



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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**Attendance of meeting with Paul Murphy MP**  
**NI Minister for Political Development**

**Iveagh House, 10.45am, Friday, 15th May 1998**

This meeting took place at the request of Paul Murphy. I had understood it was to be just a *tête-a-tête* at political level. In the event, Veronica Sutherland arrived with an official. So this note is to balance whatever note will be recorded on the British side.

The meeting lasted for three-quarters of an hour, with Minister Murphy only leaving at 11.25am in order to deliver his speech to the Inter-Parliamentary Body in Dublin Castle. The discussion was wide-ranging and general. We concentrated on the difficulties being experienced by Mr. Trimble. I indicated that I had offered my assistance to Mr. Trimble in whatever way possible to assist the achievement of a more favourable "Yes" vote from the Unionist community. Mr. Murphy indicated that their private polls were not as bad as the results published in the Irish Times today. I expressed relief at this but nonetheless shared concern that in the next week all efforts must be made to sway the undecided Unionist voters towards a "Yes" vote. I stressed that the Taoiseach's speech yesterday and my own contribution on Radio Ulster yesterday morning were very benign from the Unionist perspective and supportive of Mr. Blair's approach in this regard.

As to Mr. Blair's speech of yesterday, I discussed the matter with the Taoiseach just before the meeting. I made the point that what Mr. Blair had said was at the top end of the range in terms of tolerance from our point of view. Our line is that everything in the Agreement has to be legislated for, but that they should be wary of putting anything new into statements and commitments which went beyond what was actually in the Agreement. I also indicated that we had made best efforts to ensure that Sinn Fein did not respond negatively to Mr. Blair's speech. Mr. Murphy appreciated that and said it was most helpful. For his part, he was in regular contact with Mr. Trimble and Sinn Fein. They were making strenuous efforts to convince Sinn Fein of the need to "warm up" their language and to make explicit what was implicit in their signing up to the Agreement.

We discussed the huge importance of the role of Jeffrey Donaldson. His ultimate stance was crucial, as was the Molyneaux declaration which was expected shortly. I expressed the view that I was very understanding of Mr. Trimble's difficulties, given that he had only three colleagues out of his ten MPs supporting his line and that Donaldson would be a major advantage to Trimble if he was on side at the time of the Assembly elections. I asked were contacts being kept up with Donaldson. He replied in the negative which I found surprising, although he did say that Donaldson had had contacts with Blair. I noticed that Donaldson had reserved his position on Mr. Blair's speech yesterday and that he was attempting to come across as a tougher version of Trimble from the Unionist point of view, but still wanting to appear constructive. It was a very clever political ploy and one which would undoubtedly be to Donaldson's electoral advantage in the Assembly elections, and ultimately as aspirant leader of the Party.

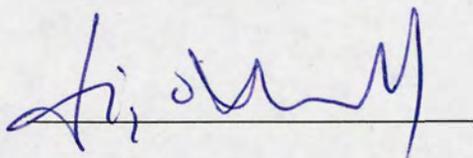
He raised the scenario, post referendum, in the event of a "Yes" vote and post the Assembly elections. They were starting to strategise around what would happen in the interregnum

would be appointed formally because this raised the dilemma as to persons holding executive office when no guns had been decommissioned. I said that obviously it was in everybody's interests to have no vacuum developing post the elections and that surely the results of the elections themselves would suggest Ministers-in-waiting very soon after the votes were counted. I stressed that there would be a need for persons of authority to be available to negotiate and consult on the implementation body's remit, and he agreed with this. There was very important work to be done in that period of the Assembly-in-waiting. He raised the uncomfortable scenario of the role of potential wreckers being elected to the Assembly in large numbers, particularly if they contained dissident members of the Ulster Unionist Party. What of the possibility, he asked, that a combination of UUP dissenters and other rejectionists coming together to form a sufficient consensus on the Unionist side to halt progress and hinder agreement.

Getting back to the campaign, he remarked that Blair was their best and secret weapon. People had faith in him and he was the best person to try and woo the undecided Unionists around to a "Yes" vote. He would be making more appearances next week. I indicated that I was very willing to do anything that I could to be helpful to their cause, mindful of course of the ultimate balance which we had to maintain in not putting Sinn Fein offside unduly.

We pondered on other persons who would be influential in this regard. I asked was John Hume any good in this regard and I noticed he was very quiet over the last few weeks. Mr. Murphy replied that Seamus Mallon was more potent as an advocate in swaying Unionist voters since he was more steely and resolute in requiring that decommissioning was an integral part of the Agreement. I made the point that it was wrong to characterise the decommissioning matter as a Unionist obsession. It was in everybody's interests that decommissioning was not a fudge, equally so on this side of the border. From my own point of view, I stressed that, if decommissioning was a fudge, I was not complicit in it, nor was my party. I stressed that the three party leaders yesterday made this very clear in their speeches and would continue to do so over the coming days.

We agreed to keep in touch.



Liz O'Donnell T.D.  
Minister of State with responsibility for  
Overseas Aid and Human Rights  
Department of Foreign Affairs

15th May 1998

*c.c. Taoiseach  
Minister Andrews  
Secretary Dalton  
Second Secretary Gallagher*