



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/97/38

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Meeting between the Tanaiste and Sinn Fein

Iveagh House, 11 October, 1995

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MR. F MURRAY

MR. P TEAHON

MR. S. DONLON

MR. T DALTON

Present were:

Government side: Tanaiste, Mr. Fergus Finlay and the undersigned.

Sinn Fein: Mr. Martin McGuinness and Ms. Rita O'Hare.

1. The Tanaiste opened the meeting by stressing the urgency of getting agreement on the twin-track process. US concerns in this respect had been conveyed to him during his trip to Washington, and had been reinforced through other channels since. He outlined the various engagements with the British where we would hope to advance matters. He listed a number of areas where he thought there could be difficulties with the Sinn Fein draft, including the question of a target date versus a specific commitment, the way in which a Commission would actually work: in particular its relationship to the paramilitaries and the question of a specific focus on illegal weapons.
2. Mr. McGuinness shared fully the sense of urgency and the need to break the impasse. With the passage of time, he and Adams were becoming more and more isolated because of a wholesale loss of faith in the process. They had met the British Government on Monday to establish whether they were willing to negotiate and what the status of

the "Hume-Ancram" document was. The British had made clear the document emanated from them and Sinn Fein had considered how best they could contribute. They had drawn up a counter document which they had shown to the Americans and others, but not the British. They needed people to accept that the engagement with the Commission would be a political project. They envisaged considerable contact with the British from next week on, and hoped to garner support in the US from John Hume and the Irish Government to expedite matters. If it was not sorted out, the Sinn Fein leadership's position would be untenable. He spoke of the widespread concern in the nationalist community that the Irish Government was being taken for granted and not sufficiently assertive, viz-a-viz the British. He expressed appreciation for the Tanaiste's UN speech which he said had heartened people. Most of his constituency now believed the peace process was finished and were waiting for it to be brought to a close. At the same time he himself was encouraging people to persevere.

3. The Tanaiste thought that people were now under pressure of a deadline, which on occasion could be a constructive force in politics. He stressed the Government were working to one coherent policy, and asked how Sinn Fein saw their engagement with Ancram. Mr. McGuinness said this depended how they responded. There were two distinct views. Sinn Fein and their supporters believed profoundly that the weapons of the British army, etc., were also part of the equation. He spoke at length of over 50 people who had been shot in Derry by the British Army in "non-gun battle situations". As leaders of a

community who were deeply conscious of that dimension, Sinn Fein could not accept the "dishonest" British analysis that Republican weapons were the only problem.

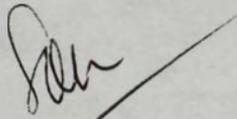
4. The Tanaiste stressed that the British Government would not accept an equivalence between the weapons of the security forces and the weapons of the paramilitaries.
5. Mr. McGuinness indicated he was not talking about equivalence as such. Everyone recognised that weapons were a major problem, on both sides. It was equally important to dismantle deep injustices etc.
6. The Tanaiste objected that this latter was not George Mitchell's task, but had to be achieved in all-party talks. Peaceful circumstances had greatly improved the support being offered Northern nationalists.
7. Mr. McGuinness agreed that the problem had to be settled in all-party talks. However account had to be taken of the "vindictive" attitude of the British Government. He himself had been cautioned by the RUC a few days ago for causing an obstruction on Derry walls at the time of the 12th of July riots. He had in fact been there with Mark Durkan. He did not care "tuppence about going to court", but it was the attitude behind the process which said it all.

8. O Huiginn said there could be no question of Sinn Fein being precluded from dealing with all weapons in their own submission. The question was how any communique would strike a balance or an accommodation as between the British and Sinn Fein views. Provided the two sets of weapons were not equated, the British Government themselves accepted that developments in relation to paramilitary weapons had consequences for their own security forces. He suggested that that approach be explored. The Tanaiste indicated that the US was unlikely to treat illegal weapons the same as those of the security forces.
  
9. Mr. McGuinness made another very long intervention, naming various victims of the violence in Derry. He could not face these people in his own city if he accepted the British view of things. He would be publicly humiliated. The Tanaiste emphasised the need for movement and asked Mr. McGuinness how he saw decommissioning taking place. Mr. McGuinness deplored the earlier British position, i.e. that reflected in their February paper where they spoke of inventories and options including handover to local RUC, etc. Both he and Adams agreed that in the right circumstances, the logistics of decommissioning would be simple and straightforward (assembly and verified destruction at agreed points, as I understood it).
  
10. The Tanaiste spoke of the importance of the US as a resource and the need to keep them on board. There were grave difficulties also for the British Government, as was evident from the Tory Party Conference.

At a certain point the Tories would go into election mode, and the window of opportunity for making progress on Northern Ireland was consequently probably small. Mr. Finlay emphasised very strongly the credibility gap that would arise for a Commission if there was to be no contact whatever with the paramilitaries. He had assumed it would be possible for Sinn Fein to make constructive statements, on the lines of Adams' speech two days before, and have that endorsed in some appropriate way as representing the position of the paramilitaries.

11. It was stressed repeatedly to Sinn Fein that a report which did not convey some constructive and authentic view of the only people who could decommission was likely to lack credibility and therefore to be a potential trap, opening the way for the British to reassert the necessity of "Washington 3".
  
12. Mr. McGuinness emphasised repeatedly that the "IRA would not go near a decommissioning body". The Tanaiste and others stressed to Sinn Fein that we had agreed the Body should take a political complexion, not in order to have no contact with the paramilitaries, but to make it easier for the paramilitaries to have some constructive engagement with it without feeling trapped into a military agenda. Mr. McGuinness remained adamant that there could be no contact with the paramilitaries, but agreed to consider and reflect upon the points which had been made to him in that respect. Mr. Finlay stressed again the urgency of the issue, and the dangers of playing "chicken" in the run-down to the Clinton visit.

13. At the end of the meeting Ms. O'Hare raised the question of an Irish Government paper. Both she and Mr. McGuinness expressed the view at that point that it would be better not to have a separate Irish paper which might complicate the position for the present.



Sean O Huiginn

12 October, 1995