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**Transcript of telephone conversation
between the Taoiseach and Tony Blair
Friday morning, 10th July 1998**

Tony Blair:
Bertie.

Taoiseach:
Hello.

Tony Blair:
Hi how are you.

Taoiseach:
How are you doing Tony, how are you keeping.

Tony Blair:
I am just you know concerned about, very concerned really. I mean what my strategy is now is this really. I mean we will hold completely firm against this, I will just tell you that and I think you know maybe Adams and people think we won't, but we will, you know I mean that's subject to something absolutely unforeseen happening, but I mean I really, I feel so utterly disgusted with people who go on about the United Kingdom and wanting to be part of it, effectively saying that we should defy the law of it, it's really not a very credible position to adopt, but anyway. So we will hold firm with them, but I want to put ourselves in this position, this is my strategy, because I think what is essential is to divide off those people who are going to try and sort of stall the barricades from not just the respectable end of the Orange Order, because I think the respectable end is just a bit cold at the moment, but from the majority of Protestants and Unionists opinion and I think the only way of getting through this, I mean it's going to be pretty ghastly in any event is to be in a situation where they just can't mobilise the Unionist Protestant Community. In other words they can mobilise possibly tens of thousands of people who are ~~other~~ you know very extreme persuasion, but they cannot get through to the

of the

majority and the best way of doing that in my view is to begin a process or at least invite them to a process of dialogue which I would actually invite them to with a Government representative and probably two facilitators, one from either community and simply have a sort of contact talk if you like with the Orange Order and with the residents, I mean not meeting together, but an attempt to facilitate and there are three compromises that we have got which are possible, because the other thing is to keep offering the moderates within the Orange Order a way of getting out of this, ~~to~~ ^{an} exit strategy with their heads held high. Now at the moment I mean the meeting yesterday was pretty depressing in the sense that I mean these were the moderate elements and they were sort of simply saying you know we would like to do something, but the others won't let us really and we are sort of saying well it's all or nothing, you know we either go down as one, you know the whole lot of us or nothing. Now I believe that if they stick with that position it's all the more important that we have offered a reasonable compromise that is then being turned down. Now there are three possible compromises that we can come up with. One is to offer them a different route and the easiest route in a sense is the route that they used to use ages ago, which takes them not down the Garvaghy Road, but down a different route. Now the residents at the moment I think would be sort of deeply hostile to that, but actually there are far fewer Nationalist houses that look out onto the road on that route and in any event it would represent a compromise and it would take about roughly 20 minutes to get them down and they would go. Now the Orange people I may say when I raised this with them ruled it out point blank, but...

Taoiseach: ^{Down}
Is this the ~~Oban~~ Street/Bridge thing?

Tony Blair:

I think it's what they call the dog leg but I don't, I got a bit confused when I was looking at the map, it was down, I think it goes down Oban Road or something.

Taoiseach:

Yes, yes, I know it, I have heard that route, they used to do that and they gave it up some years ago.

Tony Blair:

They gave it up because of trouble, you know it may be an impossible thing to do in any event.

Taoiseach:

Okay well that's one of them anyway.

Tony Blair:

At least it would be a compromise.

Taoiseach:

True.

Tony Blair:

The second compromise is to let say the Officers of the Lodges down, I don't quite know how good that would be, but that would be a limited number of people, just go down for a token march and back.

Taoiseach:

Sure.

Tony Blair:

Or out or whatever they do. So that's the second possible compromise. In other words you don't let the full Lodge down, but you let a token number down.

Taoiseach:

Right.

Tony Blair:

I mean again, they simply say to that, well that's all or nothing. And the third possible compromise is to say that we will, it can go down, but at a later date, probably the end of September, but in the mean time we will have proper talks, you know inclusive talks, dialogue between the two sides to resolve the whole of the marching issue in Portadown.

Taoiseach:

Right.

Tony Blair:

I mean the problem with that is obvious. The problem for the Nationalist side is that you agree to let it down and the problem for the Unionist side is that they are agreeing to dialogue that they don't want and that you know they are postponing it, but those are the only three compromises for this year that I can think of coming out with and as I say my belief is that it is easier to win the

argument of public opinion in Northern Ireland if a compromise is being offered to the Orange Order who have turned it down, because I think that the majority Unionist opinion in Northern Ireland will think that that's pretty bloody unreasonable frankly and we have got to keep them at the moment I think that the Protestant Unionist majority is not with the Orange Order, but there's always a danger that they go back to it and you know if we are to keep the peace with literally, I mean it's possible we reckon Sunday/Monday that you could get seventy or eighty thousand trying to storm the place.

Taoiseach:

Yes.

Tony Blair:

I mean that's a lot of people.

Taoiseach:

It is.

