

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Summary of meeting between the Taoiseach, David Trimble, Reg Empey and officials

Government Buildings, 14 June 1999

1. The meeting, which was conducted in a very positive atmosphere throughout, began with the Taoiseach giving an overview of the current state of play. In generally agreeing with this assessment, Trimble said that, if devolution did not occur by 1 July, the process would suffer a certain loss of confidence. The crucial question for the UUP, and one to which they needed to know the answer before they could begin to move forward, was "where are we going to be on the 30th June" and how much can the Republican movement give before that date.

Sinn Féin Statement

2. The Taoiseach, emphasising the need to stick as closely as possible to the Agreement, said that Sinn Féin should state that, within the Agreement, there would be decommissioning by next May. However, any possibility of decommissioning before the Executive was established was impossible. A strong Sinn Féin statement, however, was a real possibility; an IRA statement was unlikely but couldn't be fully ruled out. Teahon emphasised the significance of an unambiguous Sinn Féin statement.

3. Trimble argued that the Sinn Féin line to them had been that they would do their best, but they could make no promises nor could they give any guarantees. A statement along these lines would leave the UUP totally exposed. Empey added that there was also a moral dimension of "right and wrong" to all this. The "disappeared" issue had raised doubts about the value of Republican words. The UUP simply couldn't get into a sequencing

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process if they didn't know the outcome of it in advance. Dalton intervened to say that we were convinced that Sinn Féin had been completely sincere in their wish to resolve the disappeared issue.

4. Teahon suggested that the right Sinn Féin words would remove the existing ambiguity about decommissioning happening by the May 2000 deadline. Trimble, in response, argued that this approach was based on two dubious assumptions - (a) that Sinn Féin would give a clear undertaking, and (b) that this would be delivered on. He then referred to the Taoiseach's recent *Irish Times* article, in which he quoted Mr. de Valera as saying in unambiguous terms that the war was over. The (present) Republican movement had never given a clear statement to this effect.

5. Trimble said he believed the justification for starting the sequence (leading to devolution) was that it would enable General de Chastelain to begin intensive discussions. If the General held (as he had at Hillsborough) that progress meant actual decommissioning, the threat of a negative report would put pressure on Sinn Féin. It would also give other parties the basis on which to leave them behind. A carrot and stick approach was required.

6. Empey said that the best phrase Adams had used was on the need for both sides "to jump together". The UUP was not prepared to get into the loop if it was the only one going to jump. They were not going to be rolled over; they were prepared to get into bed with Sinn Féin and take all the risks, but not on the basis of an obfuscatory statement. He added that Sinn Féin had to realise that they were not dealing with British officials on this issue (i.e. where they could get away with fudging), but with a party who had always known that this was the "big thing".

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7. Teahon again emphasised the value of an unambiguous statement related to May 2000, together with a further de Chastelain report. If their commitment wasn't met, Unionists could state in advance that they would walk away. Empey countered by saying that, if the UUP agreed to devolution and to forming the full executive, this was an irrevocable step. They simply couldn't do this on "a wing and a prayer". Trimble added that the SDLP sanction seems now not to be available. The UUP would be left on their own in May 2000 (i.e. to bring the process down). Moreover, if the party walked away from its stated position on decommissioning over the past two years, they would have a serious credibility problem. Mansergh said that, morally, there would be a lot of understanding in the South for their position in such circumstances.

IRA Statement

8. Gallagher argued that if the Leaders of Unionism were able to say that the twin strategy of the armalite and the ballot box was now over, it would have a powerful resonance. Empey said it was inconceivable that Unionists could take a less hard stance on decommissioning than the Major government, who after all invented the issue. Any movement by Unionists had, in turn, to be balanced by what Republicans did. And if Republican commitments were not signed up to by P. Ó Neill, they could subsequently be denied. Taking up this point, Gallagher asked if a P. Ó Neill statement would ease the UUP problems with decommissioning, and take much of the strain off them. Empey accepted that it would change the atmosphere and "put us under pressure" (i.e. to move forward). Trimble, however, said that P. Ó Neill was a mythical figure, but if Adams and McGuinness went on television and used unambiguous words, this would have an impact on people on the ground.

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Extending transition

9. Turning to the 30th June, Trimble said that we were stuck with this target date. While the transitional period would be over when devolution occurred, he wondered if there was not some way of extending it, especially if there was any prospect of the Republican movement changing its stance. We had perhaps left ourselves with too little time to achieve progress.

10. Dalton emphasised the political requirement of both sides moving, against a background where (decommissioning) product was not a realistic possibility until the Executive was established. Empey spoke of the importance of UUP arithmetic; they needed to bring their full Assembly party with them and, unless the proposal being put forward was realistic, it would not secure a seconder. Trimble, referring to party problems and pointing to the chair reserved for John Taylor, said it was "no coincidence that that seat is empty"- Taylor's absence was not due to travelling difficulties from Paris. (Trimble asked that his views on Taylor's absence be kept to ourselves.)

Republican Statements

11. The Taoiseach said that the Adams/McGuinness political strategy was working, as could be seen in yesterday's election results in the South. He accepted that there was very little time left to the 30th June, but saw no value in delaying. Trimble agreed that we would have to try and produce something by the 30th. The Taoiseach then asked if statements (be they Sinn Féin or IRA) plus de Chastelain would be enough.

12. Empey, in reply, said that P. Ó Neill words, which would then be sold by Adams and McGuinness, would "change the atmosphere". They never had such a statement before. If it happened, it could lead to a really meaningful sequence. Trimble agreed that if they got unambiguous statements, the

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atmosphere might change. He added that they were not asking for product in advance, but rather in the same timescale as the Executive - though they could "shade this a bit".

