



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/98/5

**Creator(s):** Department of the Taoiseach

**Accession Conditions:** Open

**Copyright:** National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

1

**STATEMENT**

The Fianna Fáil Front Bench Committee on Northern Ireland under the Chairmanship of the Party Leader Mr. Bertie Ahern T.D. met this morning to consider the situation created by the Mitchell Report and the British Government's response to it.

Following the meeting, Mr. Bertie Ahern expressed the following views, some of which he had previously stated in the Dáil Chamber on the Order of Business :

" I regard it as absolutely tragic that with the favourable initial response to the Mitchell Report hopes for an imminent breakthrough in the peace process were dashed within a few hours by the statement of the British Prime Minister in the House of Commons. His statement constituted, apart from anything else, a grave discourtesy to Senator Mitchell and his Body, and preempted calm and careful consideration of his findings, which have been completely overshadowed.

There is intense and widespread anger throughout Nationalist Ireland that the Prime Minister instantly brushed the Mitchell Report aside, with its criticism

2

~~of the lack of realism~~ of his Government's demands over the last year. He has in effect refused to accept it, as it was intended, as a basis for proceeding immediately to all-party talks. The Prime Minister posed an absolutely false dichotomy between the IRA acceptance of the Washington 3 precondition and the Assembly as the only two possible routes to all-party talks. The proper course of action for the two Governments and all other parties was to accept the Mitchell Report in full and proceed to organise all-party talks.

The Irish Government must now give firm leadership, and demand that the British Government and all other parties accept the Mitchell Report in full, and that the British Government honour their solemn commitment in the 28 November communiqué to the firm aim of convening all-party talks by the end of February. The good faith of the British Government is in question here.

The Prime Minister has invoked opinion polls, which are notoriously unreliable when it comes to Northern Ireland, to suit British purposes. I am quite certain that if an opinion poll were held this morning there would be overwhelming public support in Ireland for acceptance of the Mitchell Report, and proceeding to all-party talks by the end of February.

3

I expressed the fear last December at the time the twin-track approach was hastily launched just before President Clinton's visit that it might only involve moving the road-block ten yards down the road. I also warned that the British Prime Minister might just be looking for another plausible excuse for inertia, now that the Washington 3 precondition has exhausted its usefulness. This has now happened.

The British Government have once again ignored the Irish Government, who are handicapped by growing signs of disunity in their own ranks and by the delay in showing strong leadership by the Taoiseach. Were the Taoiseach and Irish Government properly consulted? Where was the co-ordinated response to the Mitchell Report that the two Governments were supposed to be working on? Why was the Government apparently caught unawares by the force of the British Prime Minister's commitment to an elected Body? I accept the Tánaiste's account given in the Dáil yesterday and today. But what did the Taoiseach agree with John Major on Tuesday night? Were the Taoiseach's Office made aware as far back as last Friday, that the British would go for an elected body? I want full clarification from the Taoiseach.

As the Mitchell Report points out, to make any contribution an elected body

4

would have to satisfy three conditions, be 'broadly acceptable', have 'an appropriate mandate' and be 'within the three strand structure'. The Unionist Party's proposal does not satisfy any of those conditions. It is intended as a substitute for the three strand structure, and whatever about the British Governemnt Mr. Trimble envisages that all-party talks would be put off for at least two years.

A decision to participate in an elected body or elections will be a matter for the Northern Nationalist parties themselves. But Fianna Fáil will support them in any political decision that they take.

I would call on Ireland's friends in the United States not to allow a successful report and an imaginative initiative sponsored by President Clinton to be sidelined and torpedoed in this manner by the entire British political establishment. The United States should make it clear in no uncertain terms to Britain that its response to the efforts put in by Senator Mitchell is unhelpful and unacceptable ".

25 January 1996