



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/99/15

**Creator(s):** Department of the Taoiseach

**Accession Conditions:** Open

**Copyright:** National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Confidential

PST, PSS, S/S Ó hUiginn,  
Counsellors A-I, Section,   
Messrs Teahon, Donlon &  
Dalton, Ambassadors   
London & Washington,  
Joint Secretary

**Conversations with Gary McMichael (UDP)  
and David Ervine (PUP), 18 June 1997**

**Gary McMichael**

I met McMichael in Castle Buildings. He was accompanied by David Adams. Both were in sombre mood in light of the murders of Constables Graham and Johnston, particularly having come straight from the funeral of Constable Johnston in Lisburn (both McMichael and Adams are members of Lisburn Borough Council).

They expressed bewilderment as to what the Republicans wanted and indicated that they were coming to the conclusion that Gerry Adams could not deliver the IRA on the basis of what would realistically be on offer in the negotiations. David Adams pointed out the apparent coincidence of IRA violence with progress in efforts to reestablish the ceasefire and said that he had now begun to wonder whether the real reason for Canary Wharf was that progress was being made on the setting of a fixed date for the start of negotiations.

McMichael expressed doubt that Sinn Féin were really interested in negotiating with the Northern parties. He felt that their only real ambition was to negotiate directly with the British Government on the terms of British withdrawal; hence their concern to reconstitute a broad "pan-nationalist front".

McMichael described the present situation as very dangerous and said that he could offer no guarantee that the loyalist ceasefire would hold. He pointed out that the transition from violence to politics within loyalism was "not yet complete" and that his party faced an uphill struggle to prevent the extremes returning to their "default mode". However, he emphasised that the "default mode" of the UDP was and would continue to be a commitment to exclusively peaceful means.

McMichael said that the two things his party most needed to support their efforts to restrain loyalist violence was that something positive should happen in the talks "to take the spotlight off the streets" and that there should be clarity as regards the position of Sinn Féin.

As regards progress in the talks, McMichael stressed the need for the UDP to be able to point to a genuine alternative to violence; something which would be forfeited by loyalists if they went back to violence. I assured McMichael that both Governments, including any new Irish Government, were determined that there would be an early start to substantive negotiations and that any obstacles to this would be overcome. I referred to the Secretary of State's statement that the British Government wanted the negotiations to be completed by next May and indicated that the Irish Government supported such a time frame.

McMichael said that this commitment to get the talks moving needed to be made public. I hinted strongly that this was likely to happen in the near future and probed McMichael as to

how much the Secretary of State had revealed of British intentions during her meeting with the UDP the previous evening. McMichael said that this matter had not been raised, as the meeting had lasted only about 15 minutes.

While welcoming the prospect of new momentum in the talks Adams and McMichael were concerned at reports that nothing much would happen until the autumn. McMichael warned of the dangers of adjourning the negotiations for six weeks over the summer and urged that preparatory talks should continue over that period so as to avoid the sense of a political vacuum. I pointed out that even if, under some scenarios, substantive talks might not begin until September, there would be much to do in the interim.

McMichael asked whether the two Governments were likely to be in a position to table a paper on decommissioning next Tuesday. I expressed confidence that the Governments would be able to agree a paper, although I was unable to say whether we would be in a position to table it next week. I pointed out that the real question which needed to be answered was whether Trimble would accept an approach based on the implementation of all aspects of the Mitchell Report, or whether he would persist in his unrealistic demand for decommissioning before entry into substantive negotiations. McMichael agreed that such a demand, (which would require mutual decommissioning by loyalist paramilitaries) was unrealistic, but asked about the possibility of taking up Trimble's proposal to "pigeon-hole" the issue. I replied that "pigeon-holing" could become an option if it became clear that Sinn Féin would not be entering the negotiations, but that the terms and conditions of such an approach would need to be examined.

As regards the future intentions of Sinn Féin, McMichael urged that the two Governments should make public the nature of the clarifications offered to Sinn Féin and make clear their determination to proceed without Sinn Féin if they refused to take up the offer. I reminded McMichael that the clarifications in question had been offered by the British Government, but indicated that there was every likelihood that they would decide to go public on their position.

As far as the Irish Government was concerned. I said that we had found the latest British clarifications to be a reasonable response to the points raised by Sinn Féin and that we now wanted to establish as briskly as possible whether Monday's murders represented the considered response of the republican movement to the British clarifications and, if not, what was their response. As regards our willingness to go ahead without Sinn Féin, I pointed out that both the Taoiseach and Deputy Ahern had made clear beyond any doubt that an Irish Government would not delay talks if Sinn Féin held back from entering the process.

