

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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SECRET

MEETING WITH THE IRSP, 7 DECEMBER 1998

The Taoiseach accompanied by Mr. Tim Dalton, Secretary-General of the Department of Justice and the undersigned met with an IRSP delegation led by Gerry Duddy and consisting of Willie Gallagher, Paul Little and Jimmy Bradley in Drumcondra.

1. IRSP Ard Fheis

Gerry Duddy conveyed to the Taoiseach the information that the Ard Fheis held in Dublin at the weekend had unanimously endorsed the ceasefire and that the leadership had been re-elected.

2. General Political Situation

The Taoiseach gave the background to the events of last week. Gerry Duddy said that they had picked up indications of a serious split in the Ulster Unionist party, which was creating a vacuum in Loyalism. He said the position at Drumcree was outrageous. It was naked intimidation and racism, being tolerated by the RUC. With all the emphasis on the Assembly and North-South bodies, the position on the ground should not be overlooked.

The IRSP had not accepted the Agreement, but they accepted the will of the people. The British Government should have moved forthwith on the Executive and reform of the police (they wanted abolition, but now that was not going to happen).

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They were totally opposed to punishment beatings. They felt there was a vacuum at government level, and the RUC had not the will to scatter the protesters at Drumcree. The Mowlam régime had become a lame-duck Administration. The Quinn tragedy had got the British Government off the hook, and politically speaking had been a lucky break for them. Their concern was the danger of people being sucked in. There was a full commitment to the ceasefire and no pressure to break it, but a pro-active stance was needed. He did not believe the Unionists will concede anything willingly. Taylor had said Catholics will not get equality, because Unionists were in a majority, and they still did not concede that the old Stormont had discriminated. The 20 year war had not been about putting the Unionists back in, when there was not even going to be a joint economic approach. Aquaculture could not be sold to people.

The Taoiseach said once cooperation and the implementation bodies got into the system and started working through an agenda it would all take off. OPW had recently met its Northern Ireland equivalent, and they had identified 30 areas of practical cooperation. This would take off, and it would not just be what was initially agreed. Tony Blair wanted all that to happen. But he conceded that there was still a lot of bigotry in the Unionist leadership.

Duddy said the late Harold McCusker had a least made some effort to mix. He believed there was a tie-in between the Ulster Unionists in Portadown and the LVF, Portadown being an Ulster Unionist stronghold.

Asked about the status of the changes to Articles 2 and 3, the Taoiseach said their implementation could be extended for 12 months.

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Duddy said they were mainly concerned about things happening on the ground. They reckoned some Catholics would get killed, but there would be no knee-jerk reaction. He asked, if the Agreement failed, did the Governments have a Plan B. He suggested that an international body should arrange a meeting of the paramilitary organisations on ceasefire to discuss ways of forestalling conflict, with stand-back approaches. Quite small things had brought down previous ceasefires in Lenadoon and the Lower Falls in the early 1970s. In response to my point that the IRA did not accept Loyalists were their opposite numbers, Duddy said it was not enough to say the Loyalists were dupes or deluded Irishmen.

The Taoiseach said he was not factoring in failure.

Duddy said he could not even talk about decommissioning; he was more thinking about decommissioning of mindsets. It would be important for people to get to know each other.

3. Prisoners

Willie Gallagher reminded people that the prisoners had put forward the proposal for a ceasefire to the 1997 Ard Fheis, which had been rejected. They had 22 prisoners in the North, 9 in the South (7 in Portlaoise, and 2 in Wheatfield who were looking for transfer back to Portlaoise).

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Tim Dalton said the department of Justice would be putting some thoughts about the INLA contingent to Government before Christmas in a positive spirit which had worked in the past. There was a steady ceasefire.

Gallagher stressed the importance of 3-4 day paroles as a help to reintegrating prisoners into society. The parole of two prisoners to attend the Ard Fheis had been extremely useful.

The Taoiseach said he was glad it had not been hyped. The Balcombe Street appearance took him three months to come back from, and that sort of thing worked against prisoners.

It was agreed ongoing contact should be established between Willie Gallagher and D/Justice.

Duddy said he would like to see prisoners offered retraining with the aid of EU grants. All other groups, including non-aligned prisoners, were getting EU funding.

The Northern Ireland Office had a representative to the Ard Fheis, and they were hoping for recognition of their ceasefire within the next week. They would like to see a motion tabled before Parliament before Christmas. Not enough stress had been put, vis-à-vis other Republicans, of their acceptance of the will of the people, even though they disagreed with the will of the people. This had historical significance in Republican terms. Their concept was the development of a positive, constructive democratic opposition, moving into the body politic. They did not set much store by the 1918 General Election, which

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was after all a British election. The Taoiseach said he admired people who get involved in politics, whatever their position.

4. Missing Persons

A small IRSP delegation will go to Portlaoise on Wednesday to look at the video and maps from the French authorities, with prisoners, in the Seamus Ruddy case. They would like to see it resolved, and felt it could be overcome. While they were hopeful of a find, they had a Plan B. The Provisionals had treated the McConville family shabbily and contemptuously.

