



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/100/1

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

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(16)

**Transcript of telephone conversation  
between the Taoiseach and Tony Blair  
Tuesday 7th April 1998 A.M.**

**Taoiseach:**

Hello

**Tony Blair:**

Hello, Bertie.

**Taoiseach:**

Good morning Tony, how are you?

**Tony Blair:**

I am alright, but I have got a ....

**Taoiseach:**

Mr. Trimble isn't.

**Tony Blair:**

He is not I am afraid.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, well the lads were talking to me last night and early this morning.

**Tony Blair:**

He is giving everyone hell really, I mean as I rather feared these lists of papers that have sort of, of bodies that have slightly ..... although he knows I have explained to him, well I mean you know what the justifications are, the two things I wanted to say Bertie was this. First of all I think it's tremendously important that the lists of documents don't leak. I mean he is virtually sort of threatening to walk if that happens, because he just thinks that you know, Paisley, I mean he is basically terrified that Paisley is going to come out today and say he has agreed to all these things and you know.

**Taoiseach:**

Okay, okay.

**Tony Blair:**

He is finding a way the ..... etc.

**Taoiseach:**

Okay.

**Tony Blair:**

So that's ...

**Taoiseach:**

So lets hope, a well, from our side here well most of my people are up above, but I think, I haven't even given the stuff to the Cabinet, I have briefed the Opposition Leaders in general terms, but that's all, we have it as tight as we can. The real danger is that it comes out through the talks, but funny enough it didn't happen overnight, which was a good sign.

**Tony Blair:**

No, that's right, so I mean lets just hope that that holds, but that I see as the principle difficulty from his point of view at the moment. I mean he has also got his usual concerns, but one thing that he said was that he had had a very good meeting with someone in your side, who was heading up a sort of a reach task committee on the Constitution.

**Taoiseach:**

That's right Lenihan.

**Tony Blair:**

Brian Lenihan and he thought that they had come to quite, some quite good understandings, but he thought that that wasn't reflected in what's actually in the text at the moment.

**Taoiseach:**

In the Constitutional Document.

**Tony Blair:**

You see what I mean on that.

**Taoiseach:**

What I think the essential point in this is, because Lenihan was briefing me, Lenihan is the Chairman of the All-party Constitution Committee of the Dail, of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Dail and Senate and what the QC represent in David has been saying as part of the overview of the Irish Constitution that there are a number of other issues that they would like to see looked at. Now that will not be decided for some time, but he has made a number of suggestions, which Lenihan does not think as unreasonable for them to look at in the overall review. Now how that can be reflected since the overall review might take another you know, six months, I am not sure what the time is, but Lenihan has got on quite well with this guy and you know, they seem to be talking the same language, as has the Attorney General's Office, now I am not too sure what he would like to have reflected. But anyway I will certainly listen to what he has to say on that.

**Tony Blair:**

Yes, well lets, we, I mean what I am trying to do is to steer him back into a frame of mind, where he doesn't just sort of throw his hands up and say it's all hopeless and stump off.

**Taoiseach:**

Okay.

**Tony Blair:**

Where he is going to say, look these are the points that we need to negotiate about.

**Taoiseach:**

Okay.

**Tony Blair:**

I hope, I mean I have spoken to him several times this morning that I have got him into that position. I mean basically what happens to these guys is they get, they get terrified that they are going to get put under pressure they can't handle, you know.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, this is it, I mean it's not the normal political stuff and I suppose....

**Tony Blair:**

And I am afraid ones just got to deal with them as they are rather that....

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, I accept that.

**Tony Blair:**

As you would deal with sort of other Heads of Government or something.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, I accept that.

**Tony Blair:**

Now I am going to talk, what I have said to him is well give me a list of the things that really are problems for you and let me have a look at them, he is going to fire that over to me, now I just, I mean my instinct at the moment, although I know this is very high risk and dangerous is that I should actually go over at some point, pretty soon, because I just fear that unless I am on hand, to as it were steer him through it, it's just he is going to loose his bottle.

**Taoiseach:**

Right.

**Tony Blair:**

And in a way what I can do is sort of, you know, because I was trying to, on my last telephone call with him, say to him, look, just take a step back and look at this, you know actually what is on offer is pretty good.

**Taoiseach:**

Right.

**Tony Blair:**

It needs, I mean I know it is very, very high risk, but my instinct is that it's high risk anyway all this.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, so that if it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

**Tony Blair:**

You know and therefore there is no point. I mean if I came to sort of Thursday and I hadn't gone over and nothing had happened, then I would curse myself and I wonder whether I shouldn't actually go over later this afternoon and you know, I don't know whether it's possible for you and I to meet this evening or something and I know that this all increases the sort of general drama of it, but

I kind of think we are in that situation anyway Bertie, to be quite honest about it.

**Taoiseach:**

Okay, you think the way he is, that's the way it is.

