

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Pls pa. on Loyalist prisoners

FOR: M BROWNE/EMBASSY, LONDON **FROM**: B NOLAN

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Comments by David Ervine, Michael Ancram and Peter Robinson, re non-transfer of Jason Campbell to the Maze Prison, BBC Radio Ulster "Inside Politics", 11 October 1997

DAVID ERVINE

Interviewer: I put it to David Ervine that the PUP had lost any moral high ground they may have held, as a result of the case.

Ervine: I think, first of all, we have to acknowledge and accept that the delegates who are arriving here today for our party conference do so against a background of what can only be described as a debacle - you've got it right. Nevertheless, we have policies and attitudes that we have proven to be able to hold to over quite a number of years now. And what we are here for is to evaluate what has happened to us and more especially to analyse where we go in the future; and I don't believe that the delegates appearing here today with a solid commitment to the Progressive Unionist Party, a solid commitment to peace, a solid commitment to the future, are likely to be totally deflected by this.

Interviewer: What does this whole debacle say about your relationship, the party's relationship with the UVF? The UVF were very insistent that this transfer should take place, where do we go from here?

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Ervine: I don't think that that is absolutely accurate. I think that what happened is the issue of Jason Campbell had been running long before there was a likelihood of passing a wish-list, if you like, to Government. Now, what happened and what went wrong was when that was tagged on to what was seen as a confidence-building measure. So I don't believe that you can say, and it is absolutely inaccurate to say that the UVF demanded the transfer of Jason Campbell, per se. What they did and what we did and certainly, we take the blame for it, you've heard me say that clearly, is that we tagged it on and that, perhaps was a mistake.

Interviewer: So, effectively you're saying you regret that this whole issue ever came about in the first place now?

Ervine: We are on record as having helped quite a number of people to be repatriated, who have no involvement with paramilitary organisations. We have, for humanitarian grounds, argued issues to get people close to those who care for them, and we won't stop doing that. What, I think, we made a serious mistake on here was tagging it in under a political circumstance and it think that that was a mistake, we recognise that as a mistake and we do acknowledge that the likely fallout from this was not appreciated by ourselves and that was a misjudgement. Where it becomes really painful in terms of a misjudgement is, not what it is doing to the Progressive Unionist Party, it's what it's doing to the Scott family and the whole wounds that have been opened for them again.

Interviewer: There have been now calls for resignations of Scottish Ministers and the Secretary of State, who supported this call for Jason Campbell to be transferred, she has had a statement issued, partly on her behalf by the Scottish Secretary Donald Dewar saying that if facts were overlooked then he and she regret this. This has obviously much greater importance than just in terms of what's happening with your party.

Ervine: Certainly it would seem to be but I think we'll have to watch the Conservatives very carefully, I mean they will clutch at any straw to attempt to damage Labour within Scotland and it think we're seeing that. I wonder what Michael Ancram's position would

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have been on this, had he been Secretary of State or Minister of State for Northern Ireland, if we were dealing with the same issue, I don't think it would have been much different.

Interviewer: Where do you go from here though in repairing the sort of damage that may have been done to your party's prestige?

Ervine: Well, first of all, we began our lives in splendid isolation; I think that people have been listening to us and slowly but surely and at times quite dramatically, our party is growing and the evidence of that will be seen here today at our Party Conference. We will get on with the job at hand. The job at hand for us is the copper fastening of the absence of violence and an opportunity for peace for our people in the future, that's what our job is and that is the focus of attention. No one said we are perfect, no said we would ever not make mistakes, we've made mistakes and we are intent on not making mistakes in the future, however the fundamental issue is what is around the corner for my children and my children's children and that goes for the rest of the society. And that is the core issue of the politics and policies of the Progressive Unionist Party as will be deliberated and played out here today.

Interviewer: Do you think there is any long-term damage in all of this for the Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam?

Ervine: Frankly I think not, I think we are all in difficult and very special circumstances. We are in uncharted waters and had there been a book that perhaps gave us the recipe for how not to do things or how to do things, maybe we wouldn't make mistakes, but we're in uncharted waters, we are in strange and wonderful times perhaps or potentially wonderful times and there's no one to, shall we say, go back to a recipe book to ensure that things are done right.

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MICHAEL ANCRAM

Interviewer: I asked Michael Ancram what questions he wanted to see answered.

Ancram: I want to know precisely what happened because three days ago when the public began to become concerned about this, we were told that a decision had been taken according to the criteria. When I pressed for further information, I was effectively told to mind my own business, and then suddenly yesterday morning we are told that the Secretary of State for Scotland is looking at this for the first time and then last night the decision is reversed. I mean, whatever else, this is the most extraordinary saga of incompetence and irresponsibility and we need to know more about it.

