

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Meeting between Taoiseach and SDLP, Dublin, 12 April 2000

Summary Report

1. The Taoiseach, accompanied by Minister of State O'Donnell, met an SDLP delegation comprising John Hume, Mark Durkan, Seán Farren and Bríd Rodgers (Séamus Mallon was ill) for approximately an hour in Government Buildings. Wally Kirwan, Ray Bassett and Rory Montgomery were also present.

Present Political Situation

2. The Taoiseach gave a general account of the ongoing work of the two Governments to draft a plan setting out how the outstanding aspects of the Agreement would be implemented. He made clear the Government's openness to creative thinking from all quarters, and our determination to involve all parties fully once the Governments had finished their current work.

3. He said that while, so far as he could judge, David Trimble had a good chance of selling a reasonable package to the UUC, there would be no point in expecting him to do so without something positive to offer.

4. Hume said that (as previously reported by Ray Bassett) he had proposed to Sinn Féin that if Mandelson restored the institutions the IRA should on the same day re-appoint their representative to the IICD, making clear that their arms were not being used and that this meant they were "out of commission."

5. The Taoiseach felt that, while Trimble could survive without product up-front, he had to be able to answer the "when" and "how" questions about decommissioning. Minister of State O'Donnell wondered if Trimble were now looking for still less than he had implied at Washington.

6. Farren confirmed that there seemed to be a general willingness within the broad unionist community to get off the decommissioning hook, but on the basis of confidence that the issue of arms was genuinely being dealt with. He asked if there had been any amplification by republicans of what "maximum

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public confidence", as used in the second de Chastelain report, meant.

7. Durkan said that, at Monday's SDLP/UUP meeting, Trimble had seemed well aware that both he and the Agreement needed the early restoration of the institutions. While he accepted that there would be no product, he had said he required "a real sense of a real process.". Empey had said that there would need to be clarity, especially from Sinn Féin.

8. Durkan, in a series of lengthy interventions which were supported by Farren argued that de Chastelain had to be given a more active role. He might build confidence during the current phase of discussions by outlining what lay behind his positive report of 11 February. More critically, he should have lead responsibility after restoration of the institutions, through devising a work programme for the Commission and the paramilitaries to undertake together. This work programme could begin with a discussion of modalities and lead on, by a given date, to an indication of when actual decommissioning would begin. This would allow the UUP to point to a clear sequence of steps. Trimble could leave the "how and when" to de Chastelain if he knew at what point he was going to hear what they were. Moreover, given that all the parties were obliged to work positively with the IICD and to use their influence to seek decommissioning, their collective endorsement of its programme would have substantial force.

9. Durkan also argued strongly that an implementation plan should extend beyond what was within the two Governments' competence. For instance, the parties should indicate when they saw a Programme of Government being adopted - this would demonstrate that it was not just a question of the restoration of the institutions, but of their effective operation. Optional elements such as the North/South Consultative Forum should also be mentioned.

10. Farren thought that, even if the British Government were not disposed to repeal the suspension legislation, at the very least there should be an assurance that any future crisis would be dealt with collectively and in accordance with

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the Agreement.

11. Farren also said that there needed to be, post-restoration, a mechanism for the regular review of implementation, involving both the Governments and the parties - he wondered if the BIIGC could play this role.

12. The Taoiseach concluded this main part of the meeting by undertaking to remain in the closest touch.

Other Issues

13. In relation to **Drumcree**, Rodgers thought that, despite talk of Brian Currin as an intermediary, the situation was not now susceptible to mediation. The matter should be left to the Parades Commission. In general, the heat was going out of the issue, although she agreed that a failure to resolve the political issue could complicate matters.

14. Hume mentioned that they had argued to the Secretary of State that the Alternative Vote system should be extended to Northern Ireland for the next Westminster election. Mandelson had seemed interested. Durkan said that this would strengthen the pro-Agreement side.

15. The Taoiseach briefed Hume and Durkan on the current state of play in regard to the proposed renewal of the Dublin-Derry airlink, on a subsidised (Public Service Obligation) basis. The Minister for Public Enterprise was taking the steps necessary under EU regulations, and, all being well, the service could be in operation by early next year.

Rory Montgomery
13 April 2000

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