

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Secret

Downing Street Meeting - 19 April

Sinn Féin Position

1. No decommissioning in advance of establishment of Executive and other institutions. According to Sinn Féin their influence can only be exercised on IRA in context where institutions up and running, and Agreement being actively implemented.

UUP Position

2. Decommissioning event required in advance of, or simultaneous with, establishment of Executive. However, may be some flexibility if certainty of decommissioning event could be guaranteed within a short timeframe after Executive established. At least, if we could build a formula around this prospect of certainty, it might give the Prime Minister a basis on which to work on Trimble

Possible (De Chastelain) formula

3. A possible formula could involve a De Chastelain statement, (a) expressing a judgement that decommissioning would take place within a reasonable timeframe of the establishment of the institutions, and (b) that he would undertake to make the call within this timeframe for parties to use their influence to successfully insure the beginning of decommissioning on a specific date (see Annex 1).

4. We had already brought this approach some considerable distance with Sinn Féin before Hillsborough, without it having being rejected. It has the advantage of being within the Agreement, though it would clearly pose problems for both Sinn Féin (delivery on a specific date) and Trimble (establishment of Executive in advance; how to secure a public guarantee on the certainty aspect). However, it may offer the best prospect at this stage, in particular as it provides for De Chastelain (the Agent of the Agreement) to take the strain.

Confidence-building Measures

5. Given that the mood on the ground in Republican circles seems to be very difficult, it would be helpful if the British could move quickly with a positive normalisation paper, and with a decision to establish a public enquiry into the Pat Finucane murder case.

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John Hume's Text

6. John Hume has been suggesting a text for some time on decommissioning (Annex 2). He argues that his text, which suggests (ambiguously !) that Sinn Féin would expel itself from the Executive if the IRA ceasefire broke down, would reassure people that violence will not re-occur - the objective of the decommissioning exercise. He told me that Martin McGuinness came to him on Saturday to say that the IRA (not surprisingly) had accepted the text.

7. The Hume approach is well below the Trimble bottom line. However, the language could perhaps make some useful contribution to a wider (De Chastelain) approach.

Martin McGuinness

8. In conversation in Derry on Sunday, McGuinness was determined to move forward but was pessimistic about the prospects of success. He again emphasised that any initiative has to be within the Agreement. He made it clear also that any parking of the Agreement would be disastrous - " there would be nothing to come back to".

9. He pushed me for my views on Blair's motivation on decommissioning - was he under pressure from, or reflecting the views of, the securocrats ? I disagreed, saying that I thought that it was Blair's best judgement and instinct that Trimble would walk unless he had something to deliver on the issue.

Séamus Mallon

10. Mallon will go along with any approach we decide on. However, his instinct is that the prize (especially for Sinn Féin) is so valuable that they should be asked to pay the price in advance. He worries that if the Executive is not set up first, there will be no sanction on Sinn Féin.

11. He is also concerned about the lack of any rules on collective responsibility for the Executive. I suggested this was best left for another day !

De Chastelain and Hillsborough

12. In extremis, and if Sinn Féin refuse to accept the De Chastelain approach, we could consider factoring part of Hillsborough (an act of reconciliation by the two governments) into the equation. However, given that the De Chastelain approach suggested above would already be pushing Trimble very far, this might be a bridge too far for him(and possibly for the British). It is, therefore, very much "a back-pocket" suggestion.

Dermot Gallagher
19 April 1999

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