Interviewer: Are there very specific questions of procedure you want to see addressed?

Ancram: We have certain criteria for transferring prisoners and when I'm told that those criteria were not meet, we therefore need to know why it was thought that they were met earlier on in the week and what has made the difference now, I want to know what Ministerial input there was to this. Henry McLeish is the Prisons Minister, we understand that Donald Dewar only saw it on Friday, but he must have seen it earlier, was he consulted, did he agree with it, if he agreed with it why is he not explaining now what has changed, if he didn't agree with it, why did it go ahead. These are the sort of questions we have to have answered and the reason why it's important is that for three days, public opinion in Scotland and particularly in Glasgow, was very aroused, people were very concerned, there was a lot of fear and anger about and we were met by a wall of silence and that is simply not good enough in circumstances like this.

Interviewer: You've called for Henry McLeish to consider his position, but can you understand the position of a Minister in the Scottish Office who is being asked for a prisons transfer which carries the imprimatur of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who says, 'look, this would be a good idea because in the interests of wider confidence-building, we'd

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like this to happen'. Can you see the pressure that would come on a Minister in those circumstances?

Ancram: This is not a question of political convenience, we don't have political prisoners, transfers are made for very good reasons and for criteria which are clearly set out. What we want to know is what criteria were considered in this case and why, suddenly, these have changed. We are told now that information given was not correct. I want to get to the bottom of this and to know precisely on what basis the original decision was made and if it was made on the wrong basis, then the Minister who was involved in making that should consider his position, I've said I think Henry McLeish should resign.

Interviewer: Why do you think it took so long for the Scottish Secretary, Donald Dewar, to get involved.

Ancram: I find this quite incredible because my understanding was that a transfer of this kind anyway would be a matter at least notified to both Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Scotland. My understanding was Donald Dewar appears only to have looked at this for the first time on Friday. Another question which needs to be asked and answered - when you look at all this, I'm not overstating it when I say it is a frightening saga of incompetence or irresponsibility for which somebody must answer.

Interviewer: You've been a Northern Ireland Office Minister, you know the sort of particular pressures that come on to Northern Ireland Office Ministers and it takes me back to the same question that - given that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland wanted this to happen for what would be seen in her terms as very good, wider reasons - can you understand the position that Henry McLeish was placed in?

Ancram: Henry McLeish has a responsibility as the Prisons Minister in Scotland - and I can say this because some 10 years ago I was a holder of that Office as well - he has a responsibility to make sure that the rules are abided by and in this case it appears that the

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decision that was taken earlier on in the week was an incorrect decision. Certainly that's the impression I've got from Donald Dewar's reversal of that decision now and I go back to what I was saying earlier, when you actually get a situation where public opinion is so inflamed in a city like Glasgow that the Cardinal Archbishop of Glasgow starts talking about the sectarian consequences of this, that is a very serious matter and it's not something that can just be brushed aside on the basis of the general pressures that might come upon Ministers. Ministers are there to do a job and to do it properly.

Interviewer: Just how much damage do you think has been done to the credibility, for instance of the Scottish Office in this matter.

Ancram: I think a lot of damage has been done and particularly because, as I say, when for two days we were pressing for information on this, we were effectively being told to mind our own business and that everything was in order, suddenly we find 48 hours down the road that it certainly was not in order and that really does raise very serious questions marks about the behaviour of the Scottish Office in this instance and in particular of the Minister responsible.

Interviewer: Doesn't this all keep taking us back to the point of political pragmatism in Northern Ireland versus perhaps breaches of the rules in Scotland?

Ancram: Questions of prisoners have never been questions of political pragmatism because we don't have political prisoners and treatment of prisoners is according to rules, it always has been and I believe it always should be.

Interviewer: If there is to be an investigation of this matter, should all of the Ministers who have had contact with this issue, including Dr Mowlam, be involved in that investigation and should they all be called to account for their actions?

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Ancram: Well, my remit covers obviously the overview of the Scottish Office and my interest is in the actions of Scottish Office Ministers in this regard because the man concerned was a prisoner in Scotland, convicted in a Scottish Court under the Scottish jurisdiction and I want to know what decisions were taken by Scottish Ministers in that context.

PETER ROBINSON

Interviewer: Peter Robinson, what do you make of the whole Jason Campbell case?

