



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/100/16

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.

Secure Fax: 1107.SF

22 September 1998

No of pages including this one: 3

To: HQ
For: Secretary Gallagher

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Conversation with Secretary of State

Tapscott
[Signature]
22.9.98

- I had a brief conversation with the Secretary of State at a Hillsborough reception yesterday evening.
- She described her approach to the decommissioning/shadow Executive problem in the following terms. She wants Sinn Féin to be placed under maximum pressure with a view to actual decommissioning beginning as soon as possible. However, she has no realistic expectation of this happening in the short to medium term and feels that the two Governments will have to settle for something "just short of it" for now. They should then go to Trimble, emphasise the serious difficulties which Adams has on his own side (matching those faced by the UUP leader) and ask Trimble to "give a little" with a view to allowing formation of the shadow Executive in the very near future.
- The Secretary of State had earlier had a long conversation with Martin McGuinness (whom, we understand confidentially, she recently described in private as the politician who impresses her most in Northern Ireland). McGuinness convinced her that Sinn Féin have no room for manoeuvre in the wake of their two recent initiatives. She had also received the same message from Gerry Adams in a contact over the weekend.
- The Secretary of State was interested in our own ideas about how the impasse might be overcome. I gave her a flavour of some preliminary thinking on our side, highlighting the value of making creative use in some way of the distinction between shadow and full Executive. She was pleased with this general approach and seemed reassured that the two Governments are in "the same ball park" and working towards a solution which will address the needs of both Trimble and Adams.

*Yes - but
is Trimble
likely
to agree?
- see
later 3.
paras
huh.*

||

*copy/PSMS
PSSG
Secret Gallagher
Counsellor A1 (the O'Flaherty 1/3
secret teaching
for Mouseryn
Junk)*

(25A)
(63)

5. She emphasised her concern that the two Governments should move very quickly in order to prevent both sides from getting entrenched (as they show every sign of doing at present). She is looking forward in this regard to her meeting with the Taoiseach tomorrow morning. She hopes, indeed, to have a quick word with him this morning (from York, where she will be attending the BIPB meeting). My impression is that she would like to ensure that a coordinated message goes to Trimble at a meeting which she is to have with the latter later today (a weekly consultation between herself, her Ministers and the First and Deputy First Ministers) and at the meeting which the Taoiseach will have with Trimble this evening.

6. Within her own system, the Secretary of State is receiving advice from NIO officials which emphasises the extreme limits on Trimble's room for manoeuvre.

We have had sight of an internal note, dated last Friday and based on conversations with Jack Allen and two other UUP members, which reaches the following conclusions:

The UUP cannot accept a shadow Executive without a start to decommissioning;

This would be resisted by the party's entire Assembly group and a majority of its Executive. Although Trimble has the support of a majority of his party for the principle of working with Sinn Féin in Government, there is a widespread view that Sinn Féin must demonstrate its sincerity through a start to IRA decommissioning;

Trimble has been able to reunite his party substantially on this basis. (Donaldson is now deemed to be back on board). He will, accordingly, take no risks on the decommissioning issue. Movement in other areas (such as the return of some bodies of the "disappeared") will not suffice;

The UUP believe that pressure on Sinn Féin at this stage will produce results. They are prepared to postpone the shadow Executive for as long as it takes to secure a start to decommissioning. If this means a breakdown of the Assembly, one of the interlocutors is quoted as saying, "so be it";

- Trimble has told some people in the party that, if this were to happen (a crisis over decommissioning leading to the collapse of the Assembly), he would resign as party leader;
 - As regards the North/South Ministerial Council, the UUP are ready to go ahead in the absence of the shadow Executive being formed;
 - The main UUP members who are still withholding support from Trimble are Peter Weir, Willie Thompson, Roy Beggs (Sr and Jr), Martin Smyth and (possibly) Pauline Armitage;
 - The UUP have not yet settled on the number of Departments they would like. Reg Empey wants the Department of Economic Development while Dermot Nesbitt and John Taylor both favour Finance.
7. As regards movement on Sinn Féin's part which would fall short of actual decommissioning, we are pursuing ideas which may exist at official level on the British side and will be reporting further on this.