Tony Blair:

And people are going to get killed in that situation. So if we can possibly avoid such a situation by trying to reach some sort of agreement then I think we should, but you know I am pretty pessimistic at the moment and I you just can't pull it, maybe that ~~the way~~ be less bad than we think.

it will

Taoiseach:

Now I have a, my ^efeeling is and I suppose three or four things to say, one, I mean I have been trying to forget last week, but I still think we could if both residents and the Orange had ~~have been any way~~ compromised last week they could have avoided it all for themselves and this is what I warned them last week by not giving a break that they were going to bring pressure on themselves and that's what they really done, but anyway that's last week and it's no good talking about that. The second thing is I think that I mean we have seen this ould game before so many times, I think what will happen, I think they will amass massive crowds over the weekend and I can only assume that the security forces can do damn all about leaving them all gather, but it seems that I mean they will try.

Tony Blair:

I think they will try and stop them from the point that they are constantly weighing up the pros and cons of that.

Taoiseach:

Sure, but I think they will go for big crowds so we are facing this big mass thing and as you probably got the information Tony that John Taylor has been going around openly predicting that if they don't get down by Monday that Garvaghy Road will seek to exist to use his words. tremendously unhelpful to you and I, but even more unhelpful to his own leader. So that's another one we have to watch in this bloody equation. In my count now the only one that's remaining loyal ~~is~~ Ken Maginnis, all the others are gone from him and I know he has a bloody executive meeting tonight so that's all

Tony Blair:

I mean the truth is it is an offence against reason for this thing to destroy all the work that we have done.

Taoiseach:

I know. Anyway that's the bad side of it, I mean in terms of the compromise in trying to get some kind of dialogue, I mean I am totally in favour of that, because if we don't do something it just could, I mean these people for whatever reason and a bit on all sides around the 12th of July as I said to you many times reason and common sense that you might get during the winter days is never easy. As you have heard me saying before that the dark nights is the only time you get reason in the North, you never get it at this time of the year, so I think anything that tries to help us get through it is definitely a help. In terms of the names that we mentioned, I mean it's been floated around that there is at least two people that might help, is that kind of agreed with them Tony, will Hume and Magee and

Tony Blair:

No I don't think so yet, I think we would have to first of all work out whether they are the best people. I mean I wouldn't personally put John Hume in this position, because I think that he is, I mean he is to sort of broad brush ~~ed~~, you want someone who is down to the nitty gritty.

Taoiseach:

Yes I think so.

Tony Blair:

I mean people have mentioned this guy Magee and I mean I don't know any of these people ~~who's~~ got Magee on the Protestant side or the guy called Dunlop I think, I mean I know the names, but I don't ...

Taoiseach:

I know Magee well he was with the Loyalist side, he is a very good man, whether he would want to do it or not. He did resign off the Parades Commission and he was very close to the Loyalists, I mean he used to always correctly give the view of the Loyalists, but you know he has always had good relationships with the Government in Dublin, you know even though he is from totally that side, but he is a fellow who has delivered the message as it was you know, but whether he would do it is another thing.

Tony Blair:

Yes well whether he would, quite, but that's and then we would have to have someone obviously from the Nationalist side I don't know who it would be at the moment, but Brendan ^{MAGEE} ~~MAGEE~~ _{MAGEE} Allister is he from the Nationalist side?

Taoiseach:

He was over the, there was a commission that he was working, he did a lot of good work actually and a lot of them would say that he's very good as far as I know he is Catholic and he did try to get everything together, but this year kept away from it, because he got his fingers burned so much, but a lot of people say he has a lot of credibility, but whether he has enough, I mean whether you know he was in a situation, but it's very hard to get somebody who has enough.

Tony Blair:

Yes sure. But I mean that's all I can think of doing is to set this process up and try and sort of launch it today and then you know I have spoken to Adams myself again this morning about the three compromises and my real belief is that we have got to get one of those, probably the best is a different route for the march to be offered by the residents. You see if they were to do that, I mean at the moment they have their desire to do it all and of course what they desire is for us to uphold the law and stand firm and we will do that. So as I keep saying to Gerry Adams, so he says well you must understand their position. I say I do understand it, but what this situation is lacking is someone who's got the ability to rise above the situation and say well what does the bigger picture demand here.

Taoiseach:

Exactly.

Tony Blair:

You know, I mean they don't have to do anything, I mean they can just sit on their rights but is that very sensible.

Taoiseach:

Yes.

Tony Blair:

So if they, you see my view is that the Orange would refuse this, I mean I think it would be difficult for them, but I think they would. I mean they are so intransigent.

Taoiseach:

Yes.

Tony Blair:

But if they did, you see, supposing they refused even the alternative route, which is the one they used to use, well I mean I would go out on television and say this is just a farce, I mean these people can't possibly be reasonable and you know again it would allow me then to keep up the notion of separating out.

Taoiseach:

I see the sense in that. There was another route but it was looked at last year where they were to come a little bit into the Garvaghy Road and turn off, but that may be one that isn't in the, isn't in the

Tony Blair:

Well I think the dog leg thing does actually involve them doing that a little, I think they go to the right, they go up this Garvaghy Road rather than down it or something.

