

Reference Code:	2023/154/29
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.

AMBASÁID NA HÉIREANN
TELEPHONE: (202) 462-3939
FAX: (202) 232-5993

EMBASSY OF IRELAND
2234 MASSACHUSETTS AVE., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

Mr Whelan
We have not yet received this separately
Ted
14-1-2000

SEEN BY TAOISEACH

24

SECURE FAX

14 January 2000

FOR SEC GALLAGHER FROM AMBASSADOR

RE: CALL BY SINN FEIN DELEGATION

1. Mr Martin McGuinness, Mr Aidan McAteer and Ms Rita O'Hare made a courtesy call to the Embassy this afternoon. Mr McGuinness had spent most of the day with Education Secretary Riley on discussions and visits relating to their educational brief. They had also made a short call on the First Lady's Chief of Staff, Melanne Verveer, at her request. This latter had been essentially a courtesy contact and no new issue of substance had been raised.

2. I said to the delegation that I had been struck by the contrast between the optimism which prevailed up to recently and the strong concern now emerging that the Executive might still founder on the decommissioning issue. McGuinness' reaction was very uncompromising: deadlines did not work. What was being asked of the republican movement required an IRA convention. They knew from their soundings that such a convention would go against them and lead to a change of IRA leadership. That was in no one's interest. He made a long historical analysis of how the decommissioning issue

©TSCH/2023/154/29

had been mis-used.

3. I said one had to distinguish between what might have been and what actually was the situation. Trimble had a rendezvous with his party, to cancel or execute his resignation pledge. He could hardly say he was only joking on decommissioning. His enemies were temporarily holding fire in the hope that he would have nothing to show and we believed his situation would be untenable in that event. If Trimble went down in this way public opinion, in our jurisdiction at any rate, would find very strongly for Trimble. Republicans would be blamed for the collapse of the Executive and, like the Duke of York, would have expanded all their energy to march their followers up the political hill only to march them down again.

4. The Sinn Fein side did not challenge the likely reaction in the South, although they insisted reactions would be different in the nationalist community in the north. They maintained they had been absolutely consistent in telling both Governments that the IRA would not decommission. Trimble also knew this and nevertheless had taken the course of action he did. They agreed that the Good Friday Agreement could not purport to prevent any party leader from resigning but insisted that Trimble's linkage of his potential resignation to conditions outside the Good Friday Agreement and the Mitchell Review had been wrong.

5. Mr McGuinness said it was obvious that the two Governments were working on the assumption that if everyone "including the Pope" "ganged up" on Sinn

©TSCH/2023/154/29

Fein that the IRA would decommission. That would exercise no pressure on the IRA to decommission. They would not split Republicanism. Trimble's resignation and the collapse of the Executive did not have to mean an end to peace. On the other hand, republican dissidents were lying in wait on the decommissioning issue and factors such as the lack of progress on demilitarization, doubts on Patton, bugging of Sinn Fein vehicles, etc etc added to the vulnerability of the Sinn Fein leadership.

6. I reverted to Trimble's dilemma, recalling Mr Mandelson's analysis here of three broad scenarios: (a) nothing happened - resignation by Trimble; (b) an actual destruction - a defusing of the decommissioning issue and (c) sufficient progress of some form, short of (b), to enable de Chastelain to issue a positive report which might, with skill, give Trimble a way out. How did Sinn Fein see Trimble escaping from the bind in which he found himself?

7. Mr McGuinness' first reaction was that the British should now proclaim that the decommissioning issue should not be allowed to ruin the progress that had been made. I said that was unrealistic. He said it was also unrealistic to expect the decommissioning issue to be resolved in a few weeks when the Agreement envisaged it being handled two years into the operation of the Executive. He conceded that if there were ways they could be helpful to Trimble via de Chastelain (compatible with the minuscule room for manoeuvre be attributed to the republican side) then they would of course do so. However he did not dissent from my closing analysis that, notwithstanding all the good work to date, the institutions could face a crisis and even collapse on this issue in the

©TSCH/2023/154/29

next few weeks.

8. Our meeting concluded with some questions from them on the conventions governing Ministerial visits and the relationship with the Embassy, or, as in their case, the Northern Ireland Bureau. I outlined the conventions on our side and suggested that there could be a degree of flexibility on their side also, provided demarcation lines between party political activity and Ministerial activity were kept clearly separated in financial and procedural terms. This question seemed curiously at odds with the rest of our conversation, which pointed to a likely crisis. I do not know whether this is indicative of a compartmentalized approach or of greater potential flexibility on the decommissioning issue than was manifested in the very hardline presentation which they made.

END

©TSCH/2023/154/29