



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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 Secretary: Counsellors A-I

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Cops

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29 September 1998

No of pages including this one: 2

To: HQ  
 For: Secretary Gallagher

From: Belfast  
 From: Joint Secretary

25A  
 57

Tadhg  
 1-10-98

Subj: Conversation with Peter Bell

1. The following are some points of interest which arose in a conversation with Peter Bell this afternoon.
2. In further comment on our paper, Bell said that his side want Sinn Féin to be pressed to deliver a specific timescale for the start of decommissioning. In the absence of a start to actual decommissioning in the short term, a specific timescale is the minimum needed from Sinn Féin to overcome the present impasse (as distinct from what the British see as the more aspirational terms of our paper). They would also wish to see a "start to decommissioning" explicitly included in any position which the two Governments might agree among themselves.
3. I made clear that, while the two Governments clearly share the objective of achieving a start to decommissioning, our paper focusses on what is realistically achievable at the present time. I pointed out, however, that, despite the oblique terms used, a timetable of sorts is clearly implied in the connection made between the formal transfer of powers and "significant developments" in the decommissioning context.
4. Bell said that his side can see no progress being made without firmer pressure being placed on Sinn Féin and the IRA. Why, for example, had we not included a requirement for the IRA to make clear their own support for decommissioning? Noting that our paper envisages Sinn Féin "using their influence to this effect" with the IRA, I reiterated that our paper reflects a careful judgement of what is deliverable at the present time.

5. Bell described today's British paper as a set of elements which might help to move matters forward. They are still looking, however, for the "significant piece of decommissioning" which, a few weeks ago, the Prime Minister hoped might be achievable in the short term. When I asked whether he still considered this to be possible, and whether Prime Ministerial optimism on this score might be affecting Trimble's calculations, Bell said he did not exclude the possibility that Trimble was taking his cue from something the Prime Minister had told him.
6. In this general context, he said his side regarded as significant suggestions they had picked up (I gather from the SDLP) that Sinn Féin has recently established a party committee on decommissioning.
7. The British are agreeable in principle to 4pm on Thursday in Dublin for the Liaison Group (to be confirmed tomorrow).
8. They have asked for our observations on the draft Memorandum of Understanding about the British-Irish Council which they gave us at the informal Strand Three meeting in Oxford recently.
9. Finally, as I mentioned, a burglary in General De Chastelain's hotel room over the weekend resulted in the theft of a lap-top computer and briefcase containing a range of computer discs with confidential material relating to the work of the Decommissioning Commission. Although De Chastelain said that there was nothing particularly sensitive in this material, one of the items was an assessment of the Commission's recent contacts with Martin McGuinness. An RUC investigation was launched. We have since heard that the material has turned up, in a store selling secondhand computer equipment, and that more sinister motives for the burglary are being ruled out.

AK come on!