**Tony Blair:**

I mean and I just feel that unless I, unless I get to him and say to him, look hang on a minute before you say it's all hopeless, lets have a look at what your problems are.

**Taoiseach:**

Okay, okay. Well at this stage your next move is he is going to give you a list of the items.

**Tony Blair:**

You see the decommissioning stuff he is unhappy about too. He is unhappy about that. He is unhappy about the policing and I think frankly when he sees the prisoner stuff, I mean I think there is a real danger on that.

**Taoiseach:**

Right.

**Tony Blair:**

So you know my concern is to get him back into where he thinks he can get some, you know, I think most of it is not real movement on substance, most of it is presentational.

**Taoiseach:**

Right, right.

**Tony Blair:**

For example when all these, you know, lists of bodies, lists of areas where they may cooperate, you know, he sort of says, well look you know, if Paisley says they are going to turn over your further educational system to the Irish, I had it and all the rest of it and I say well it doesn't actually say that. You know these types of.....

**Taoiseach:**

These types of things.

**Tony Blair:**

Yes. I know obviously you have got your mothers funeral tomorrow, haven't you.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, well it actually goes to the Church tonight, this is our problem. But anyway when are you thinking, have you made up your mind what time you are going Tony, or have you made up your mind up yet?

**Tony Blair:**

I wanted to talk to you frankly before I did it.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, yes.

**Tony Blair:**

But I can't, I mean in one sense it is very, very high risk, but in another sense I sort of feel that I have come in for a penny, so I may as well be in for a pound on this thing anyway.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, yes. The only thing apart from just of the time that I have, I wonder if there is a time where we can go in and then once we go in we have to stay with it I think. If we go in too early, then you can get caught and in some ways it would be better just to see what the range of problems are and then see what answers we can come up with.

**Tony Blair:**

That's why I don't think I should take a final decision until I see what I have got back from him.

**Taoiseach:**

Because you see once we go in there is no way out, you kind have to stay until the end then.

**Tony Blair:**

That's absolutely true.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes.

**Tony Blair:**

I think that is right, but on the other hand.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, if it was going to break you don't have a choice then, that's what you are saying.

**Tony Blair:**

Exactly and my worry is that, you see, if he comes back to me with lets say there are sort of seven main items, which I think there may be, I think you will have a problem on the Constitution, and a problem on decommissioning, you will probably have a problem on prisoners/police, you have got the approval of the Assembly on the Implementation Bodies, you'll get the actual composition of the Implementation Bodies and the list of the other areas and you have got this cross community stuff in Strand One. Now if we have got all those things to resolve, you know let us assume since nothing is realistic to assume, that he has got eight or nine or ten sort of more minor measures that he is, or wordings that he is jibbing about. My sort of worry is leaving it until tomorrow night to come over and then finding we just don't have the time.

**Taoiseach:**

Or that we run out of time. Well listen why don't we just see, lets see what this list is and then see what we have to do. You see one of a couple of things, I wonder is he going to start really looking for major change or is he just going to look for how it's presented, he hasn't said that really, has he?

**Tony Blair:**

My assessment is, for what it is worth, is that one he does want to do a deal.

**Taoiseach:**

Right.

**Tony Blair:**

And although he is just, he is frightened basically, I mean to be quite honest about it that's what he is.

**Taoiseach:**

Okay.



**Tony Blair:**

But he does want to do a deal. But secondly, my assessment is that his problems are basically presentational.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, okay.

**Tony Blair:**

That's not to say that they may not be, you know, show stoppers because of it, but they in the end it all comes back to the one central fear, which is that the North/South Council operates, is up running, operates independent of the Assembly, the Assembly collapses and you are left with the Council.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, well as I said the other day, there has to be some mechanism.

**Tony Blair:**

There has to be in my view.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, there must be a mechanism that can take that out of the system.

**Tony Blair:**

That's what I think and that's why I am you know, reluctant to give it up, but then I feel on the other hand unless I am sort of you know, you and I are close to this thing, because you know of all the people that I talk to in this whole damn thing, I feel that we are on the same wave length now.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, well I think we want to see it through.

**Tony Blair:**

And you know where we want to get too and it's just a question of managing it.

**Taoiseach:**

Yes, of trying to get it through. Anyway, listen, lets see the list, lets see the list Tony, it's just going to be, it's going to be just difficult for me to get over there today, but I will go up there today, but lets see the list, I mean I am around here.

**Tony Blair:**

Lets see the list, see what George reckons he could actually get by way of...

**Taoiseach:**

Of his tick tacking.

**Tony Blair:**

Yes.

**Taoiseach:**

And then we could make a judgement later.

**Tony Blair:**

Let us speak again.

**Taoiseach:**

Okay Tony, I'll talk to you later.

**Tony Blair:**

Alright Bertie many, many thanks, goodbye.

**ENDS.**