

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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SEEN BY TAOISEACH

Summary of meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the UUP, Castle Buildings, 14 February

1. David Trimble was accompanied at the meeting by Reg Empey, Michael McGimpsey and David Campbell. The Minister was accompanied by the undersigned. The atmosphere throughout was good, despite the difficult issues under discussion. Trimble and Empey told the Minister at the end that they would like to stay in regular contact.

Meetings with Adams and McGuinness

2. Trimble said that the Prime Minister had suggested to Adams that he meet with Trimble on Friday and explain what Republicans intended doing. In the event, he had a phone call from Adams, and McGuinness attended the meeting in the Sinn Féin President's place. McGuinness however, told him nothing, and neither man gave him any sense of what they were planning to do.

3. Trimble said he couldn't see suspension being lifted within a week or two without some decommissioning. In its absence, they would have no choice but to remain in suspension. And, given their expectations of the Mitchell review, there was no alternative to suspension last Friday. Otherwise, Trimble said he would have been quickly replaced as Party Leader at Saturday's Council meeting.

De Chastelain Report

4. Trimble and Empey then turned to what they saw as the ambiguities in the de Chastelain Report of 11 February, citing in particular the references to (a) the putting of arms beyond use " in the context of the removal of the causes of conflict", and (b) the General's belief about "the prospect of an agreement which would enable it to fulfil the substance of its mandate".

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5. Empey said that the possibility of re-establishing the institutions on the basis of the published de Chastelain Report was "zero". The Republicans had made a mistake in not making a gesture in January - "even a bag of child's caps" would have created a dilemma for the UUP.

6. Trimble, supported by Empey and McGimpsey, said that they had "no feel or concept about what's involved in de Chastelain". Even if they had, they simply couldn't go to the party again, as in November, on the basis of an optimistic assessment of ambiguous words.

7. The Minister, in a series of interventions, argued strongly that it was vital that the public credibility of the de Chastelain Commission be safeguarded. It was agreed both in June last year, and as part of the outcome of the Mitchell review, that the Commission had the key role to play. Publicly to second-guess the Commission would weaken its authority. All of us needed to accept and enhance the Commission as the body which can best take the strain. Understandably, of course, assurances might be required and these should best be pursued with de Chastelain and Adams.

8. Overall, our strong view was that, if suspension remained in place, there would be a progressive polarisation of attitudes and a hardening of positions. The situation was already very worrying. It would be very difficult to see what could emerge from a review in such circumstances. The reality was that a new situation had been created by Friday's report. Trimble was now in a significantly stronger position than last week, and the opportunity should quickly be seized. Otherwise, we would be in a very difficult situation indeed.

Failsafe mechanism

9. Trimble referred to what he called the failure of the Government to honour undertakings given in November. He added that, if Dublin continued to delay "doing what you have to do to give effect to suspension", a very serious situation would arise. Already, he was under considerable pressure from anti-Agreement Unionists on this issue, especially from McCartney. He could

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"flannel" the situation for a while but inevitably, unless some action was signalled, they would be forced publicly to accuse us of "bad faith" within a week or two.

10. The Minister, in response, explained the constitutional situation and the constraints it placed on the Government. Trimble said that David Lavery had not received a clear picture from the Attorney General, and neither had the Home Office a good grasp. If they had a clear picture, it would make life easier.

US Trip

11. Trimble said he would be in London on Wednesday and in Missouri and Boston until Wednesday or Thursday of next week.

Adams meeting

12. He agreed with the Minister that an early meeting with Adams would be important, and said he would be happy to see him on the following day (Tuesday, 15th), either on a one-to-one or group basis.

Dermot Gallagher
15 February 2000

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