



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/99/2

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.

Phone Call between Taoiseach and Prime Minister

Friday, 31 January

[Call took place at 4.00 p.m. for approx. 20 mins.]

The call covered four areas:

- multi-party talks;
- possible ceasefire;
- North report; and
- Bloody Sunday developments.

1. **Multi-Party Talks**

At the Prime Minister's suggestion it was agreed that there would be contact at official level to avoid as far as possible problems from the Loyalist perspective and then to have the softest possible landing for the talks.

2. **Possible Ceasefire**

The Taoiseach and Prime Minister agreed that a ceasefire now appeared less likely and that there would be a real issue of judging whether any ceasefire before a British election were genuine or tactical.

3. **North Report**

The Taoiseach pressed the Prime Minister to act on the fundamentals of the North report as quickly as possible. The Prime Minister said that it was untrue to suggest the British Government were artificially delaying their response because of the forthcoming election. The Prime Minister said the legislation would in his view be passed immediately on the resumption of Parliament after the election [recognising that it would depend on the election results].

4. **Bloody Sunday developments**

The Prime Minister said he had an open mind on any significant new evidence. The Taoiseach said he would have officials review the new developments and arrange to have the outcome conveyed to the British side.

SPEAKING POINTS FOR TELEPHONE CONVERSATION
WITH BRITISH PRIME MINISTER, 31 JANUARY 1997, 3.45 P.M.

Revised Version 1

1. The Multi-Party Talks

- We remain ready to try anything constructive to break the impasse on decommissioning provided it adheres to the Mitchell Report and we are persuaded that the Unionists are serious and, therefore that it will move us on to real negotiations.

- But the reality probably is that it is highly unlikely that we will see real progress in advance of elections (local elections of 20 May and British General Election).

- Talks will obviously have to be "parked" at some point, with a view to preserving the process and enabling their resumption after the elections.

- In all this, there is a need to strike the appropriate balance between keeping dialogue going on the one hand, and protecting the credibility of the process on the other.

- How that balance can be achieved will be explored by the Tánaiste and Secretary of State next week.

- Our officials have had some discussion about a soft landing and there was agreement on the need to "park" the talks as constructively as possible, with a managed set of positively oriented statements by all the players that matter.

- To delay "parking" too long- without any progress being made - would damage the credibility of the talks process for the future.

- At the same time, to "park" too early - without any plausible justification in terms of imminence of elections - could be interpreted as an admission that the talks process (in which we have both invested so much) had failed - making it difficult to revive after an election.

- From what PUP and UDP leaderships say, it might be difficult to maintain the Loyalist ceasefire in such circumstances - and we obviously want to avoid the escalation in violence which would follow from a breakdown.

2. Ceasefire

- Does not appear to be any good reason for believing a new IRA ceasefire is imminent - quite the reverse, given intensified IRA activity in recent times.
- Of course, we cannot and must not give up on any sensible efforts to get a new durable ceasefire.
- As you know, we have said that the official channel of communication can be used whenever the Government receives reliable assurances that an IRA ceasefire is attainable in a genuinely short-term horizon, and that previously identified and realistically attainable things need to be discussed at the meeting, and done, that will achieve that end.
- In the event that a ceasefire was in prospect, the "parking" of the talks and the forthcoming elections might provide "space" which could be used to facilitate a ceasefire - which would of course have to be real and not merely tactical.
- If the unequivocal ceasefire is consistently observed, we would remain anxious, subject to that ceasefire requirement, to see inclusive all-party talks off the ground at the earliest possible opportunity - perhaps, if the ceasefire came soon, on their resumption after the local elections in May.
- We accept that revisiting the exact same texts as before is not a feasible or useful way forward, as now also does John Hume. But, as your people said themselves, there were some slightly encouraging elements in the latest language Adams could sign up to. If any reliable indications could be received, via Hume or otherwise, as to readiness to have an unequivocal restoration, there could be some merit in idea of answers by you to questions from Hume. But I accept that first need is solid indication from Republican movement.

3. North Review

- I know that you would share my view that we must avoid at all costs a repeat of the confrontations of last year's marching season in Northern Ireland which have had such a disastrous effect on community relations and on the climate for political progress generally.
- I do not wish to go into detail on the North Report. No doubt, that will be covered in some detail under the Anglo-Irish Agreement framework and Dick Spring hopes to meet Paddy Mayhew next week.
- Let me say, however, that broadly speaking, we welcome many of the recommendations, which are in line with our own proposals, such as that for a

new independent Parades Commission although ideally we might have preferred its proposed powers to be more clear-cut and less qualified than what is suggested. The composition of the Commission is obviously a very sensitive and important matter. The Government would hope to have a full discussion on that matter.

- I also welcome your Government's acceptance of all the recommendations and the announced intention to set up the Commission as soon as possible.
- Early establishment of the Commission is important because of the urgency of the need to take pre-emptive action if we are to avoid a repetition, or worse, of last year's events. This was the point I conveyed to your office, via Wally Kirwan, on Wednesday evening. I am therefore very disappointed that, on the recommended power of the Commission to make a determination, your Government has gone for an eight-week consultation period. That, regrettably, will ensure that this cannot be implemented before your election. With the imminence of the marching season and the signs of confrontation already looming, there is no time to be lost.
- I would still hope that you can reconsider this, so that all the necessary steps can be put in place in time.
- *[In the likely event that Mr. Major says consultation period, as announced, cannot be changed:*
That is a great pity and as to consequences, I fear the worst. Of course, for our part, we will do everything we can to avoid confrontation. We will continue to try to persuade you of our viewpoint on this but in the meantime, I would urge you to get the Commission established and working as soon as possible to promote and undertake the necessary mediation efforts].

4. 'Bloody Sunday'

- Yesterday was the 25th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. It is clear at this stage that this matter will continue to be a source of grievance until it is put to rest once and for all.
- Another important point here is that the Republican movement continue to exploit this issue for their own propaganda purposes. Everything that can sensibly be done to correct that imbalance should be done.
- The view here, which I share, is that, particularly on the innocence of those who were shot dead, the Widgery Tribunal's report and findings were deeply flawed and wrong - whether for reasons of State as seen at the time or for whatever reason.

- I am aware of your own statements on the matter, both in the Commons and previously. These have gone some way. But there is now a very strong case for the additional material, which has come on stream, to be examined along with all the material presented to the Widgery Tribunal in 1972 - particularly that which Widgery did not take into account.
- In particular, if such an examination could lead to an unequivocal statement from the British Government that the victims were totally innocent, that would help significantly the victim's families to come to terms, once and for all, with their grief. The hurt of this question mark over their loved ones' innocence only prolongs the sense of wrong, sense of injustice, and sense of hurt.
- If this matter can be put to rest without resort to all the machinery of a full inquiry, then perhaps so much the better.
- This is essentially a matter of human rights - the rights of those who were shot and of their surviving families. That is primarily the context in which it should be considered. But if it could finally be cleared up satisfactorily, it could have also strongly beneficial political effects.