Drumcree

13. Empey said that Drumcree was a major obstacle for both Republicans and Unionists. The Republicans, for instance, must be worried that, if it went wrong, people could harp back to the 1960s and the "I ran away" slogans. Trimble said that the security forces in the North hadn't been as effective as they should be with Loyalist dissidents; they had thought they were small beer. The Loyalist dissidents had caused so much pain that it had made decommissioning impossible for Republicans.

14. As regards the recent discussions on Drumcree, it was unfortunate that Frank Blair, who had been poorly advised, had got it wrong. His offer had been too close to the residents' position, and they effectively jumped at it, while the Orange walked away. Trimble said he believed that up to last week direct dialogue could have been achieved, with the Prime Minister in the Chair. The Orange would have agreed to direct contact if they had felt agreement (on their terms?) was likely.

15. Looking at possibilities, he wondered if a token parade, alternating every second year with a full parade, would be a runner, or else a parade in two out of each three year period. The minimum should be to agree this year's parade in return for direct dialogue, the establishment of the forum, and an economic package, with the future parades issue to be settled in due course. The Prime Minister was still willing to chair a meeting, and next week might be a possibility. Peter Quinn (the facilitator on the nationalist side) was also fairly positive about moving matters forward.

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16. Campbell said that one advantage of the Frank Blair initiative was that it had lowered Orange expectations. He felt also that McCionnaith was losing control of the residents, and might be prepared to do a deal while he was in control. Teahon set out the clear limits for manoeuvre on the nationalist side.

Continuing Contact

17. Finally, both the Taoiseach and Trimble agreed that there would need to be the closest contact between all sides in the coming days. Gallagher suggested also that Empey should resume his discussions with Martin McGuinness, and that Campbell and Lavery might develop a parallel dialogue with Aidan McAteer.

Attendance

18. The Taoiseach was accompanied by Paddy Teahon, Tim Dalton, Martin Mansergh and the undersigned. Trimble and Empey were joined by David Campbell and David Lavery. John Taylor, though expected, did not turn up.

Dermot Gallagher
14 June 1999

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Transcript of David Trimble after meeting the Taoiseach on Monday 14th June, 1999.

David Trimble: .... to meet us at fairly short notice. The reason for the visit is that obviously as the election results come through attention is going to focus on the next few weeks and on the general political situation and we thought it would be useful to touch base at an early stage and to exchange views and will be continuing to do this over the course of the next few weeks as we see things develop. It was, as I say, an exchange of views, a very positive, a very fruitful exchange of views I hope but not something that will immediately produce, I think, any change in the situation. The basic difficulty remains as it has been throughout, namely that the republican movement do not yet seem to be ready to carry out their obligations under the Agreement. We stand ready to do so. We have done a lot of work to implement the Agreement, we are ready to complete the implementation of the Agreement but we need to know that other people are going to discharge their obligations too so that we can all then, in Mr. Adam's words, jump together.

Question: Mr. Trimble do you think that the election results may reflect the bigger picture ????.

David Trimble: Well so far as the results in Northern Ireland are concerned we'll know that later today. The expectation is that the three sitting MEPs will be returned and that there will therefore be no change in the outcome. Of course, those who like these things will study the detail but the detail of the percentage of particular parties and the transfers are precisely that, they are the detail. We are looking forward to the result. We are looking forward to the result because we think actually Jim Nicholson's done a bit better than some people think and that'll be nice but basically it'll be a no change result.

Question: Also with regards to the bigger picture ?????? Are you of the view, as the two Governments appear to be, that the June 30th is the absolute deadline which progress has to be made?

David Trimble: June 30th is important. Its the target that we are working to and the reason why we are working to it is that on July 1st Devolution will occur to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly and that we feel that

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if Wales and Scotland were to move ahead and Northern Ireland were left behind there would be a significant loss of confidence but I don't think that anybody wants to walk away from this process. Too much has been gained over the course of the last year or so, too much has been achieved to throw away. Certainly, we're not looking at throwing away the process and I don't think anybody else is.

Question: Is there any real grounds for optimism given that Republicans have been saying no guns, no explosives ??? you have stated your position no guns, no SF ?????

David Trimble: Well it comes back to the question of the Agreement. Were Republicans genuine when they endorsed the Agreement. Were they genuine when they endorsed an Agreement that contains an obligation on them to commit themselves to exclusively peaceful means and of course to deal with the weaponry as a result of that. If they weren't genuine then there is a serious problem and we need to know whether they are and there is at the end of the day only one way in which they can prove it.

Question: How really desperately do you want peace?

David Trimble: Of course everybody wants peace and of course we do.

Question: ??????? over the last several months ???? much sense of an ????

David Trimble: I haven't seen any sense yet of the Republicans being prepared to carry out their part of the Agreement and that is the difficulty that we have.

Question: ?????????

David Trimble: Well lets get there and see.

Question: ????????

David Trimble: Of course there is and we have mapped that out.

Question: ?????

David Trimble: The problem at the moment comes from the refusal of republicans to carry out their obligations under the Agreement. We hope that

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they will do so. We hope that there will be by June 30th a clear indication that they will carry out their obligations so that we can, in the words that Mr. Adams's used in March, that we can both jump together, we could both move together. We're quite willing to do that but we need to see a response from them.

Question: Is your leadership on the line when today's election results are in.

David Trimble: Well all leadership is always on the line. As I said earlier, I'm looking forward to the results in Northern Ireland. I expect that we have done reasonably well. I'm certainly not looking at the sort of situation we have seen in England where someone has lost over half his seats and suffered a catastrophic drop in support but that's a different matter.

Question: Do you feel under any pressure over the recent stance adopted by John Taylor.

David Trimble: No.

Question: ??????? for sale on the Internet which links you with ????

David Trimble: I'm taking legal action against that because of course the linkage is totally false. As everybody knows.

END

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