

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Confidential

Summary of Meetings between Minister for Foreign Affairs and (a) Séamus Mallon and (b) Martin McGuinness, Belfast, 22 June 1998

Séamus Mallon

1. Mallon emphasised that setting the 30 June deadline was exactly the right course for the Governments to take. But this deadline needed to be absolute; otherwise, there was no possibility of pushing parties to a compromise. And if a breakthrough wasn't reached on the 30th, there should be no question of putting the Agreement in "cotton wool"; in any event, it would die the death very quickly.

2. Mallon said the Unionists wanted to play the process long and believed that this would be achievable given their belief that the Governments would be reluctant to call a halt on the 30th. On the other hand, Sinn Féin believed they could get away with "blue murder" due to the fear of the Governments that the ceasefires might break down.

3. As to the way forward, Mallon said that, if Trimble moved off his requirement that decommissioning was a precondition, he would be entitled to "a collective and clearly- defined backstop" if decommissioning was not delivered on. This was the balance that was required.

4. Finally, Mallon said that, at the end of the day, the two Governments may have to make the call on where compromise lay. He added, in this regard, that he would be amazed if the Governments did not already have a "piece of paper" in their back pockets for this purpose.

Martin McGuinness

5. The Minister pushed McGuinness very hard on the need for Sinn Féin to move forward from their present position. He said that risks needed to be taken on all sides. Republicans, given their self-confidence and their recent electoral successes, were now best placed to show the leadership necessary. In his view, it would transform the situation if the IRA could issue a statement supporting the Sinn Féin position

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(3)

conveyed at Downing Street. He understood the difficulty of this, and that it was not in the Agreement. But, as in the past, he hoped Republicans would be able to show the leadership required.

6. On decommissioning, the Minister said that if some gesture on product could be made, this would be invaluable. John de Chastelain had, of course, the key role in that area. His independent judgement on what is required could carry much of the strain on all sides.

7. The alternative to not reaching agreement now could be disastrous. The situation could deteriorate back into war, despite the best efforts of all. It was against this background that he was asking the Republican movement to reflect long and hard on how it could best help at this time.

8. McGuinness, in response, said he appreciated the frankness of the Minister's presentation, and his understanding of Sinn Féin's difficulties. He agreed that substantial changes were already taking place on the ground, including the fact that next year Sinn Féin would hold the Mayoral Offices in Belfast, Derry and Sligo. He would reflect carefully on the Minister's views and convey them to his colleagues.

9. Overall, we had a sense of a man who fully realised how much Sinn Féin had gained from the peace process and, as a result, wanted to do business on the 30th. However, he was clearly concerned about whether Trimble would be in a position to deliver if Sinn Féin were to stretch their constituency further. The answer to this could well provide the key to moving Sinn Féin forward, at least to some degree, by the 30th.

Dermot Gallagher
22 June 1999

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Meetings between Minister of State O'Donnell and Parties, 22 June 1999

Summary Report

1. The Minister of State held separate meetings in Parliament Buildings, Stormont with (a) the PUP (b) the NIWC and (c) the Alliance party. The main points made by each of the parties are set out below.

PUP

2. The PUP (David Ervine, Billy Hutchinson, Winston Rea and Dawn Purvis) strongly supported sticking to the 30 June deadline, arguing that the passage of time would make the impasse no easier to resolve.

3. They argued that the demise of the Agreement would be bad for unionism, but recognised that there were some who preferred defeat to compromise.

4. Like the other parties, they had no definitive view of what Jeffrey Donaldson's return to the UUP negotiating team would mean. They expressed continuing resentment at the efforts others were expected to make to save the UUP leader from his own disloyal troops.

5. In relation to Sinn Féin, Ervine wondered what Martin McGuinness meant when he said that progress on decommissioning would be possible after the formation of the institutions. He agreed that Sinn Fein needed to be given the tools to do the job of decommissioning, and also needed to know that "unionism's war against them" was over. While accepting that Sinn Féin did want the institutions to succeed, they could more easily batten down the hatches and live without the Agreement than could others.

6. Ervine argued that a reasonable package would be a combination of (I) the formation of the Executive (ii) a "war is over" statement (iii) an SDLP guarantee to exclude Sinn Féin if there were a return to violence [note: not if there were no decommissioning] and (iv) an agreement by Sinn Féin to discuss their "street politics" with other parties [presumably with a view to limiting demonstrations, protests etc. others deem provocative - this point was not clear]

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7 Neither Ervine nor Hutchinson believed that, if there were no breakthrough by 30 June, the suspension of the Agreement need be a disaster. On all sides, there would be a need to return to the table. Besides, they did not see how the IRA could resume a war against a British Government which was seen to have done everything it could to make progress.

8. Hutchinson had met with the Decommissioning Commission the previous day and would be replying to the questions posed by General de Chastelain. He felt that it would be a mistake to focus too much on progress, as there had been so little: but the existence of a process by which decommissioning could occur was an important advance and should be more widely publicised.

NIWC

9. The Women's Coalition (Monica McWilliams, Jane Morrice and Kate Fearon) expressed considerable anxiety about what would happen if there were no agreement by 30 June, but the Minister of State, reiterating the determination of the two Governments to adhere to the deadline, refused to speculate about the consequences of failure.

10. The NIWC also reported that the UUP (Nesbitt) is now, contrary to earlier form, showing a keen interest in maintaining contact with them. They thought that Donaldson's re-appearance was in part at least the result of his own sense of isolation, though they agreed that it might well make agreement still harder to reach.

11. Fears were expressed about the Decommissioning Commission's possible lack of political touch; we offered the reassurance that de Chastelain was in regular contact with officials, and the view that he would be able to manage Ambassador Johnson [of whom the PUP remarked that his "boiler was burst"].

Alliance

12. Alliance (Seán Neeson, Séamus Close and Eileen Bell) emphasised the need to stick at the negotiations until a result had been achieved - at Hillsborough talks had

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broken up too early. They felt that discussions should be as collective, and as transparent, as possible.

13. They suggested that one compromise would be for the Executive to be formed, but not convened until decommissioning had started.

14. They felt that there was powerful public frustration at the failure to begin decommissioning.

15. They reported worrying levels of loyalist activity, by the UFF in Carrickfergus (Neeson) and the UVF in North Down (Bell).

16. They were amazed by Ronnie Flanagan's uncharacteristically inept *Panorama* performance, which reinforced the strong case for a full investigation of the Finucane case.

17. Neeson, unsurprisingly, appeared dejected after his very poor European election performance.

Rory Montgomery
22 June 1999

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