Robinson: I think there are several elements. First of all, it's very clear that the whole basis of the so-called peace process is built upon the principle that you buy off terrorists. The IRA have had a never-ending list of demands on the Government and as soon as the Government starts to go through the list and complete it, the IRA produces a new list. What does the PUP do? They think that they can get in on this wheeze of twisting the Government's arm, they make a demand of the Government, is it to defend the Union, is it a step towards making the Unionist community more comfortable? No, not at all. They decide that bringing a cut-throat from Glasgow to Northern Ireland is the top of the PUP shopping list and then we have this mess where first of all we have the hypocrisy of Michael Ancram - who set up the whole principle of buying off terrorists - complaining of the Scottish Office when everybody knows that the Scottish Office had it forced upon them because the Northern Ireland Office had done the deal with the PUP.

Interviewer: Mo Mowlam was involved in this process, she supported the transfer.

Robinson: She wasn't so much involved, she was responsible entirely for the process, because it was the Northern Ireland Office who was engaged in doing deals with terrorists in Northern Ireland and who insisted that the Scottish Office release this person. So it is entirely M Mowlam and her Ministers in Northern Ireland and the whole lot of them should go. It's very clear that they are the responsible parties.

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Interviewer: Where do we go from here with this, though? The PUP have been damaged very badly by it, they accept that it's a debacle. There will be collateral damage, as it were, for the Northern Ireland Office, where do we go from here?

Robinson: People seem to think that something remarkable has happened over the last couple of days. This is what's been going on for months and months. For instance, the Provisional IRA are getting prisoners moved around and released, nobody seems to be making a lot of noise about it. Are they more decent murderers than the ones that the PUP are wanting moved? It's a nonsense the whole process, built upon the edifice that if you can buy these people you'll get a respite from terror, it doesn't work.

Interviewer: Moving on to the wider peace process, we've had this week the start of the full three-stranded process. Your party isn't involved in that but there are those who argue that there cannot - and yourselves among them - that if this process was set up to bring Sinn Féin into it because it wouldn't work without Sinn Féin, that equally, you would argue that it would be important for the DUP to be part of any settlement for that settlement to work, how do you get a scenario going where you are more involved in a process which you can feel happier in?

Robinson: I think any intelligent person looking at the position would come to that conclusion. Unfortunately, the Government hasn't. The Government believes that those representing a lesser number of people but who are the mouthpieces for terrorists are much more important to the process than a larger political party which operates within the democratic process, largely I think because the IRA are bombing Britain and the DUP is not. So, that's the thinking of the Northern Ireland Office but they've got it terribly wrong. Anybody who thinks that you can set up new structures and constitutional positions in Northern Ireland without the support of an overwhelming majority of the Unionist community - because let's make it very clear, it's not simply one party outside the talks process, those representing the majority of Unionists are outside the talks process because Mr Trimble isn't speaking for the majority of his own party, he may be speaking for a number of

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people within his party but there are very strong and prominent voices within the Ulster Unionist Party who do not accept what he is doing.

Interviewer: But aren't there even those within your own party who aren't entirely happy with what your party is up to? Unionism is not a monolith, I recall the poll that was conducted by Coopers and Lybrand which suggested that 22% of DUP supporters would want their leadership in there in the talks and in there with Sinn Féin.

Robinson: The reality is that the Democratic Unionist Party 100% believe that we are doing the right thing because we are doing what our manifesto said we would do. People voted for us to do exactly what we are doing now. And I hear some of our opposition saying to us that we are letting our voters down by not being there. We told our voters what we were going to do. Our voters voted for us on the basis of doing exactly what we are doing now. We are the ones who are being honest and consistent. It's the other people who have broken their election pledges, I think, who should be having the whole basis of argument turned on them and they should be having to explain to their electorate why it is that they have departed from their principles, why they have departed from the pledges that they gave.

Interviewer: But polls are also saying that the DUP are effectively sitting on the sidelines. There will be an Assembly emerging from all of this and the DUP will take advantage of what they would perhaps refer to as the fruits of the settlement without taking any risks with their supporters. And you'll toddle on to the Assembly and make it work like everybody else when the settlement comes round.

Robinson: I can think of nothing that I would rather be doing than being party of a fair and level playing field talks process. I am in politics, I have been in politics for several decades. I want to be part of a negotiating process but it would be futile to be in a negotiating process where the Chairman was imposed upon us, where the Ground-Rules were set down by others, where the end result has already been identified in those Ground-Rules in

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paragraph 4 as being the Framework Document for a united Ireland. Now, what politician who has any respect for his own position and for his electorate would allow him or herself to be in a process where it is already determined what the outcome will be. That isn't the kind of process that Unionists should be in. I want to have a process where a Unionist outcome is possible, where we can actually go in and negotiate believing that there are not people within it who are trying to direct the whole process as the British Government and the Dublin Government are doing.

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