

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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29 MAR 2000

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RÚNAÍOCHT IDIR-RIALTASACH
NA BREATAINE-NA hÉIREANN
BÉAL FEIRSTE

BRITISH-IRISH
INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECRETARIAT
BELFAST

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TO: Kim Gilligan /Mary Henry/Rose Gaughan
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Press Section, Embassy London

58, 25?

Ms Griffin

Not faxed on to the Taoiseach – overtaken by events

29.3.2000

TRANSCRIPTS

THE ENCLOSED TRANSCRIPT(S) WILL BE OF INTEREST.

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UUP PRESS CONFERENCE – DAVID TRIMBLE – 24 MARCH 2000

DAVID TRIMBLE

I said earlier this week, slightly surprisingly from Martin Smyth because in many respects we expected it to come from Willie Ross. But there you are, Willie, Martin are people who were at the centre of the leadership of this party for 10 or 15 years. Now, let's be frank about it. In that time, they achieved the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and they achieved the framework document. That was my inheritance. That was my inheritance as leader. And in the time that I've been leader, I believe I can say that I have turned round the political situation that this party faces.

Yes, we've produced an Agreement, we've produced an Agreement which ended the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement's gone. The territorial claim in Articles 2 and 3 have been gone and replaced by something which is not a territorial claim. We have also seen the sovereignty of the United Kingdom, of our country, recognised in the Agreement and, what better way of demonstrating the recognition of that sovereignty by the actions that were taken by the Her Majesty's Government in February of this year to suspend the Northern Ireland Assembly.

There is some people, I think Dr Paisley in particular, who've made a silly argument about Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act being repealed, and this ending British sovereignty or affecting British sovereignty over Northern Ireland. It was demonstrated very clearly in February of this year, with the suspension of the Assembly, by the United Kingdom Parliament, even though we know that Dublin was reluctant about it, that British sovereignty over Northern Ireland is there, and furthermore, the basic reality, the need for any institution here to be founded on the consent of the people clearly came through there as well.

In that Agreement we also have the consent principle clearly, clearly stated. Now, of course, there are still things to be done. We want, we still want to see devolution work, we still want to see decommissioning occur, those are the objectives that I am pursuing, and pursuing vigorously. I know that some people got confused about the comments that were made in Washington, but that's all that they were, namely, setting out again our willingness to achieve both devolution and decommission. And, even if it was done in a sequence, there was no doubt but that we wanted decommissioning to follow, and, as we proved in January and February, if it did not follow, then consequences would follow. So we stand square on that. And furthermore, of course, in all that we've done in pursuit of these objectives, we have done it with the approval of the Ulster Unionist Council at every stage. At every crucial stage I have gone back to the Council to get support.

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And it is, at the end of the day, the party collectively which makes policy, and that policies that we followed are policies that have been endorsed by the Ulster Unionist Council again and again by significant majorities. But we're presented with a challenge again. And when that challenge is over, as I believe it will be tomorrow, and over with the present policy and leadership being endorsed significantly, then I call upon Martin, and Willie, and the others, to this time respect the decisions of the Ulster Unionist Council, this time accept their decision, this time after that decision support it, and not continually have this campaign to undermine the polices that we are following. I've no doubt but that the policies that we are following are the best for unionism, and they're the best for Ulster, and I want to see this party reinvigorate itself, modernise itself. I want to see the party renew itself, and to follow through the historic leadership that's given to people here in Northern Ireland. The leadership that I've attempted to discharge over the course of the last five years, and will continue to discharge, because I know that what we've done is for the best for everybody in Northern Ireland. And what is best for unionism, what is best for Ulster, what is best for Northern Ireland, that is what we've tried to achieve. And I know too that there won't be a stable future if it is not based upon the leadership that this party has given historically, and will give in the future.

Now I could say much more along those lines, but I think I've said enough.

MEDIA

In the past two years, Mr Trimble, it has become more and more apparent that you are the leader of two distinct parties, two distinct groups, probably two distinct parties now. Is that a sustainable position for whoever wins on Saturday?

DAVID TRIMBLE

We have had a problem ever since the making of the Agreement, in that there has been a section of the party that has been opposed to the Agreement, and which has not accepted the democratic decision, either of the Ulster Unionist Council, or of the electorate in Northern Ireland, which has clearly endorsed the Agreement. And I think the time has come for that to end. And that is why I have called, as I called this morning, for Martin and Willie, and their supporters, to this time accept the democratic decision and support the democratic decision. That is their duty as Ulster Unionists and as democrats.

