



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Meeting between the Tánaiste and Sinn Féin delegation

11th December, 1995

Present were:

**Government side:** The Tánaiste, the undersigned.

**Sinn Féin:** Mr. Martin McGuinness, Mr. Aidan McAteer, Ms. Rita O'Hare.

1. The Tánaiste welcomed the delegation. He referred to the IRA statement the previous Thursday which had badly wrong-footed him in terms of the British media on Friday. Fortunately Mayhew had been persuaded to play the matter down.
2. Ms. O'Hare said there had been no intention that the two should coincide. Mr. McGuinness countered that his supporters were surprised at the handling of the meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister. There were confused at what was being said and whether the twin-track approach was designed to genuinely overcome obstacles. They were concerned also at the presence of the Canadian General. He asked the Tánaiste how he saw the work of the Body, in view of the very negative position of Paisley and Trimble.
3. The Tánaiste indicated it would be helpful to have an idea of how Sinn Féin would approach the Body. Mr. McGuinness said they were preparing a submission. It would be comprehensive. It would cover the role of the British Army etc. They would be prepared to show it to the Irish Government. He added it was important to understand that Sinn Féin could not speak for the IRA. They had met the IRA, and gave an analysis which had led to a cessation. To go back and to broach the decommissioning issue with the IRA would be "to question our integrity with those people".

*Doireach  
Do see please in Murray,  
13/12*

SEEN BY  
COPY TO:  
PST  
PSS  
MR. F MURRAY  
MR. P TEAHON  
MR. S. DONLON  
MR. T DALTON

*Seen. The SF/IRA  
position is to look for  
the maximum all the time.*

*Mr. Hare  
Mr. Dalton*

4. The Tánaiste asked if this meant the IRA would never decommission. Mr. McGuinness said they would do so in the context of overall agreement. He would support that. To do otherwise would cause a split which would be disastrous. As the delays got longer, there was a growing belief in the republican community that the entire peace process had turned into one of cornering the IRA. He referred to various negative statements over the weekend (Seamus Mallon ?) which had added to these fears. Certain statements by the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Major had also been very unhelpful.
  
5. The Tánaiste pointed out that Mr. Major, like Sinn Féin themselves, had occasionally to say things for the benefit of his own community. The Taoiseach had marked his distance very firmly and publicly when Prime Minister Major had made that necessary at the Conference.
  
6. Mr. O hUiginn asked the delegation to focus on the outcome of the Mitchell Body. What, realistically, could the Body envisage as an alternative to Washington Three? Were there areas where Sinn Féin could help in building confidence?
  
7. Mr. McGuinness said the sustaining of the ceasefire over the past sixteen months was being devalued. The question now was whether more could be got from the IRA. He felt that was impossible as a gesture. Trimble and the unionists were being totally hardline and negative. The proposal for a convention was a source of concern.
  
8. The Tánaiste said he acknowledged all those difficulties. However every obstacle required an effort to overcome it. The Irish Government accepted there would not be a surrender. However, if the Commission reported and something constructive were done by Sinn Féin, nobody could argue any more that the commitment to peace was not serious.

9. Mr. McGuinness said "If Gerry Adams and I went to the IRA we would be finished. That's how serious it is." It was only because of himself and Adams that the peace process had lasted so long. They were now right "out on the plank, fighting a losing battle."
10. Mr. O hUiginn again asked whether there were particular ideas which it might be useful for the Irish Government to put to the Body, since there was a common interest in having a report which gave people encouragement. Mr. McGuinness said that the difficulty was that anything that could be thought of in the way of confidence building gestures directly affected the IRA. He and Adams were sacrificial lambs and would not come through unscathed. They had taken matters to the IRA prior to the ceasefire. They could not go back now.
11. The Tánaiste stressed that the key objective was to come out of the twin-tracks with the peace process intact and the prospect of progress. Mr. McGuinness said that would "drag us onto ground of sinking sand". He felt the Commission might report that Sinn Féin was committed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, etc. The Tánaiste objected that that had been said already, but had not been convincing to those that had to be engaged.
12. Mr. McGuinness said that the only thing that would satisfy those people (i.e. the British Government and the Unionists) would be a total disarmament and defeat of the IRA and the destruction of Sinn Féin. He had been at a large funeral in Derry and no-one there had been consulted on the Sunday Tribune poll on decommissioning. The key problem for Sinn Féin was the motivation of the British Government. The one British voice to praise Gerry Adams or to recognise his achievement, had been Peter Brooke. Otherwise there had been only sixteen months of begrudgery and provocation.
13. The Tánaiste said that the British were not going to go away. Their dependence on the unionists would be worse in six months time. Mr. McAteer objected that the