Taoiseach:

Yes, anyway I mean these things have to be looked at, but you would put in the two mediators, you would say that these two people are in there to try to mediate and they then, they would, you wouldn't mention a compromise they would go off then and try this

Tony Blair:

That's right, we would work at that behind the scenes as it were and I would probably put in somebody from here just to sort of you know because it would

have to be my initiative I think, but I just, I think really the work would be done by the two facilitators really.

Taoiseach:

Okay.

Tony Blair:

But I mean I would like someone if that happens since we would actually host it to have someone on the spot who would then be able to report back to me as to what was really happening and you see if you got, I mean it's a pretty big if though, but I mean if you got the residents really to show that bit of movement on a compromise, then you know we could take that out very strongly and my view is that that would knock away a lot of the, especially with the Lower Ormeau Road one going down, it would just knock away any possibility of them really mobilising the broader community.

Taoiseach:

Yes, well on the other marches I mean I know you have said it and I have been saying it to Sinn Fein at all levels that whatever they do they must be careful, whatever about having a small protest that they can't be doing anything that creates problems in the Lower Ormeau Road.

Tony Blair:

They have also got a huge opportunity.

Taoiseach:

Yes, I think if they behave themselves.

Tony Blair:

Yes, if they behave themselves, they turn around to people in Northern Ireland and say look we are obeying the rule of law and do that.

Taoiseach:

They are trying, we know from all our intelligence that they are working at that and Adams has even said to me if it comes to me he will go down the Lower Ormeau Road himself to keep people calm, so at least that's moving.

Tony Blair:

Right, I mean that would actually be the sensible thing from their own point of view frankly.

Taoiseach:

From their strategy it's the thing to do. Always the trouble, what if somebody gets killed Tony, the thing can go off ...

Tony Blair:

That's the problem I mean you know the trouble is you are dealing with the...

Taoiseach:

We will get into mob rule, I mean it's not I mean if somebody throws a brick and you know it's not even a question of somebody using guns, if somebody get killed then of course emotions just get out of control and that's just what I would be worried about this weekend. In terms Tony, of if you do this initiative today I mean we would want to be seen, I would want to be seen supporting it strongly, so just the presentation of that, how we do it that you know if you can keep us in touch so include us, because I want to be able to row in and ...

Tony Blair:

Surely, actually that would be very helpful obviously, well I will get ^{Alan} ~~Alister~~ to speak to Joe about that.

Taoiseach:

Yes just that we are in behind it. Would you ask them to meet in Belfast or what would you do?

Tony Blair:

I don't know really, I mean I think probably we would try and get them away from Portadown and probably do it in Belfast yes.

Taoiseach:

And in terms of the two individuals you don't have really names settled yet do you?

Tony Blair:

No, I mean we obviously we have to approach them to see that they are..

Taoiseach:

They are prepared to do it.

Tony Blair:

But I think most people seem to think this guy Magee is the one to do it on the Protestant side.

Taoiseach:

Well I mean from our point of view I would just say I have no problem with him.

Tony Blair:

No, right, okay well that's helpful and as for the other one, I mean this ~~Mr Callister~~ you reckon he would be okay if he is willing to do it.

Mr Callister

Taoiseach:

Well if he is willing to do it, as I say he's a guy who has worked very hard at it, I know the Women's Coalition were saying to me yesterday that they believe he is the right guy, he is still working away at it just that's he got himself burned on a number of times along the way, but I mean it's almost impossible, I wouldn't say that against him, I would just say from his own point of view whether he wants to, but if he is still willing, he knows the game you know.

Tony Blair:

I mean we should keep closely in touch over the next two or three days, Bertie, I mean I am thinking of other strategies to mobilise public opinion, you see the only way we will win this in the end is by refusing them the space politically to be a victimised minority and to be in a position of saying to people look they are just not being reasonable about this. I mean I know reason, who cares about that in this situation type of thing, but I think that my impression is and this is certainly the feed back that Mo is getting is that there isn't a desire in Northern Ireland to make this the last ditch, now people don't want to do it, that's not to say that they won't be pushed into it eventually, but there is a desire to uphold the peace process and not to see it wrecked by these guys. So we have got to be reinforcing that the whole time.

Taoiseach:

Yes, yes, well I agree with that. I am doing a European lunch of Journalists today Tony, it's a speech and then it's a questions and answers, so needless to say the whole bloody thing is going to be on the North, because it's European Journalists all your guys are there so I want to be, I will try to keep it on other issues, but needless to say once it comes back to the questions and answers it will be only on the North, in terms of you know not saying anything wrong or being helpful, if I say I have been, you know we have been in touch again this morning at this stage you would rather me not say that you are trying any initiative.

Tony Blair:

We better not, no, we probably just better wait and see what their reception is going to be.

Taoiseach:

Yes, well I will just say we will be keeping in touch.

Tony Blair:

Yes, absolutely

Taoiseach:

Okay Tony, well listen I am around all the time, so we will keep in touch or whoever in your office is on, Paddy will be around all day as well.

Tony Blair:

We will see this thing through.

Taoiseach:

We will get through it some way.

Taoiseach:

Okay.

Tony Blair:

Okay, Bertie all the best.

ENDS.