

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code:	2023/154/35
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.

©TSCH/2023/154/35

Meeting between the Taoiseach and the Progressive Unionist Party on Thursday, 6 April @ 1.00 p.m. in Government Buildings.

Those attending the meeting were:

Taoiseach
Martin Mansergh
Wally Kirwan
Ann Whelan
David Ervine
Winston Rea
Wilson McArthur

The Taoiseach welcomed David Ervine and his colleagues and said that people see them as a constructive force for common sense. The Taoiseach is trying to keep things moving on and trying to meet all parties.

In the lead up to Washington the Irish side was trying to be constructive. In Washington the statement by David Trimble was a surprise. ~~The~~ focus ~~now is~~ on coming to an agreement between the two Governments on what is outstanding and what needs to be done, to square the circle and get a timetable. There is a need to get a sense of what ~~is needed~~ and then see what can be sold to ~~other~~ the participating parties, generally. It would prefer to bring the work between the two Governments to a conclusion early the following week.

The proposal to be agreed has to be put to all parties. This is a feature of learning from past mistakes. ~~The general thinking~~ is that no one should be complacent. May 22 is very significant but there is a ~~desire to see~~ need to get things going ~~again~~. ~~There is no imaginative way~~ around the decommissioning issue, on how to put it into context of full implementation of Good Friday Agreement. All key officials have been working on this for three weeks. The Irish and British Governments will finalise their positions and consult with all parties.

Mr. Ervine in reply stated that after the Omagh bombing there was impetus in the process. There is no process now if another Omagh were to happen. He expressed disappointment at the recent statement by the Garda Commissioner that there may never be any convictions for the Omagh bombing. The difficulty is if the Real IRA get lucky. He also expressed concern at the suggested impropriety of Gardai being involved in arms finds on several

occasions and involving the same arms being transferred to these locations. This was taken as a reference to the ongoing investigation in Donegal. He also expressed disquiet at talk of bomb scares purporting to be the work of the LVF. This, in his view, gave these people the notion that they were capable of such activities, which they are not, and he felt this was a dangerous situation. He expressed ~~annoyance~~ at the status of North South implementation bodies. The Irish side had ~~being saying~~ that it would take a period of time to revert them back. His people had been questioning him on the position.

On the talks process Mr. Ervine indicated that the process had been successful in the past when all parties came together. ~~It was possible to get over hurdles in this way.~~ In his view, ~~the Secretary of State is more~~ for pragmatic than moral arguments. People are trapped on moral arguments. Accountable democracy is more important to the UUP than IRA guns. The matter will have to be dealt with. What is being demanded will not be given and too much time has been spent asking. ~~The IRA~~ haven't addressed the issue and have ignored ordinary people. Up to De Chastelain II and the related IRA Statement all had been negative. Gerry Adams has increased UUP expectations arising from his meeting with David Trimble. ~~This debate~~ is about tokenism. ~~There are also loyalist guns.~~ Putting all weaponry beyond use is much better. The issue now is whether Sinn Féin are insincere or whether they are suffering wash back from a disaffected constituency. There is an urgent need to create a dynamic and test the Provisionals on how far they will go.

On the question of how far the leadership will press the Provisionals, the Taoiseach stated that the current information is that the ceasefires still hold. In the absence ~~of the institutions, however,~~ there would be no guns in bogs. There ~~is a~~ danger of slippage to ~~fringe~~ groups. Martin Mansergh remarked on the recent increase in punishment beatings. The Taoiseach questioned what can the UUP sell to a conference. They had closed doors on themselves and had less scope to sell solutions. The leadership vote was not good with 44% against on a weak candidate and on a minor issue at 48 hours notice.

Mr. Ervine raised the question on whether "we are dealing with Sinn Féin or the Provisionals". Unionists want the process to work. It is necessary to get around the ambiguities of the Good Friday Agreement. The IRA don't need to say the war is over. This would be left to others to interpret. He had given Gerry Adams words "that the mantle of Republicanism would pass from the IRA to Sinn Féin". There is a need to ~~understand the intent~~, to bring people out of the trenches and tell them that 'we are now in politics'. IRA should hand

©TSCH/2023/154/35

over moral guardianship to Sinn Féin. Martin Mansergh responded that the pure IRA may not want this.

