

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Taoiseach
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18 FEB 2000

Summary of meeting between Taoiseach, Minister, British Prime Minister, Secretary of State and SDLP Delegation, Downing Street, 16 February 2000

1. The SDLP delegation consisted of John Hume and Séamus Mallon. Bill Jeffrey (NIO) and Dermot Gallagher were also present.

2. Hume said that a more effective way of putting pressure on parties was to have a five-sided meeting (two governments plus UUP, SDLP and Sinn Féin) as distinct from separate meeting with each.

3. Asked about the IRA approach on Friday, the Prime Minister said the problem was that, while they had given a commitment in principle (to put arms beyond use), it was not fully clear what they meant by it. He wondered what they meant by "in the context of the removal of the causes of conflict", to which Hume replied that they meant "total demilitarisation". The Prime Minister, taking up the point, said that if it was an arrangement between decommissioning and demilitarisation he would understand, but the trouble was in extracting a clear answer from Republicans.

4. The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister said that Unionists - especially Reg Empey - seemed keen to get the institutions back. The Prime Minister added that, if Friday's material had been available on 31 January, there would have been time to work on it.

5. Mallon wondered how the process would be taken forward. The IICD was now only a "clearing house". The British Government was not going to get a

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response from Republicans; the Irish Government was the only body likely to be able to do it.

6. Mallon argued forcefully that the real problem was the absence of any sanction against Sinn Féin or the UUP. Sinn Féin were leading everyone "a merry dance". The more difficulties there were, the more they were pampered. And pampering was counter-productive. Every time a problem arose. Trimble ran to Dublin, Adams to London, and both to the White House. The only way out of this was to find two "pills" or sets of sanctions to put pressure on them.

7. The sanction on Sinn Féin should be to say to them that, now that we have tried everything to help you, you will only be treated properly when "you decide you are going to be part of the political process".

8. The sanction on the UUP should be to emphasise that, in the absence of the Executive and North-South Council, there was an alternative way of doing things - through the active use of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

9. Mallon concluded by arguing that the present stalemate was "caput stuff" and, if not corrected, would result in the end of the Agreement in a very short time.

10. The Prime Minister said we shouldn't ignore the possibility that, in the end, the two governments would put it up to both sides, including through the threat of alternative approaches. However, this card could only be played once; it would be the last card to be played and carried a big risk with it. He saw both sides as "completely and bloody unreasonable", and he wondered whether their approaches were motivated by tactics, ideology or theology, or perhaps a

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combination of all three.

11. The Minister made the point that, at his meeting with the PUP earlier in the week, the party (reflecting the views of the UVF) had given a "reality check" about the decommissioning issue. It would be helpful for David Trimble to hear this hard reality at first hand from another unionist party.

12. In concluding the meeting, the Prime Minister paid tribute to the work of the Irish Government in moving the process substantially ahead last week. If this movement had been possible two weeks earlier, there would have been a real chance of a breakthrough. We needed now to know the bottom line - what it is the IRA mean by their words - and put our ducks in a row. If this failed, we would then have to think seriously of the approach suggested by Séamus Mallon.

Dermot Gallagher
18 February 2000

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