



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/97/35

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copy Joe  
The Secretary  
27

25 August, 1995

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Mr. Dick Spring T.D.  
Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs

Dear Dick,

Over the last few days I have had a number of conversations with various people in Northern Ireland. Most of these have been on the phone. To the best of my ability I have taken notes of what was said to me, although I have less full notes of what I said.

I would like to set out for you my best recollection of what was said to me, as this may be helpful to you.

**Ken Maginnis**

Ken thinks that Sinn Fein's tactic of mobilising the masses in support of their demand for immediate talks has not worked. He has revised his view that we are in for a "rolling resumption" of violence. The tactic of demonstrations that he believed would precede the resumption of actual violence has not worked. He claims that Unionists did not react to provocation, and as a result they did not give Sinn Fein the basis for what he had been predicting would be a rolling resumption of violence.

As a result of all of this, Ken Maginnis now thinks that the IRA are ready to "do something" on decommissioning. He sees the idea of a panel or

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Commission as being helpful in this regard. But he said that it was very important that the process of decommissioning be "benchmarked".

He indicated the following benchmarks on the road to actual decommissioning which could be built into the Terms of Reference of a Commission or panel.

- A. Agreement in principle to decommission.
- B. An agreement as to the number of weapons of different kinds to be decommissioned.
- C. An agreement on the modalities of decommissioning.
- D. An agreement on an actual schedule of decommissioning.

(I draw some hope from the above. It seems to indicate that Unionists are looking at a way of breaking the decommissioning down into manageable pieces. Thus it might be possible for them to make a staged political response as each of the benchmarks was passed.)

I raised with him again the question of the Ulster Unionist Party meeting the Irish Government. He said that he would prefer to have prior private discussions about issues with the Irish Government before any formal and publicly advertised meetings took place. At prior private discussions it would be possible for agreement to be reached that both the Government and the Ulster Unionist Party to say things that would be complementary to another. This would improve the atmosphere for a formal meeting, when it did take place.

He expressed concern at the idea that the British Government might "further formalise the bilateral talks process" without any action by Sinn Fein on the

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decommissioning issue. I said that I believed that some thing of that nature was the absolute minimum that was necessary to be done to create an atmosphere in which decommissioning might be done.

I raised with him the question of setting a date for a round table conference. I also mentioned the possibility of a twin track approach on decommissioning and talks. He expressed worry about a twin track approach in that there might not be an equal amount of progress in both tracks. He felt that Unionists might be trapped in the political talks track, while insufficient progress was being made on the decommissioning track.

He sent me a copy of his speech to the East Down Branch of the Ulster Unionists Party of 19 August which he felt would be helpful.

**Fr. Denis Faul**

Fr. Faul was very concerned that Gerry Adams was not talking the language of peace. He felt that the language being used by Sinn Féin was unduly provocative and confrontational. He felt that Fianna Fáil and the Cardinal were inclined to act as "Altar boys" for Sinn Féin. He felt that Sinn Féin were looking for some form of victory over the British and that this was unconstructive. He mentioned the continuance of punishment beatings and the burning of Protestant property. He felt that Sinn Féin could control the elements that were engaging in this activity, but were failing to do so.

He agreed however, that guns might be needed, for the time being, to defend the Nationalist community. But this did not apply to semtex and rocket launchers. He felt that semtex and rocket launchers could be decommissioned much more readily.

He felt that it was unlikely that all-party talks, of a kind that would lead to a settlement, would take place "for at least five years". The important thing was not political talks or a political settlement, but getting on with living together as neighbours. He argued that, while people did not particularly enthuse about it, most members of both communities actually accepted direct rule as providing a reasonable life for them.

He said that the Sinn Féin agenda consisted of two items - get the British out, and dismantle the RUC. He felt that neither of these were actually going to happen. He therefore seemed to infer that a talks process would not be successful until Sinn Féin had moderated their objectives.

He expressed a strong view that the British could do more to limit and control Orange Parades.

### **John Alderdice**

He said that he would be very happy with an approach of inter-party talks, involving all-parties, at this stage as means towards advancing the peace process. He took the view that the term "all-party talks" always meant, and was understood to mean, something launched at a conference in one room with all the relevant parties present. In this John Alderdice seems to confirm Gerry Adams view of what "all-party talks" mean. (My own view was that all-party talks were talks involving all parties, and that it did not particularly matter whether they were launched at one big meeting or whether they started in individual meetings).

He said that he did not want to see Unionists put in a corner. He felt that any formal launch, whether at a conference or any other type of event, would at this stage probably be boycotted by Unionists.

I mentioned the idea of starting of with inter-party talks, but working towards a date for a conference later in the year. He thought that this idea might have promise and undertook to think about it.

He said that he and his party were thinking about various suggestions that they could make to the Irish Government when they meet us next week, about how to get the Unionists more involved in the process.

**Jim Molyneux - Jim Wilson**

I was in touch with the General Secretary of the Ulster Unionist Party, Jim Wilson, with a view to getting to talk to Jim Molyneux. According to Jim Wilson they have themselves been trying to contact Jim Molyneux for the last two days without success. They undertook to give him a message to the effect that I was looking for him. I got the impression that they were genuine in what they were saying, and that they were not trying to fob me off. But I do not know for sure.

**David Ervine - Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist Party**

I sought to talk to David Ervine (to whom I had spoken at the end of July) but could not get him. I got Billy Hutchinson instead.

