



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/100/16

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

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*Secretary - General Treason*

*Why for your information on  
re tonight meeting  
22.9.98*

*Mr. Kenman*  
Sec. Gallagher  
Joint Secretary  
Amb. London & Wash.  
A-I Counsellors

(63)

(5A)

**Confidential.**

**Conversation with Ken Reid, UTV's Political Correspondent.**

28/9

25A

Ken Reid phoned me about the difficulties facing David Trimble on the shadow Executive/Decommissioning issue. Reid, who is very close to Trimble, said that he felt that the Agreement was facing a messy situation. Trimble was very aware that the current problem was a self inflicted wound. He admits that he was outflanked at the Ulster Unionist Council Executive meeting of 12 June when the resolution linking actual decommissioning beginning before Sinn Fein taking its place in the shadow Executive was reaffirmed. Trimble realises the error and is now desperately looking for a facing saving way out of the situation. His position was not helped among unionist supporters by the fact that Blair had oversold this issue during the referendum campaign, particularly in the Coleraine speech.

*Mr. Kenman*  
*Mr. Gallagher*  
*Mr. Weir*  
*Mr. Armitage*  
*Mr. Coulter*  
*Mr. King*  
*Mr. Adams*  
*Mr. Blair*  
*Mr. McGuinness*  
*Mr. Martin*  
*Mr. Millar*  
*Mr. O'Neill*  
*Mr. O'Reilly*  
*Mr. Patten*  
*Mr. Reid*  
*Mr. Trimble*  
*Mr. Wilson*  
*Mr. Young*  
*Mr. Zetter*

Trimble's difficulty, says Reid, is one of arithmetic. If he decided to do a u-turn on this issue and proceeds with the appointment of the Executive, he stands to see at least four members of the UUP Assembly members jumping ship including Cobain and Weir, and the possibility of a further two (Armitage and Coulter). His party advisors in Belfast are said to be in favour of pushing forward with this, but they acknowledge that outside of Belfast there would be difficulties. Trimble knows that even with six defections the combined unionist no camp would still be one short of the 60% necessary to deny parallel consent. He is not confident, however, that pushing ahead might not ultimately lead to a Faulknerite situation. He knows that the Robinson/Donaldson camp are proceeding with their moves to create a loose coalition (see previous report) by 31 October which will oppose Trimble on this and other issues. The Union First organisation of Peter King will be just one of a number of its groups which will become active with various rallies across Ulster in the next few weeks to mount opposition to Trimble making any concessions prior to decommissioning. These rallies will essentially be the no campaigners returning to a rerun of the May referendum. Trimble's greatest difficulty in selling a decision to press ahead with the implementation of the Agreement including the issue of Sinn Fein in the Executive is that he has never really managed to sell the Agreement to his supporters and, at this stage, such an effort is probably too late.

Reid says that Trimble knows that he's not going to get decommissioning before the shadow Executive has to be formed and that what he's really hoping is that the two Government's and Sinn Fein will give him just enough political space with statements etc that he can bluff his way forward. Trimble expects to have substantive discussions with PM Blair and Adams in Blackpoll next week. He knows he'll emerge damaged but he hopes that it won't be fatally. Reid, who has spent some time with Adams lately, is convinced that Sinn Fein will not be delivering on decommissioning in the short term and that they have factored into their political calculations that Trimble himself may not survive in the long run, even if the Agreement does.

Dermot Brangan  
22 September 1998