

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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26th October 2000

Dear Fellow Unionist,

You will by now have received a copy of the proposal to be put before Saturday's Ulster Unionist Council meeting by Jeffrey Donaldson and those others who seem determined to destroy the Agreement.

Whilst some of the language appears reasonable, I believe the proposals to be fatally flawed. It is nothing more than a carefully disguised manifesto to bring down what some colleagues refer to as "the toytown Parliament". Furthermore, it provides no clear route to re-establishing devolved government at Stormont. It is an exit strategy without a re-entry strategy.

The central element of the proposal is to immediately withdraw from North/South meetings and withdraw from the Executive within five weeks unless there is a substantial hand-over of weapons from Sinn Fein/IRA. In the meantime, it is said that the Assembly would somehow be retained. This is simply not so: the power to suspend applies across the board. The Secretary of State has no power to suspend only part of the institutions. Resignation does not immediately end the Executive but if the Executive eventually collapses there is no power to continue the Assembly without it.

On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that if this strategy were endorsed on Saturday the collapse of the Assembly and the Agreement would begin immediately. Ulster Unionism, which has gained so much credibility by faithfully implementing its side of the Agreement, would lose that credibility overnight. In short, there would be no Assembly and no decommissioning. What is more, Ulster Unionism would be left dangerously marginalised. I am determined not to allow unionism to be put back in that position.

I do not pretend the current situation is satisfactory but causing the political process to collapse within the next few weeks is not the answer. Furthermore, to make a fundamental breach with the agreement we

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reached on decommissioning at Hillsborough in May would only be to republicanism's benefit.

Political pressure correctly applied has brought and can bring rewards for unionism but what is contained in the Donaldson proposal would be utterly counter-productive. That is why tomorrow I will outline a carefully considered response should republicanism continue to ignore its commitments on the issue of disarmament.

The response is intended to increase pressure progressively on republicans and nationalists. This might result in a crisis for the Assembly and Executive. But if that arises we must do all we can to place responsibility on republicans. Only in that way can suspension be achieved. Suspension is preferable to collapse for it is the only way we can hope to make progress afterwards.

As I proved in February, there is a "bottom line" and it will not change. We are determined to achieve decommissioning and have no intention of acquiescing in mere inspections.

But I have to say that had the Council listened to the advice of those in the anti-Agreement camp we would not now have the Assembly and committees they seem so keen to preserve. The Assembly would have 'crashed' a long time ago with republicanism only bolstered.

It is my intention to listen carefully to the views of delegates tomorrow. I am already well aware of the concerns. But I believe that if we lose our nerve, we will squander every gain we have made and the very real prospect we have of further improvement in the unionist position.

I hope I can count on your support as I have been able to at each of the 21 meetings of the UUC and Party Executive where we have debated the Belfast Agreement.

Yours sincerely,

David Trimble

The Rt. Hon. David Trimble MP MLA

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