The Taoiseach said he had met the families of at least 9 missing persons, mostly women getting on in years, who knew the circumstances in which people had been shot, were totally realistic and just wanted to have a family funeral.

Gallagher said they were pursuing this not on political but on moral grounds.

5. Equality

Paul Little said social equality was more important than cultural equality.

The Taoiseach commented on the impact of the acceptance of Irish on the British curriculum, to which he had found a very positive response at the University of North London.

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Little said the effect of thrusting Irish at Loyalist grassroots needed to be watched. He felt debate was too much sticking on issues of symbolism.

The Taoiseach offered that our equality experts should meet Paul Little (address 16 Harcourt Drive, Belfast BT14 6 GR - tel: 0831 377161). It was agreed that Ray Bassett of D/Foreign Affairs would make contact.

6. Conclusion

Duddy said for the vast majority of Republicans the war was over. But that of course did not mean that it could not be restarted. The contact by and on behalf of the Taoiseach had made things a lot easier at the weekend.

I attach documentation passed onto us.

7 December 1998

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Submission Document

December 1998

Re : Parole, Transfer, Release and Re-settlement of IRSP / INLA prisoners in Portlaoise.

The issue concerning our prisoners is one of 'equality of treatment'. In the Memorandum Document the Government (p.2, para. 4) regards "a complete and unequivocal INLA ceasefire an important step in building confidence between the communities and of benefit to all". Our prisoners require reciprocation in order to maintain their confidence in the peace process.

The enclosed documents referred to below as (A) 'Guidelines Document' and (B) 'Pre-Release Document' were passed on to our representatives by the prison authorities. These documents contain the criteria which qualify the conditions under which Republican prisoners are given parole. Access to this provision of parole has recently been withdrawn from our prisoners. We propose a regularization and development of this provision.

Parole programme :

A new programme of parole should incorporate the existing conditions of the 'Guidelines Document' and replace the structure of the 'Pre-Release Document' with a sole provision of 'Pre-Release' guaranteeing our prisoners parole once a month pending their release under the Good Friday Agreement.

Transfer :

For humanitarian reasons we propose that our prisoners be transferred to an 'open-prison', as soon as possible, pending their release.

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Release :

There are presently seven of our prisoners in Portlaoise and two in Mountjoy Training Unit. Under the terms of the GFA we would expect 'equality of treatment' on the release of our prisoners.

We require confirmation that such releases will commence in the run up to Christmas, as agreed. An indication of which qualifying prisoners are to be released would be welcome and a time frame for those remaining.

Name	Length of Sentence	Time Served
Eddie Hogan	20 + 20 yrs	11 yrs
Tony MacNeill	15 yrs	11 yrs
Anthony Gorman	5 yrs	2 1/2 yrs
Sean Hughes	8 yrs	1 1/2 yrs
Peter Maguire	4 yrs	1 yr
Gary Adams	1 yr	8 mths
Tommy Murray	18 mths	1 mth
Denis Thompson	18 mths	1 yr
Thomas Price	18 mths	1 yr

Resettlement :

We would like the Taoiseach's commitment to assist, in every practical way, the re-integration of our prisoners back into their communities. If the Taoiseach agrees, our recommendations can be submitted for his consideration in due course. These recommendations will focus on the provision of a 'Drop-in-Centre' to co-ordinate information on housing, employment, further education, etc, etc. for our ex-prisoners and their dependants .

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(A) 'Guidelines Document'

Deaths in the family

Visiting members of own organisation in other prisons

Visiting members in Beladd House, Portlaoise

Visits to hospitals to family members

Attending weddings of family members

Attending children's Communion / Confirmation

To vet accommodation for release

To attend girlfriends child's Communion

Caring for family, family member in hospital

Comforting family, post bereavement

Attending for exam interviews

Attending Aunts / Uncles funerals

Being admitted to hospital for surgery

Consulting with colleagues, (outside) re : peace process

Caring for family after hospital treatment

Dealing with domestic situations, family troubles, etc.

Visiting step son /daughter with medical problems

Family celebrations, 'Special occasions'

Visiting son / daughter home on holidays (broken marriage situations)

Visiting elderly parents unable to visit the prison

Spending Christmas with family

Pre-release programme

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(B) 'Pre-Release Document'

Length of Sentence	Commencement of Short-term & Weekend Pre-Release	Number of Pre-Releases
Up to two years	3 months before expiration of sentence	3 in last 3 months
Between 2 and 4 years	6 months before expiration of sentence	6 in last 6 months
Between 4 and 6 years	12 months before expiration of sentence	3 in first 6 months 6 in last 6 months
Between 6 and 10 years	18 months before expiration of sentence	2 in first 6 months 3 in next 6 months 6 in last 6 months
Over 10 years	2 years before expiration of sentence	4 in first 12 months 3 in next 6 months 6 in last 6 months

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