MEDIA

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I know you have said several times that you are disappointed but it sounds to me that you are rather relishing this challenge, that it might put an end to it.

DAVID TRIMBLE

Let us now put an end to it, let us clear the air. Let us clear the air and then let us now after this decision because over the course of the last two years the opponents of the Agreement have run through the full gambit of what they can do to oppose the Agreement culminating in this challenge. Now let it end with this challenge, that is what I am saying.

MEDIA

You seem to be saying that your dissident opponents in the party have really run out of rope this time. You have been criticised recently for not dealing harshly enough with them. Do you think this marks a watershed in this challenge?

DAVID TRIMBLE

As I said I hope this puts an end to the dissent and that this time that the democratic position will be accepted.

MEDIA

Is it factual that there is a proposition being considered that in future only pro-Trimble candidates can stand in the Westminster elections?

DAVID TRIMBLE

No, I think, we are a party of rules as this challenge has demonstrated and as a party of rules we will stick to our rules and procedures but we will also call upon people to accept democratic decisions.

MEDIA

Now can I make the case if this party needs to reform so as this sort of thing doesn't happen in the future.

DAVID TRIMBLE

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I think there is nothing that will ever guarantee in any party leadership problems or leadership challenges but I think we have got to look at the way in which we do things. It is remarkable in this party that someone could turn up tomorrow, a delegate could turn up at tomorrow's AGM at 10.30 or whenever, could just get on the seat and nominate anybody. So I think we are incredibly democratic in terms of our procedures..... Because they could let a hundred flowers bloom. I mean we are incredibly democratic and I have respected that. I have consulted with the party council more thoroughly than any of my predecessors. I have been more open with my colleagues than any of my predecessors. I have debated again and again with my colleagues. When they ask me questions I answer them and I come to meetings in order to debate things in detail. So I am quite happy to operate in a party and I prefer to operate in a party that is democratic, that has internal debate and rather than operate in some of the more stifling dictatorial operations which sometimes call themselves democratic and yet are not.

MEDIA

In the overall political picture, if you win this contest tomorrow will it more swiftly bring about the restoration of the Executive?

DAVID TRIMBLE

I can't answer that because the problem lies not with unionism, the problem lies with republicanism. It is the republican movement that in February withdrew from the table, walked away from the table. It is the Republican movement that has talked about playing it long and renegotiating the Agreement and part of what I did in Washington was to call upon the republican movement to come back to the table, to put more on the table than was there in the past and the choice should be with them. One of the disappointments about this challenge is that it is distracting attention from that. We have through what we did over the course of the last few months focused attention on republicans and their failure and this challenge is a distraction from that and I think that is one unfortunate aspect of it.

MEDIA

To turn to things later in the afternoon, what is your view on the David Burnside motion?

DAVID TRIMBLE

As I have said I share the objective and we are all very deeply disappointed with the mistakes that Chris Patten made. Chris Patten didn't stick to his terms of reference and indeed it is just

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simply a bad proposal, it is going to damage policing in NI, so I share the objectives. The question are the tactics and at present I think, as I have indicated, I think the particular form of the Burnside motion is ill advised and our present tactics, or the present state of our thinking is to bring forward an amendment and indeed we are actually working on the amendment at the present time and I think you will see that tomorrow.

MEDIA

Are you as confident about winning that amendment as you are about winning the leadership challenge?

DAVID TRIMBLE

Yes. Because it is an improvement.

MEDIA

Frank Miller this morning, a former colleague of yours and a well informed person on unionism, he advised in the paper, he suggested in the paper, that should Martin Smyth get higher than 30% and I hope I am quoting him correctly, that it would be damaging in terms of the leadership of the Ulster Unionism, in terms of Ulster Unionists generally. Would you share that view?

DAVID TRIMBLE

Well I am very sorry to offend Frank by saying I haven't read his piece....as yet but I will.....

