

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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cc PS/T, PS/C, PS/M, Mr Taylor, Mr Watkins, Dr Mallon, Mr Ingram, Mr Lavery (w/c), Sir Kenneth Bloomfield (R/H), Caroline R.

Telephone Calls to Denis Rogan and Jim Wilson, UUP

Monday 27 March 2000

1. I spoke briefly today to Lord Rogan, the UUP Chairman, and to Jim Wilson, Chief Whip of the Assembly Party, in the wake of Saturday's meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council.

2. Both confirmed that the picture was as it had appeared in the media: undoubtedly both David Trimble and pro-Agreement unionism had suffered a serious, but not yet a fatal, blow.

3. Rogan said that they had known it would be a tough day, and rejected the view (put most forcefully by Frank Millar) that the Trimble camp had been complacent. He agreed with the point made by Michael McGimpsey that constituency representatives were 70:30 in favour of Trimble, but at the same time "rules are rules" and it would now be impossible to change the party constitution for as long as this was seen to have a direct bearing on wider issues.

4. Rogan admitted that the Burnside motion had been a "cleverly-designed ambush", but felt that ultimately Trimble could live with it: sooner or later, if there were any prospect of a deal on restoring the institutions, Trimble would have to return to the Council.

5. Rogan thought, with hindsight, that Trimble's Washington comments had been a mistake. While not a slip of the tongue, they did not represent a carefully thought-through policy, or even conscious kite-flying. While their substance was indisputable, they had put the pro-Agreement side on the defensive.

6. All in all, Saturday's meeting, while not terminal in its effects, had reduced the

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UUP's potential flexibility still further.

7. Wilson's assessment of the meeting was broadly similar. However, he admitted that the vote represented not just a hard core of anti-Agreement feeling, but a drift away from the Yes side which mirrored that in the wider community. His own Presbyterian Minister, and family members, had said to him that they thought Trimble was going too far and giving too much. He also admitted that he had found himself at odds with significant members of his own (South Antrim) constituency association.

8. Wilson spoke with some feeling of what he saw as the failure of the two Governments to offer Trimble sufficient support: there was no public criticism of Sinn Féin, and no sign that they were being put under serious pressure.

9. Nonetheless, both Rogan and Wilson said that they remained willing to explore all options, though the latter, in particular, evinced little optimism that anything likely to be offered by republicans would come close to meeting basic UUP needs.

Rory Montgomery
27 March 2000

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W. Kirkham

cc PS/J. Nash, PS/MC
M Tanlan, Dr Hamill
Quillan PA/
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5.4.2000

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TO: SECRETARY GALLAGHER<HQ

FROM : BILL NOLAN<BELFAST.

Ken Reid - comments following events of the weekend.

1. Ken Reid, UTV, believes Trimble is prepared for now to remain in the fray and is willing to keep trying for a way forward. He is, however, badly shaken after Saturday's confrontation and knows it is very likely that he will face further challenges to his authority, if not to his rule, in the weeks and months ahead. As of now, he sees no way of coming back to the Council with a package that stands any chance of success, unless he is able to produce (as Ken puts it) "a shiny new present from the 'RA'". It would have to be good - "words will not be nearly enough after Saturday", according to Ken Reid.

2. It was the vote on his amendment to the Burnside motion which floored Trimble on Saturday. It came in the afternoon following what many felt was the best and most passionate speech he has made to the party since becoming leader. His theme was that the Agreement, though by no means perfect and certainly not what Unionists would ideally look for, was the best that could be obtained and did offer Unionists a good deal for the future. He told the Council that if it goes down, they will inevitably be faced with a far worse choice next time. Saying NO has not worked in Unionism's favour in the past; it is now a real danger to the Union.

3. Despite this appeal, the amendment was lost by about 50 votes. Trimble took this to be a truer indication of the Council's mind on the leadership issue than the actual contest earlier in the day. He was so shaken by this that he saw immediately a vote on the motion itself would have to be avoided at all costs. Burnside's motion would have carried easily and, in those circumstances, Trimble would have had little choice but to offer his resignation there and then. It was that close, according to Ken Reid.

4. The latter thinks 'the Taylor factor' will now need to be watched carefully. Taylor's behaviour and demeanour at the press conference on Friday upset the Trimble camp considerably. They are very worried about this and know that with majority sentiment inside the party now running heavily against the Agreement (60-70% according to Reid, but with anything up to 25% of that still "persuadable"), time is not on their side.

END
27 March 2000.

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