

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code:	2022/84/44
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.

Copy (3) 16 FEB 1999

Secure Fax: - 1745

15 February 1999 No of pages including this one: 3

To: HQ From: Belfast
For: Secretary Gallagher From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Conversation with Paul Bew

1. To confirm, some points of interest arose in a brief conversation which I had with Paul Bew this afternoon.

2. Bew, who as you know is a close friend and ally of Trimble, saw the UUP leader last night. Trimble was in buoyant form, more relaxed than Bew has seen him for the past week or so. His self-confidence was due in part to a successful weekend meeting of the UUP's ruling Council, which marginalised the dissidents and gave his own leadership a distinct boost. He was also delighted with the Taoiseach's Sunday Times interview, which he considered to be very helpful.

3. Bew understands that Trimble and his senior colleagues barely needed to intervene in the Council meeting. A large number of rank-and-file complained bitterly about the dissidents and the support they have been giving to the DUP. The mood of the meeting was strongly against the dissidents, who made very little contribution to the proceedings, and there was clear vindication for the leadership's approach. (Note: Bew evidently received from Trimble a highly subjective account of the meeting, which made no reference to the motion reportedly put down by Donaldson).

4. The Taoiseach's Sunday Times remarks have gone down very well. Trimble recognises that the Taoiseach was not, in essence, saying anything new. However, the force of his comments about the need for some movement on IRA decommissioning was welcome. The clarification which the Taoiseach subsequently issued came as no surprise - Trimble and others could see that the Sunday Times presentation of the interview was misleading. Unionists, Bew remarked, recognise a

©TSCH/2022/84/44

clear "moral distinction" between calling on the Republican movement to do something on decommissioning, which is what the Taoiseach did, and stipulating the latter as a precondition for entry to the Executive, which he did not do - and which, Unionists privately acknowledge, he was never likely to do. The later clarification did not detract from what Trimble considered to be a very helpful basic message about the urgency of IRA decommissioning.

5. Trimble is now reasonably confident about the Assembly vote this week. He was very unhappy last week at the prospect of being labelled a "Faulkner" if, as seemed inevitable, he could only muster a minority of Unionists in support of the determination. The latest indications are that he might avoid this fate altogether or dip only marginally in that direction. "Beggs Óg", as Roy Beggs Jr is termed by some in the party, may now support Trimble and there is similar speculation about Billy Armstrong (though the latter's defection, were it to happen, would be considered less significant than that of Beggs).

6. Bew expects that Trimble will take a hard line in public following the Assembly vote, emphasising that the responsibility for the blockage in relation to the formation of the Executive lies with Sinn Féin. Privately, however, Trimble will seek a meeting with Adams, possibly over the next few days, for the purpose of impressing on the Sinn Féin leader his own desire to see Sinn Féin as part of the Executive. He is anxious, according to Bew, to demonstrate "directly and personally" to Adams his own good faith in this matter.

7. Bew is struck by the degree of confidence which Trimble has (and which he himself does not share) that Sinn Féin will deliver something capable of overcoming the current impasse. Trimble appears to have concluded from recent contacts he has had with Adams that something may be possible on decommissioning in the short term which would enable the Executive to be formed on schedule. He indicated to Bew yesterday that he expects "everything to be alright eventually". (Comment: It seems likely that Trimble, who is perhaps not used to Adams' subtlety of argument and presentation, is seriously misreading Sinn Féin's position).

8. When I asked whether e.g. a statement from General De Chastelain indicating Sinn Féin's good faith on the decommissioning issue would suffice for Trimble's purposes, Bew suggested that it would not. He believes that some element of actual

©TSCH/2022/84/44

decommissioning, "however small", will be required. However, when I saw virtually no chance of this being delivered in the short term, he suggested that Trimble might eventually have to settle for a firm commitment that some actual decommissioning would happen in the medium term.

9. Bew indicated that Trimble may be hoping to secure a deal of some description on decommissioning in direct contacts with Adams. I noted recent speculation that, if no such deal is forthcoming in the run-up to 10 March, Trimble may put down a motion to have Sinn Féin excluded or may even offer his own resignation. Bew replied that he hopes, and believes, that Trimble will not go that far.

10. As for the review scenario which has also been a subject of recent speculation, Bew said that he himself is not recommending this to Trimble (though others in the party are). He believes that the UUP leader has no interest in seeking a formal review of implementation of the Agreement. Trimble is as conscious as anyone else of the risks inherent in a possibly prolonged stalemate and loss of momentum. All he has in mind, according to Bew, is that there would inevitably be a period of a few weeks, following a failure to form the Executive and go ahead with devolution, when "people would be sitting around wondering what next" - and when, as he sees it, Sinn Féin would be under continuing pressure to take the action needed to resolve the impasse.

©TSCH/2022/84/44