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REV MARTIN SMYTH PRESS CONFERENCE – LIVE ON SKY **24.3.00**

REV MARTIN SMYTH

....diverse patterns throughout Northern Ireland. I've heard already in the media today that it's a question of the 'No' campaign against the 'Yes' campaign. The reality is that there are many who voted 'Yes' have been supporting me and asking me to stand because they've gone as far as they are prepared to go in duplicity. Might I also welcome you, ladies and gentlemen of the press, to share with us a recognised part of your problem and I must confess that I welcome the fact, in the light of an article in one of the London papers during the week, that journalists who have backed particular politicians very soon turn from them and I haven't found a weight of support from the press, therefore I'm happy that I haven't got the kiss of death upon me. There has been a degree of misreporting, I've drawn it to the attention of one of your colleagues who, this morning, when I was on Radio Scotland I was told that my colleague Jeffrey Donaldson was not supporting me. I pointed out that's a surprise because as far as I was concerned he actually had said that a vote for me would be a mickey message to the Prime Minister and I said where did you get that from and he mentioned a very well respected constituent of mine, who is in the media. I've already spoken to him and he denies it, but he will be aware that Jeffrey himself has been on the local radio this morning clearly supporting me.

Now, having said that, to get it out of the road so that there'll be no ambiguity. I want to say that my campaign is not a personal campaign, it's a political campaign and I regret that there are some people who have sought to make it a question of jealously. My record stands clear on that situation, that I have served the party faithfully, there have been times when, as an officer of the party, I've had to support candidates and I wondered about the judgement of the selectors. But because of the commitment as a party officer I had to support them and when it comes down to clear cleavage, a departure from the policy of the Ulster Unionist Council, its Executive and others, it seems to me that there comes a moment when you've got to say enough's enough. Now I would just read you the statement that David made, and it's a verbatim one. The crucial thing from a question posed earlier is, if we look at the sequence in the future, is it going to work? We can't move unless it is quite clear it is going to work. I can't answer the question about whether a new sequence is going to work or not. I have made it clear that we are prepared to be involved in a fresh sequence which probably will not involve arms up front, but it has to involve the issue being dealt with, it has to involve the issue of the matter working and I can't answer that. You can't answer that at the moment. The only persons who can answer that are the republican movement, the only people that can answer that question of, will it work this time, are them. He sought, and I noted it said in one of the papers that I'd asked for the 'clear the air' meeting. The media actually reported he was

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coming to London for a 'clear the air' meeting. He said that I didn't ask him any questions. He didn't attend the party meeting. The only issues that he was dealing with were trivia, for example, in my office said, when is the vote, tonight? And that was Wednesday, I said it will be actually on Monday, such votes come on a Monday. So I was giving him clear guidance. He did not clear the air at any level and the more he has spoken on the issue and those who tried to say that he has strengthened his position leave me wondering about the use of the English language and in that context one of the papers today actually said that he threatened to resign. He had given a post date cheque, it was not handed in at the correct time and that was done deliberately as a political ploy to allow Peter Mandelson to rescue the Assembly from oblivion.

Now let's get down to policy. I have no difficulty with a devolved Assembly, I certainly have queries as to whether Northern Ireland with 1,700,000 people need 108 people with all the ancillary advisers as staff, with ten departments, to govern them. It's out of all proportion to Scotland and Wales and since they reckon to be the most impoverished region of the United Kingdom it seems to me alarming, that so much of that budget is going to be spent on the administration and therefore I have problems there. I have problems also, and people well know it because they are political issues and we have a right to argue them, and that is d'Hondt is not the proper way to form an Executive and I have every hope that good sense will ultimately prevail as people realise there has to be an improvement and we may evolve into something like Wales or Scotland where, for example, in Wales a minority Labour group are actually governing with at the least the consent of the Assembly. In the Scottish situation where they have a parliament the Labour party had to have a coalition with the Lib Dems to make sure that the Scottish (unclear) would not govern. So that's normal politics, I have no difficulty with that. What I have difficulty with is the American Governments, the European Governments, who were quick to castigate the people of Austria who elected a right wing party which, to the best of my knowledge, have no arms and while I'm a child of the 30s and I understand the fears that may arise there, nonetheless there is something basically inconsistent, to try to impose upon a democratic community, those in government who come with the force of arms and let me say that's the Belfast Agreement. The Belfast Agreement clearly says that there can be no one in the Executive who come, either, representing the armed terrorists or using them as a threat and that's been hanging over us all along and therefore I believe that the two Governments have got to take this step. Rather than pressing the Ulster Unionists for another step forward for peace, when to the best of my knowledge, Ulster Unionists have not been brandishing arms and we have taken a fairly clear line against terrorism from wherever it comes. But the reality is that there is only one party elected with a mandate from the people to be in the Assembly who, according to the d'Hondt principle, could be in that Executive and they could be in it if they were abiding by the rules of the Assembly, by the agreement that says you cannot be there if you are using violence or the threat of

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