He said that the language used by Sinn Féin in recent weeks was "the language of war and not the language of peace".

He expressed concern about the releases of Republican Prisoners in the Republic. I said that these releases were justifiable on humanitarian ground, not for the purpose of confidence building in the peace process. He said that that might be all right, but from the perspective of Loyalists, they felt that the

Provos were the only people benefiting from the peace process. Loyalist organisations were not getting any benefit. He acknowledged, of course, that we had no Loyalist prisoners and therefore were unable to be of any help in that regard.

I asked him if his Party would come to an all-party conference if it was called. He said that he hoped that they would. But he believed that neither the Ulster Unionist Party nor the Democratic Unionist Party would turn up.

On the idea of an International Commission in respect of decommissioning, he said that his Party had actually mentioned this idea to the British themselves.

He expressed concern about remarks made by Albert Reynolds on the decommissioning issue. He said that it was wrong of Albert Reynolds to say the decommissioning question was not raised before the ceasefire. He says that in contacts between his organisation and the then Irish Government that the Progressive Unionist Party actually gave assurances in regard to decommissioning themselves. So the matter was raised.

### **Rev. Martin Smith**

He said that Sinn Féin had delivered nothing except a tactical ceasefire. He says that what Sinn Féin are now looking for, all-party talks, cannot be delivered because the electorate of Northern Ireland are not ready to deliver it to them. By this he seemed to mean that the Unionist electorate was unwilling to see Unionist Politicians taking part in all-party talks on the basis sought by Sinn Féin.

He expressed concern at the fact that the British Government were rumoured to be about to announce a 50% remission for paramilitary prisoners. He said that

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as soon as this was granted there would be an immediate demand for a 66% remission. He said that high levels of remission of sentence would make it easier for paramilitaries to recruit people because the penalties would be less.

He said that middle-class Unionists were becoming very concerned, and were beginning to support paramilitary options.

I then asked him about Unionist involvement in all-party talks and the question of Unionist willingness to meet the Irish Government. He immediately went back to the way that they were treated when they came to Dublin in 1992. He said that he and his colleagues did not want to become involved in another talks process that might end up like that. He did not want two more years of what he described as "navel gazing".

I pointed out that the Government in Dublin was now different from the one that they had met at that time, and that there would be a willingness now to meet Unionist concerns to a greater degree. I explained that it was very difficult to portray Unionists in a reasonable light, if Unionists were unwilling to talk even to the Irish Government. He seemed to take this point on board to some degree, but did not make any concession on the issue of actually meeting us.

He expressed concern at Sinn Féin's exclusion orders on individuals not having been lifted. He felt that these continued exclusion orders represented a continued threat of violence to the individuals concerned.

I put it to him that Unionists were going to have to talk to Sinn Féin eventually anyway. I said that Unionists had more to gain from the continuance of peace than others. I said that Unionists had a guarantee that no solution would be imposed without the agreement of a majority in Northern Ireland. Thus they had little to fear from having talks with Sinn Féin, even if Sinn Féin had not decommissioned.

He said that their experience of discussions with Sinn Féin did not bear this out. He seemed to feel that Sinn Féin had broken agreements that they had entered into with the Orange Order in regard to the parade on the Ormeau Road. Apparently, he feels that Orange men honoured their side of the bargain, but the local Sinn Féin people did not.

I put it to him that if Unionists were to come to talk to the Irish Government, that would show that Unionists were willing to enter into talks with other people. It would make their position on the decommissioning issue more comprehensible. As long as they were not willing to talk even to the Irish Government, their arguments about decommissioning and not talking to Sinn Féin were not particularly convincing, because Unionists appeared not to be willing to talk to anybody anyway.

### **John Hume**

All the above conversations were by telephone. I had an actual meeting with John Hume. I was accompanied by Paddy Teahon and Sean Donlon. He said that he was worried about bilaterals because he felt that the British would simply pick and choose things that were agreed between parties and present them in a way that would catch some of the participants out. For example, he said that Prior had engaged in bilaterals with the various parties. Prior found that the only thing that they all seemed to agree about was that there should be an assembly. He therefore, proceeded to have an assembly. But this was something that the SDLP were only willing to agree to as part of a wider arrangement. Because he was meeting the various parties separately, Prior was able to detach the assembly from the context in which the SDLP had put it. Thus, he put the SDLP at a disadvantage.

I said that this would certainly be a problem if bilateral or trilaterals were to go on indefinitely. But I thought that what we would be looking for would be that

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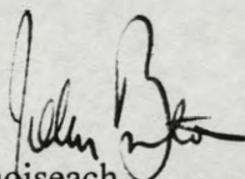
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we would have a bilateral and trilateral phase leading to a conference on a specified or determinable date. Thus the bilaterals and trilaterals would be only preparatory. I said that I felt that we would have a better chance of launching an all-inclusive talks process, in which all the parties would actually take part, if it had been prepared in this way. He did not contest this point. But he did say that Unionists would be most unreasonable to fail to turn up at a conference. Pressed on whether he believed they would actually come to a conference in September, he did not say that they would. Nor did he say that the British Prime Minister had agreed to the calling of a conference, or given any indication that he would, when John had met him in July.

At the end of our meeting John Hume agreed to put it to Sinn Féin over the weekend that they would agree to an approach to all-party talks that involved starting it initially with bilaterals and multilaterals, and using these as a way of agreeing a date, at latest in November, for an all-party conference.

I hope that the above material is of interest.

Yours sincerely,

  
Taoiseach.