decommissioning issue was a bogus issue. The IRA view was a matter for the IRA, and Sinn Féin's mandate should not depend on that. The key was to build a political process so that arms were no longer necessary.

14. Mr. McGuinness asked how the Rev. Ian Paisley showed his commitment to peaceful process? Where was the credibility of the political track? He recently advocated using legally held weapons.
15. Mr. O hUiginn said the British themselves were aware that the political track would have to be credible in retrospect, or that would cast a shadow on the twin-track process as a whole for them. Pressures could be brought to bear on the British Government but it had to be done in the realm of politics rather than by means of the decommissioning debate, which ultimately centred on the gun.
16. There followed an inconclusive exchange on whether it would be possible for Sinn Féin to have a sight of or a briefing on the Government submission. While indicating that this was in any case a matter for political decision, it became clear that the very tight timetable did not admit of any very extensive consultation. (It was subsequently agreed that Sinn Féin would make contact with the Government on Thursday, to establish the position).
17. Sinn Féin indicated that they were likely to meet the British under the political track. There was a feeling that after a bilateral with each Government the question of meeting the Governments jointly could be put to the British.
18. Towards the end of the meeting Ms. O'Hare raised the question of prisoners. Mr. McGuinness emphasised the importance of a generous release for Christmas. (He hinted that their understanding with the previous Taoiseach was that Portlaoise would be empty within the year). The Tánaiste pointed to the sensitivity of the issue, and the comments that could be made if a five year sentence amounted to four

months. He indicated that discussions on this issue were continuing in the Government.

19. Ms. O'Hare raised the question of bail for Quinlivan and McAuley. They were under severe pressure from the families and would have to go public (with criticism) if no progress were made. The Tánaiste said they could not instruct the Garda to take a particular position on bail. He emphasised the sensitivity from the point of view of the Garda of a number of developments. The killing of Paul Devine in Belfast was unclaimed, but there were widespread suspicions of Republican involvement. He complained again about intimidation of drug users in Kerry. There could not be a position where Republicans were being let out of prison on one track and reimprisoned on another track.
20. Mr. McGuinness objected there was no evidence as to who had killed Mr. Devine. Drugs were a major scourge all over. The Tánaiste stressed that this problem could only be addressed within the law and this was being done. He set out in emphatic terms his objection to certain actions that were being taken.
21. Ms. O'Hare raised the question of "the forty year men". She urged that certain relaxations should be offered to them. Her point on this was noted.
22. After the meeting with the Tánaiste and the departure of Mr. McGuinness and Ms. O'Hare, Mr. Aidan McAteer spoke to me, essentially going over the grounds already set out by McGuinness in terms of the lack of manoeuvre with the IRA, the anger and frustration in the Republican community, and their doubts about British intentions and the twin-track process. He expressed the view that the Irish Government submission should be designed as a deliberate balance to the likely British submission.
23. I said our goal would be to get everyone off hooks, but that the Irish Government submission would clearly have to reflect the Irish Government view, e.g. on the

desirability of decommissioning, and could not be a Sinn Féin draft. We agreed that Mr. McAteer should contact either Mr. Teahon or myself on Thursday to establish whether they could be briefed on the lines of the Government submission.

Sean Ó hUiginn

12 December 1995

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