

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.

cc Sec. Gallagher; Mrs A-I; Mr. Morgan; Just Sec; Irish Desk; Norma Leahy, Dublin, Murgatroyd, Kinnock.

Confidential

Some UUP Views

1. In Belfast yesterday I met separately with Dennis Rogan (Chairman of the UUP Executive Committee) and Dermot Nesbitt to discuss the present political situation.

2. Both acknowledged the damage done to Trimble's standing in the party in the aftermath of Downing Street. Rogan suggested that Trimble had looked at the document "as a lawyer, not as a politician" and had failed to appreciate the confusion likely to be engendered by its terseness and lack of clarity. Jonathan Powell's subsequent letter had helped to stabilise the situation. Nevertheless, the majority sense in the party, including among the officers, was that to run d'Hondt during the election campaign would have been too much of a gamble. Rogan stressed that the strongly negative line taken at the meeting of party officers on the Saturday (which he chaired) had more to do with their sense of the party political downside than with the substance of the Downing Street text. He suggested that Trimble, who had lunched at his house that day, had already been getting cold feet even before the message had been conveyed to him.

3. Both Rogan and Nesbitt were happy with Trimble's article in yesterday's *Telegraph* (Rogan, but not Nesbitt, knew it had been on the cards), feeling that it offered a step forward but insisted on adequate guarantees. Nesbitt in particular was firmly of the view that Ministerial nominees should have none of the trappings of office. The spectre of Martin McGuinness presiding at school prize-givings was again instanced.

4. On the formation of the Executive, Rogan was adamant that this was politically unsustainable without at least some simultaneous decommissioning. He admitted that in his own view it would, with hindsight, have been better to have formed the full Executive last July. He also said that he was "blue in the face" saying at party meetings that every time unionists left the table there was less there for them on their return. Like Nesbitt, he felt that ultimately unionism had more to gain from the Agreement than nationalism. He also felt that the mood on the ground was perhaps more flexible than among party activists. Nevertheless, despite all of these factors, he was convinced that

©TSCH/2022/84/44

Trimble would be overthrown by the Ulster Unionist Council if he departed from the "no guns, no government" line: "Don't underestimate the sheer stubbornness of the Ulster Prod."

5. Nesbitt made a strong case, in familiar terms, for the moral justice of the UUP position. Initially he too was emphatic about the need for prior or simultaneous decommissioning ("jumping together") but, in discussion, showed at least a tentative interest in the possibility of an IRA "war is over" statement and some offer of comfort on the achievement of decommissioning within the timescale of the Agreement. However, he insisted that there would have to be strong guarantees from the SDLP and the two Governments that a failure to honour commitments would lead to Sinn Féin's expulsion from an Executive. I expressed doubts about the achievability, or desirability, of this.

6. More generally, I detected in Nesbitt a sense of disillusionment or frustration with the two Governments and the SDLP. He suggested that, after Hillsborough, all three had buckled under republican pressure, and were failing to adhere to a clear line on the obligations of both sets of former paramilitaries. In particular, he said he resented Séamus Mallon's consistent line that there were two "absolutist" positions and the implication that the UUP had been as unmoving as Sinn Féin. He also speculated about whether pressure could be put on the SDLP to make clear that it would in certain conditions move into an Executive without Sinn Féin: I suggested that this was unrealistic. He replied that, decoded, realism seemed to mean "do what the Shinners want and stuff the unionists". I argued that the important question was what was in the long-term interests of both communities.[*Comment: Nesbitt habitually takes a rather moralistic line. However, it would not be surprising if liberal unionists felt themselves to be rather isolated and under pressure at the moment. It would be disappointing if a sense of betrayal, analogous to that frequently voiced by Ken Maginnis and the McGimpseys after the 1992 talks, were to gain ground.*].

7. Both Rogan and Nesbitt wondered what was meant by the 30 June deadline, and what would happen afterwards if there were no agreement. I suggested that both Governments were treating it very seriously, but despite this neither Rogan nor Nesbitt seemed really

©TSCH/2022/84/44

to believe that the crunch would come before the autumn. Rogan thought it inconceivable that "the shutters would be pulled down" just before Drumcree.

8. In regard to the European election, both believed that Nicholson would poll poorly but would nonetheless take the third seat on the basis of transfers from other pro-union candidates (Rogan expects Hume to be a comfortable poll-topper). Even a one-vote victory could be portrayed as a success. Rogan said that if Nicholson were to fail, however, Trimble would probably be deposed (for that matter, so would he as UUP Chairman and Jack Allen, Nicholson's agent, as Treasurer).

9. Rogan thought that while John Taylor was still angling to succeed Trimble, there was something too transparent and almost frivolous about his behaviour, above all in his conduct of an anti-Nicholson vendetta.

Rory Montgomery
4 June 1999

©TSCH/2022/84/44