



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/100/18

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

Mr. King

RECEIVED 06 OCT 1998

TAOIS

Sec. Gallagher. Joint Sec.
Amb. London & Wash. C.?
A-I Councillors.
Mssrs. Teahon, Dalton.
Mansergh

Conversation with Professor Paul Bew of Queens University.

I met with Professor Bew this week in Belfast. Bew, in addition to his job as Professor of Politics at Queens, is a well known political commentator on Northern Ireland political affairs and an occasional advisor to the UUP leader, David Trimble. He recently met (possibly with Trimble's instigation) with Tom Hartley, Jim Gibney and Mitchell McLaughlin of Sinn Fein in the Clonard Monastery to discuss, inter alia, the current impasse over decommissioning. He had come away with a great sense of pessimism. He said that they had come very close to saying that there would never be decommissioning. He met with Trimble last Saturday to convey this and was surprised by his optimism on the issue. Bew said that, on exploration, it emerged that Trimble was basing this on the British view that there would be decommissioning sooner rather than later and that hence his public stance on this matter.

Bew said that Trimble believed that there could be no movement on this issue until, at the earliest, the Ulster Unionist Council meeting of 31 October. The month would be used to allow all parties, including the Governments, time to reflect as to how best the matter could be resolved. Bew felt that the interregnum would also be used by unionism to keep the pressure up on Sinn Fein/IRA to make further moves on decommissioning. He said that we should expect further trenchant unhelpful restatements of the unionist position over the month. Next weekend the young unionist conference had a series of resolutions down for debate which were "off the wall" in the view of Trimble and Stephen King, the Chairman of the young Unionists. Bew's advice was that we should just ignore them. The UUP party Conference on 23/24 October was also an unlikely locale for Trimble to move away from his current stance. That left the Executive meeting on 31 October which was the earliest possible date, depending on political developments outside the party, where the ground could be laid for more unionist flexibility on decommissioning, which Bew believes will come. The question of managing the internal dissent among UUP Assembly members was one that had to be addressed in any shift in policy on decommissioning. Bew mentioned the names of the most likely opponents of any shift and said that of the potential 6-8, Pauline Armitage was the one he felt could do the most damage. Others such as Weir, Coulter, Ken Robinson, or Roy Beggs Jnr could be persuaded.

Bew was aware of some of the possible scenarios that might be constructed to resolve the impasse. He felt that making a distinction between the Executive in the shadow period and when it is fully constituted with full powers, might only work if there was a guarantee from the British Government that decommissioning must start before the full Executive was allowed to come into being. Trimble might be able to sell this, if over the month of October, Sinn Fein had continued to work constructively with the International Body and General de Chastelain had publicly confirmed this. A joint Government statement about decommissioning being an indispensable part of the Agreement would assist as would a definitive statement

(24)

(58)

(2542)

(63)

by the IRA on the disappeared. Trimble's bottom line is that he requires a start to decommissioning ; a timetable in the future would not be sufficient in Bew's view.

Bew thought it was interesting that his Clonard meeting with Sinn Fein brought out the fact that the party was thinking seriously about what happens if the current impasse fails to be resolved and the Agreement collapses. He said that the Sinn Fein view seemed to be that the British and Irish Governments in the interests of peace and stability would seek to implement the non institutional aspects of the Agreement plus operate a reinvigorated Anglo-Irish Agreement in return for the continuation of the ceasefires and decommissioning. The Sinn Fein argument was that the unionists would get the blame for collapsing the Agreement and that the primary concern of the British would be to hold onto the IRA ceasefire. Bew said that analysis was fatally flawed in that there is no way that Prime Minister Blair will leave David Trimble or the unionist community politically isolated, as this would lead to even greater instability.

Bew said that Trimble was relaxed about the North/South Ministerial Council and was ultimately not going to cause problems, since he believed that the concessions on its operation secured in the Agreement were sufficient. Bew mentioned that Trimble had told him that his involvement of Austin Morgan in the issue of the Implementation Bodies was specifically designed to " drive those fellows in the Department of Foreign Affairs mad" but that Morgan would be called off, when it was time to agree the areas for cooperation.

Bew mentioned three other items of interest viz that

- unionists in general had not yet afforded the Taoiseach and the Irish Government the due recognition they should have got for delivering the changes in Articles 2&3.

-Trimble was working hard to try and rehabilitate Donaldson into the fold (if that was possible) but he was not going to allow the Donaldson factor to prevent him moving forward on decommissioning, if he felt there was a way forward. Donaldson, in Bew's view, wants to return to the UUP fold as complications over the formation of the so called coalition with Peter Robinson have now emerged.

- a number of Bew's academic colleagues had been examining the surprising showing in the Assembly election of the UKUP and the muted behaviour of Robert McCartney since then. Apparently the unexpected showing can be partially explained by the support given by the Northern Ireland Baptist Church to the UKUP. UKUP Assembly member, Paddy Roche, a Baptist, had secured the Church's backing. One of the consequences of this alignment was the unreported resignation of McCartney's personal advisor, Geoffrey Dudgeon, whose open homosexuality would not sit well with the new direction of the party.

Dermot Brangan
2 October 1998.