Returning to the subject of the loyalist ceasefire, Adams and McMichael expressed considerable dismay at the attitude of those who sought to question their right to be in the talks. They were particularly irritated at the high moral tone adopted by the Alliance Party. Adams pointed out that while he and his colleagues were "down on our knees" pleading with people not to commit acts of violence, others were pointing the finger at them, questioning their commitment to democratic means and thereby setting them up as targets for republican paramilitaries. I expressed some sympathy with their predicament, and sought to reassure

them that, while the Government was concerned that a number of incidents had been attributed to groups associated with the CLMC, we recognised the efforts being made by the UDP to stabilise the situation and wanted them to remain in the negotiations.

### David Ervine

I rang Ervine in his Shankill office. He conveyed the impression of being under considerable pressure, complaining that "we are being battered on all fronts; by the Provos, by the LVF and by elements in British intelligence". When I expressed surprise at the inclusion of the last-named in this list of perceived tormentors, Ervine said that loyalists believed that elements in British intelligence were attempting to undermine their position in the talks.

While I suspect that Ervine's allegations may have been partly prompted by ongoing events relating to UVF prisoners in the Maze, he did not mention these but focussed exclusively on the decision of Alliance Party to reactivate its demand for a meeting with the loyalist parties to discuss the latter's alleged breach of the Mitchell Principles. He told me that Alliance had proposed that the meeting, which would also involve the Independent Chairmen, should take place next Wednesday but that since Alliance had now gone public on the matter (he was due to go head-to-head with Seamus Close on BBC that afternoon) he was now inclined to refuse the meeting. He asked what was the motive for what Alliance were trying to do; the loyalist parties were the anchor for the loyalist ceasefire and Alliance were trying to uproot that anchor.<sup>1</sup>

He claimed that Alliance's criticism of loyalist violence was inconsistent and that not a word of condemnation was heard from that quarter when "'Basher' Bates was murdered by the UDA".

In an effort to reassure Ervine, I pointed out that it was the two Governments alone who would determine whether any party was to be expelled from the negotiations and that there was no indication that either Government wanted to bring about the exclusion of the loyalist parties. I said that, as the Irish Government was concerned, we hoped that events on the ground would enable the DUP to continue to play an active part in the negotiations, not just because of the implications for the loyalist ceasefire, but also because of the particular analysis which the PUP bring to the negotiations. Ervine responded by saying that he feared

---

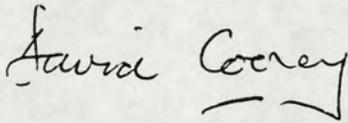
<sup>1</sup> As it happens, I had a fairly lengthy exchange with Seamus Close, following my conversation with Ervine. Close expressed concern at what he saw as the application of double standards. He referred to the attacks on the homes of two prison officers, the night before, which have been attributed to the UVF. He also pointed out that loyalist politicians, no less than their republican counterparts, refuse to condemn the actions of the paramilitary associates. He also expressed being struck by the call of the Presbyterian Moderator, Dr. James Johnston, at the funeral of Constable Johnston, that it was time to put the spotlight on the silent majority and not on the paramilitaries and their associates.

While accepting the legitimacy of most of what Close had to say, I suggested that the leaders of the loyalist parties were genuinely seeking to prevent the loyalist paramilitaries sliding back into violence and questioned the benefit to the silent majority of expelling them from the talks.

that this might be part of the problem with what he referred to as "the powers that be"; it could be a case of "shop assistant wanted; clever, but not too clever"!

Turning to the implications of the Lurgan murders, Ervine admitted that there was a real danger of things "falling off the edge". He had asked the Secretary of State, during his meeting with her the previous evening, to make public the clarifications that had been put to Sinn Féin so that the people could decide on whether there was any further excuse for delaying an IRA ceasefire. He expressed himself non-plussed by Monday's events, as his intelligence was that the Sinn Féin reaction to the aide-memoire had been positive. Indeed, he hoped that this might yet prove to be the case. However, he said that it was now essential that the Governments pushed forward the negotiations with, or without, Sinn Féin.

I outlined the Government's position along the same lines as I had when talking to McMichael and reassured Ervine that any new Irish Government not depart significantly from this approach. I referred, in particular, to the position set out by Deputy Burke when he appeared with Ervine on *Prime Time* the previous evening. Ervine accepted the positive nature of these remarks.



David Cooney  
Department of Foreign Affairs

19 June 1997