



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

To: Paddy Teahon, Sean Donlon, Wally Kirwan

From: Taoiseach

I had conversations today (Monday) with Ken Maginnis MP and Reg Empey, both of the Ulster Unionist Party.

Ken Maginnis said he was very depressed about the situation. He asked that the Irish Government should appoint the Decommissioning Commission on a non-statutory basis, even if the Bill wasn't passed. I took it that this was to give some indication of our seriousness in the matter. He also complained that I had not been in touch with Unionists in recent months. I responded that I had not made any contacts because I did not wish to be cutting across the work that was being done in the talks by opening up separate and possibly contradictory lines of communication. I also said to him that he, and other Unionists, knew where to find me if they wanted to contact me. It should not always be for me to make the initial contact with them. They could always phone my office and say that they would like to get a call back within a week or so. I agreed that I would contact him again in the next two to three days.

I attempted twice to make contact with David Trimble at the number I have for him, but did not succeed in actually talking to him.

I had a lengthy conversation with Reg Empey.

He said that a lot was going on behind the scenes to defuse the problem in regard to parades over the summer. He said that there were dissident elements (dissatisfied Loyalists) coming into the parades issue with a view to making it difficult and venting some of the anger that they were unable to vent because of the absence of any Loyalist military campaign.

In regard to the all-party talks, he said that there was no possibility of the Ulster Unionists meeting with Sinn Féin in the talks. This seemed to be his fundamental position, and the talk about decommissioning is really tactical.

He said that he felt that Unionists were in disagreement with the SDLP, and the two Governments on this matter. The SDLP and the two Governments wanted a position where Unionists and Sinn Féin would sit around the same table.

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

2.

He said that this was very difficult because of the IRA's cynical provocations, designed to bring the Loyalist ceasefire to an end. He also said that the fact that the first ceasefire had broken down made Unionists very doubtful about Sinn Féin/IRA intentions.

He said that he felt that Sinn Féin and the IRA were setting out to abort the talks by provoking a Loyalist breach of the ceasefire so that the Loyalist parties would be driven out of the talks. Once that happened the Unionists could not reach any agreement with the SDLP on anything under the ground rules, without the consent of the Democratic Unionists Party and the UK Unionists. Without the possibility of bringing the two Loyalist parties along with them the Unionists could not meet the "sufficient consensus" requirement on the Unionist side. Thus, he saw a fairly deliberate tactic behind the IRA provocation of Loyalists in order to provoke an ending of their ceasefire.

Our conversation then turned to the talks themselves. I asked if there was any possibility of some measure of agreement between the Unionists and the SDLP. I said that there must be many issues in Strands 1, 2 and 3 on which an agreement could be reached between the SDLP and the Unionists. Not a lot of work was needed, I said, because most of this work had been done before.

Reg Empey responded that there were some positive signs on this. He was pleased that the independent chairman, Senator Mitchell, was becoming much more involved in the talks. The Unionists hoped that this would enable him to help move things forward to achieve interim agreements on some issues. He said that the chairmanship was an under-utilised asset.

Reverting to the decommissioning issue, he stressed that the Mitchell Principles only required the participants to "consider" decommissioning. From a Unionist point of view, just "considering" decommissioning was just not enough.

I urged him to engage Unionists in some form of contingent discussion with the SDLP on the basis of what might be agreed, or might be the content of an overall settlement. While this contingent agreement might not be published, the knowledge that contingent agreement was possible on the wider issues, might encourage both the SDLP and the Unionists to reach some agreement on practical interim measures that could be advanced.

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

3.

Reg Empey agreed with this. He said he could see no possibility of forward movement on the decommissioning issue. He said that the only way forward was through private discussions with the SDLP to reach a better understanding on what would be possible.

I said that he had to understand that the SDLP would not want to reach any final agreement without the involvement of Sinn Féin, because that would leave them exposed. He said that he fully understood this. But a contingent agreement of some kind might give both sides sufficient confidence to move forward on what he called "interim measures".

He said that there were a significant number of "interim measures" that could be taken in the security area. He mentioned:-

- individual rights
- group rights
- language issues
- police matters
- prisons

He also felt that North South co-operation could be enhanced.

He said it was possible to envisage a package of measures that could be agreed between the Unionists and the SDLP which did not prejudice anybody's constitutional or aspirational position.

He said that he would have a better idea this week on the SDLP attitude to movement along these lines.

He accepted that nothing could happen without the agreement of John Hume. There was no point trying to reach agreement with others in the SDLP. John Hume had to buy into any scenario if it was to be realistic.

He returned again to the issue of Unionists meeting Sinn Féin. He said that any meeting by the Unionists with Sinn Féin would confer a legitimacy on Sinn Féin. Unionists could not afford to be conned. Once they met Sinn

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

4.

Féin they had to know that Sinn Féin was in the process for good, and that violence was over for good. If the Unionists met Sinn Féin, and then IRA violence resumed, the Unionists who had met them, would be in a terminally impossible position.

His own assessment was that the IRA have no intention of stopping their campaign. Whatever about the views of Gerry Adams, the hard-core in the IRA had too many sacrifices, had buried too many colleagues and were not going to give up violence.

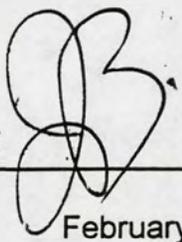
I asked him if he had no hope at all for the situation in light of this.

He said that there are doubts within the Sinn Féin/IRA community as to whether they are really pursuing the right strategy. Positive developments in the political arena could erode support for Sinn Féin. He felt that Sinn Féin's position had deteriorated vis a vis that of the SDLP in urban areas since the IRA recommenced actions. All these were positive signs. He could see the support for violence erode.

I asked him if he felt it would be useful for me to pursue with the SDLP the scenario of possible agreement between Unionists and SDLP on

- (a) private understanding on wider issues accompanied by,
- (b) interim measures.

He said that it would be useful for me to do so. I asked who in the SDLP he felt I should talk to. He felt I should talk to both John Hume and Seamus Mallon, but was clearly of the opinion that nothing worthwhile would come of any initiative unless John Hume bought into it.



February, 1997