Mr. Ervine continued that Sinn Féin are under siege from the Unionist community. This denies them space in which they can manoeuvre and is counter-productive. PUP can give them space but they must use it. Sinn Féin may have a self defence mechanism. If they haven't it will be more difficult for them. There is a perception that the Irish Government give too much support to Sinn Féin.

On the issue of North South bodies the Taoiseach stated that the tents have been folded. The bodies have been brought to as near a stop as is possible, short of enacting legislation. There is no doubt that a legal challenge would arise if legislation were introduced in this jurisdiction. Wally Kirwan pointed out that meetings of boards had been stopped and other matters were being held over, including acquisition of offices. The bodies were 'ticking over' just short of legislation.

Mr. Rea said that there was a perception that the Irish Government was not being true. David Ervine understood the fear of the legal challenge. He had asked the Secretary of State to name more Ministers to replace those suspended. This was by way of putting down markers - that if people did not come up to the mark, direct rule would go on. He assumed that the decision in the Fusco case was also because of a legal constraint.

The Taoiseach confirmed this and referred to the perception in some quarters that this had been arranged. He stated that politicians cannot interfere with the Courts, nor influence Gardai or get behind warrants. The Taoiseach referring to the difficult situation on the North/ South bodies said there was an issue with the budget for tourism. If separate allocations had to be made, North and South, it was back to the old way and the tourist interests is the North wanted to share the resources.

On a communications issue, Mr. Ervine stated that there was no liaison system in the North now for his party. Previously, during the multi-party talks they had ongoing contact with Irish officials, particularly Ms. Williams and Mr. David Cooney. The Taoiseach agreed that it was useful to have people to touch base with.

In response to Mr. Ervine's enquiry as to ~~the timeframe of any agreement with the British Government~~, the Taoiseach said that it was not a good idea to wait

©TSCH/2023/154/35

©TSCH/2023/154/35

until the last date. There would be a media build up to 22 May. The Taoiseach would rather try sooner and not later than around Easter. The longer it is left the more difficult it becomes. Stressing the positive, David Ervine stated that there was a need to emphasise the good parts - "is what we have less valuable than what was before" - and to bring out the human gains from the Agreement and peace, such as increased numbers out at night in cities and towns, enjoying themselves, young people able to be out without their parents being acutely anxious etc. The Taoiseach responded that the audit would cover the positive elements.

The Taoiseach stated that he long held the view that Sinn Féin owe him for trying to push the UUP. He now needs something/cards from Republications. Responding, David Ervine stated that the Taoiseach was in a more exalted position than any previous Irish Government, in the eyes of the people his party represents. Secretary of State and Minister Cowen need a good relationship. They need to sing off the same hymn sheet. They may have difficulties in getting David Trimble to jump. The issue is not necessarily product but the question of whether people have folded tents. The Taoiseach agreed on the need for confidence formation. Sinn Féin say that while dissidents are small, if the war is over it will put it up to them to prove you [D. Ervine] wrong. The question was how to settle matters so that they won't react. David Ervine added that they can't have it both ways. There has to be political efficacy and Unionist acquiesence. Sinn Féin are narrowing the ground that other parties work on. This may be a tactic to cause divisions in Unionism.

Martin Mansergh remarked that the problem is justification of war and making that OK with the current political system. Mr. Ervine responded that it is necessary to deal with people who are not into change no matter what. A formula is needed where people don't fuel each others problems. If Gerry Adams can deliver he should be helped.

On the current negotiations the Taoiseach indicated we will keep the position tight with the British Government and then go to all pro agreement parties. On the economic front, he stated that there was lots of positive investment available for Northern Ireland but investors won't come in until war is over. The South is glad to be co-operative with the North to share economic benefits.

David Ervine stated that the institutions should have been started when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. The leaders failed to deliver. Its now necessary to change deliver change to the people.

On the communications point the Taoiseach noted what was said and undertook to make information available on this or any other areas.

April, 2000.

c.c. P/Secretary to the Taoiseach
Secretary-General Teahon
Dr. Martin Mansergh
Mr. Walter Kirwan
Secretary Gallagher, Department of Foreign Affairs

said that he had taken careful note of what had been said about the need for liaison arrangements. He would try to make sure we have this and a liaison person in the coming weeks and beyond. If there are meetings and they have questions about them, we could give them factual answers.

He expressed frustration that many people were coming to the South from Eastern Europe to learn lessons from our economic progress but that the ongoing political difficulties were inhibiting a similar process as between North and South in Ireland

©TSCH/2023/154/35