for David Vance. The trouble with Bob's advice is that he seems to be against everything. His idea of getting to the top of the tree is to stand at the bottom and tell everyone how dangerous it is to climb.

Bob is very proud of his reputation. But it puts me in mind of Dolly Parton – out of all proportion and with no visible means of support.

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Then there is advice from the DUP who are so opposed to power-sharing and republicans though I hear that Peter Robinson has been seen ordering the furniture for his ministerial room. I recall that on 15th July he and Ian needed half an hour of last minute adjournments - no doubt searching for excuses that would let them take up office alongside republicans.

But seriously reflect on the fact that Peter has been in Parliament for twenty years and Ian for thirty. Ask yourself, in all these years,

- what have they achieved?
- have they strengthened the Union?
- have they increased the friends of unionism?
- have they offered any hope for the future?

Indeed in twenty or thirty years experience of Parliament is there any sign that they have learnt anything?

No, they continue in their usual selfish way. Nigel Dodds has announced he will fight North Belfast. This party has held this seat for years and Cecil Walker was returned with a massive vote. The Ulster Unionist Party will fight North Belfast at the next election, and if Mr Dodds puts personal ambition before the best interests of unionism and hands the seat to republicans he and his party will never be forgiven.

Then some talk of alternatives to the Agreement. I have only heard two mentioned. One could be called the county council option. That is a return of power to a small number of larger local authorities. But what would this mean in practice. Bearing in mind the way that boundaries would be drawn, it means handing over half of Northern Ireland over to nationalist and republican control.

Where then would the new border be?

The other alternative mentioned is administrative devolution on the Welsh model. We supported this option in 1991 and 1992. Iit was the basis of the proposals we made in the Brooke and Mayhew talks. Then we tried very hard under Jim Molyneaux's leadership to get agreement: but could not.

Originally the Welsh Assembly was based on proportionality. That concept was at the heart of our proposals for a Northern Ireland Assembly. Last year the government's ideas for Wales changed. The Assembly led today by Alun Michael, Wales' First Secretary is now based on simple majority rule.

Now does anyone think that we can today persuade others to accept simple majority rule?

It is more than ten years since this party's policy moved to proportionality. A major shift that recognised the political realities. There were big arguments at the time. I was not involved but I remember a friend telling me of a confrontation with a then senior

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Unionist. That unionist declared, "I would give them nothing". To which my friend replied, "They don't want any more from you – they've got it all already!"

This process is actually about Unionism clawing back part of what has already been taken from it. Anyone who thinks otherwise has had his head in the sand for the last fifteen years.

Remember John Taylor was quite right to remind people recently that we will not achieve progress without agreement with nationalists and includes republicans. Those who talk of so-called alternatives do not address the fact that Sinn Fein will be represented in those bodies and they will have to deal with them whether in a new council set-up or an alternative assembly.

The problem we face now is inescapable while Sinn Fein maintains substantial electoral support. I wonder if the alternative strategists have a strategy for reducing Sinn Fein's electoral support, for persuading those who presently vote for them to vote for another party.

Not that we regard Sinn Fein as just another party. We will not forget the inextricable link between it and the IRA. That is why I refer so often to them both as the Republican Movement – it is after all their phrase.

And the Republican Movement has been a force for evil in this society. I do not ignore the fact that violence is at a lower level than before the cease-fires, but violence continues even from groups supposedly on cease-fire.

Since the Agreement, loyalists on cease-fire have been responsible for 3 murders, 181 beatings, 76 shootings and have exiled nearly 400 people from their homes. In the same period, the IRA, during its cease-fire committed 5 murders, 160 beatings and 62 shootings and has exiled over 400 people from their homes.

We demand yet again that all paramilitaries cease all these attacks!

Sinn Fein cannot distance themselves from this. It is rank hypocrisy for Mr Adams to lecture society on rights and equality while he connives at these barbaric onslaughts.

He is in no doubt as to our insistence that these abuses of human rights must stop.

Nor can they pretend that beatings are acceptable in republican dominated estates in the absence of normal policing

There was an attack a few weeks ago in Ardowen in Craigavon. Fourteen year old Eamon O'Hanlon was very badly beat. Dr Liam Kennedy, who stood as a human rights candidate against Adams at the General Election, conducted an opinion survey in the

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estate. He visited over a hundred houses only 4 refused to speak to him. Forty-seven agreed to complete a detailed questionnaire.

Overwhelmingly they opposed paramilitary attacks. Only 4 supported shootings and 7 other attacks. Dr. Kennedy said, "Some of the additional comments and the vehemence with which they were made left little room for doubt that punishment beatings and shootings were regarded as beyond the pale of acceptable behaviour."

I am sure we all agree with the good people of Ardowen.

One of the researchers said that he was struck by the number of times people mentioned a low level of policing on the nationalist estate and a desire for greater policing by the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Which is a better comment on the acceptability of the RUC than anything in the Patten.

That comment also shows that all decent people, nationalist and unionist together, want the same thing - the effective and professional RUC being allowed to get to grips with the Mafia state that is trying to take over various neighbourhoods. And name and other changes are simple not relevant.

We should remind ourselves of what all decent people want. It is what we are still trying to achieve.

A peaceful, fair and democratic Northern Ireland.
Free from bomb, bullet or baseball bat.
Our people at ease with themselves and their neighbours.
No longer obsessed with the constitutional issue– for it has been solved.
The consent principle recognised.
Formal acceptance of the legitimacy of our place within the Union.
Greater certainty and stability than at any time in this century.
Democratic accountability restored.
Where Northern Ireland is administered by its people.
Where common problems are tackled together.
Where the talents of all our people are fully realised.
Where unionists are respected – where nationalists are respected.
Where our children can see a future worth staying for.

All this is worth the effort,
worth shouldering the burden,
knowing that it can be done,
knowing that if it were left to others it would never be done
knowing it is our opportunity and responsibility to build a better future.

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Yes we face difficulties. But it was never going to be easy. As Margaret Thatcher once said that for her the word "failure" did not exist. We too do not assume that there will be failure. Our focus is on building that better future.

As she told her party when the going got tough in the early eighties, "there is no alternative".

In difficult situations it is easy to talk tough. Remember the big rally at Belfast City Hall just after the Anglo-Irish Agreement. In his own quiet way, Jim Molyneaux undercut the bombast of some others. As he so rightly said, the true glory lies not in a grand beginning, but in carrying it on until all is completed.

We will strive to carry through to completion

We have not given in. We will not give up

We are a confident party.

We offer leadership.

We believe passionately in the Union as the best for all in Northern Ireland.

As we approach 2000 – the bi-centenary of the Act of Union – on this day as on every other day, let us represent that commitment to the Union.

For the last hundred years we have been the safeguard of the Union.

Let us show the world this Party is ready to do as much and more throughout the next hundred years.

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