

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Summary of meeting between a UUP Delegation led by David Trimble, and the Taoiseach and the Minister for Justice, Government Buildings, Sunday, 11th July 1999

1. The UUP delegation emphasised that, if they were to be able to win party support for the Way Forward document, they needed to be able to go back to their Executive on Wednesday evening with some new and positive material. At their meeting on Friday, the Executive would have been at least 75% opposed to the Governments' approach, if it had been put to a vote.

2. Apart from the fail-safe legislation, the UUP's biggest concern related to the sincerity of the signals from the Republican side - whether "we can, in fact, believe these guys". In their discussions with Sinn Féin at Castle Buildings, and in subsequent public statements by Adams and his colleagues, the UUP were unable to see any "seismic shift" on the arms issue. The Prime Minister at Castle Buildings had showed them two "bits of paper", which seemed to be draft IRA statements, but nothing had as yet appeared.

3. Reg Empey, in a forceful intervention, said that we were all at the wire, and nobody was playing games. If "these guys are committed, then for God's sake, let them say so". Jim Nicholson added that the UUP leadership at this stage didn't even have "a shirt on its back". And all this at a time when the party Executive had, for the first time, said it was in favour of an inclusive administration in Northern Ireland.

4. Ken Maginnis, in one of many security-related interventions, questioned the sincerity of the Republican movement. The Way Forward document had

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been predicated on a seismic shift, but nothing had happened. It was essentially a "lolly" in the absence of a statement from the IRA. Within the wider Unionist constituency, the reality was that 90% of people, including the business community, were opposed to the party participating in government without absolute clarity from the Republican side.

5. The Taoiseach welcomed the Unionist commitment to an inclusive Executive. He would be prepared to help in any way possible with the party's dilemma and would, in pursuit of this, speak with John Hume and Séamus Mallon over the following day or so. He agreed, in particular, that an IRA statement would be very helpful at this time.

6. The Minister for Justice and Tim Dalton gave an assessment, based on security intelligence, of thinking within the Republican movement on decommissioning. The Minister emphasised that the whole debate in the movement was now about the "when and how, rather than the if" of decommissioning. Republicans were preparing the ground for decommissioning. He added that our intelligence in such matters had rarely been proved wrong.

7. Dalton made the point that one of the core interests, from a Justice point of view, was to ensure that weaponry was decommissioned. He emphasised the importance and seriousness of the move by Republicans on decommissioning. There could, of course, be divisions in the movement and some might move away from the movement but, overall, he was convinced that a substantial majority would go with the leadership. Would it not make sense to "make the call" on the commitments made by Sinn Féin at Castle Buildings last week. If the UUP failed to do so, the universal impression would be that they allowed Sinn Féin "off the hook".

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8. David Trimble, while seeming to take encouragement from the above assessment, said that there was no sense of this at ground level in Northern Ireland. In addition, Ronnie Flanagan on television that morning had said that he had no indication that decommissioning was going to happen. Trimble asked what credibility would Unionists have left if they went into an Executive and decommissioning didn't happen. While he was tempted, personally, to "make the call" on Sinn Féin, by going into the Executive, he couldn't bring his Party generally to that view unless Sinn Féin/IRA could provide greater reassurance by Wednesday evening next.

9. Ken Maginnis, in taking strong issue with our security assessment, said Unionists needed to see "cards face up".

10. Gallagher said that all of us had to take some risk. The Irish Government were accepting that Articles 2 and 3 will be triggered automatically by the new institutions, and with no way back. This was a highly sensitive issue for us. Unionists, on the other hand, had the safety net of suspension if de Chastelain reported negatively. They would also be in a comfortable moral position, here and internationally, in such circumstances.

11. Trimble emphasised that the "plain simple reality" is that he couldn't deliver without some new material. Unionist morale had suffered over the past 15 months, as they felt nothing of value to them had emerged from the Good Friday Agreement. An opinion poll some time ago had even indicated that only 4% of Unionists thought the Agreement was a good deal for them.

12. Jim Nicholson said that the biggest problem for Unionists was one of timing. All the leadership were likely to be denounced as "traitors" from platforms

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over the 12th. Asking Unionists to move now was like asking Republicans to do so over the Easter Sunday period.

13. The Taoiseach argued that not to establish the institutions would let Sinn Féin off the hook. Trimble agreed that this would be a win-win situation for Republicans, and one that would also destroy the leadership of the UUP. Empey said that Unionists had no interest in maintaining the integrity of our ancient quarrel. Their interests now coincided with Dublin. If there was a genuine desire on Republicans to get the institutions working, and an acceptance by them that Unionists were committed to an inclusive Executive, then "for God's sake" let them do what was necessary.

14. As this stage, there was a reference to an article by Martin Ferris in the *Kerryman* in which he apparently accepted that there will be decommissioning. Trimble said he would like to see this, and we agreed to get a copy and forward it.

15. Maginnis said that the Taoiseach and John Hume could resolve the (Unionist) problem by underwriting the process and, in particular, by stating that, if commitments were not honoured, the structures could continue in being (i.e. without Sinn Féin in the Executive). He added that he was concerned that Unionists could come out of the process with nothing.

16. The Taoiseach, in a robust intervention (in response in particular to Maginnis), spoke of the huge attachment of the Fianna Fáil party to Articles 2 and 3. We were prepared to put these up front without any way back. We would, therefore, have real difficulty if decommissioning wasn't delivered on. The UUP could be assured that, if we had to go into a review in such circumstances, we would take a particularly tough line - there was no

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question of our being "patsies". The Unionists, on the other hand, had effectively put nothing up front and had failed, in particular, to go into an inclusive Executive as required by the Good Friday Agreement.

17. Trimble said he was trying to find a basis on which to take a gamble while being faced with a deeply sceptical party. The problem was that Sinn Féin had always succeeded in putting devolution off to the next phase of the process. Without some new development, he simply couldn't move.

18 The Minister for Justice emphasised the risk the Taoiseach had taken on Articles 2 and 3. If the Executive wasn't formed, it would not just be Sinn Féin but ordinary people in the street who would say that the Unionists weren't ready to share power. That would be a win-win situation for Sinn Féin.

19 Trimble said that the message he was receiving from us about the Republican movement and decommissioning was very much on the lines of what the Prime Minister was telling him.

20. The Taoiseach, summing up, said that (a) the Commissioner would brief the Chief Constable on our security assessment, who could in turn speak to Ken Maginnis; (b) we would follow up with the SDLP to see how they might best be helpful; (c) we would actively pursue with Sinn Féin the question of an IRA statement; and (d) we would send a message to the White House to the same effect, especially given the meeting between Martin McGuinness and the NSC on Monday.

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21. Finally, Ken Maginnis said that he and some colleagues would like to go ahead with a meeting (which he had earlier suggested) with the Taoiseach on Tuesday, perhaps around 11.00 am.

Dermot Gallagher

12 July 1999

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DELEGATIONS

Government: Taoiseach, Minister for Justice, Paddy Teahon, Tim Dalton and Dermot Gallagher.

UUP: David Trimble, Reg Empey, Ken Maginnis, Jim Nicholson, David Campbell and David Lavery.

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