



1. Mr. Blufffield
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NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service

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EXTRACT FROM A SPEECH BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND,
THE RT HON TOM KING MP, TO THE LONDON DIPLOMATIC ASSOCIATION, ON
12 DECEMBER 1985

Yesterday we held the first meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in Belfast. It dealt with issues which are of concern to everybody in Northern Ireland. In particular we discussed ways of enhancing security co-operation between ourselves and the Irish, and relations between the security forces and the minority community.

Yet yesterday's meeting was greeted with protests and even violence. I believe that was profoundly mistaken, because the Conference is not the beginning of some slippery slope to a united Ireland.

The Agreement is absolutely clear. It enshrines the principle that there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority, and it acknowledges that that consent is not forthcoming.

The Conference itself is going to be a forum in which we discuss practical matters from which everybody can benefit. One of the most important of these is obviously increased co-operation on security. The recent spate of attacks on police stations near the border, tragically illustrates the need to enhance this co-operation.

That is something the Unionist community has, quite rightly, been pressing for over many years.

So I hope that the Unionists will take advantage of the opportunities that the Agreement does, despite their fears, offer them; opportunities to improve security and to get devolution going.

The Conference specifically provides an opportunity for the views of the minority to be heard but of course the views of the majority must be listened to as well.

The Unionist leaders complain that we are not listening to their views. But at the same time they are talking of resigning from Parliament, they have suspended the normal business of the Assembly and many councils, and are walking out of public bodies. And they refuse to speak to Ministers.

That is hardly consistent behaviour. We want to hear the Unionists' views on all matters affecting Northern Ireland, including the matters we discuss in the Intergovernmental Conference. The Unionists always have had channels of communication to the Government, they still have and we want them to use them.

The benefits of the Anglo-Irish Agreement will take time to mature, and I am under no illusion that men of violence on both sides of the community, who thrive on tension and disharmony will seek to destabilise the situation.

The Government is determined that they shall not succeed, and I am sure that this is a determination that the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland share.