



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Ahern apologises to Dr. Paisley over remark on photographs



Mr. Bertie Ahern

Mr. Ahern, the Irish Prime Minister, issued a full apology to the DUP leader, Rev Ian Paisley, after he had earlier said the photographing of IRA decommissioning was not “workable”. The statement, following a Dublin meeting with Sinn Fein’s Mr. Gerry Adams and Mr. Martin McGuinness, led the DUP to threaten to break off relations with the Government.

However, Mr. Ahern seems to have healed the rift in a nine-minute phone call to Dr. Paisley, emphasising that the governments still wanted IRA decommissioning to be photographed.

“The Taoiseach apologised for any confusion that this might have caused, and reassured Rev Paisley that the Irish Government had not abandoned the proposals of last week,” said a spokeswoman.

In a bid to bring an end to the controversy as quickly as possible, Government sources made no effort to hide the fact that Mr. Ahern had blundered in his remarks. “Ian Paisley was very, very upset,” said one source. “I think some people were a little worried that he wouldn’t take Mr. Ahern’s call.”

The DUP said it expected formally to remove the boycott of Government Ministers and officials once the Taoiseach had publicly put on record his position.

In his remarks to journalists, Mr. Ahern had said: “The Government’s position is that we were happy with John de Chastelain. Then there was the issue of further witnesses. We were happy with that. We tried the issue of photographs. That’s not workable, so we have to try and find some other way. The big issue is that decommissioning, as I understand it, is ready to happen; is ready to happen as part of a comprehensive agreement. It won’t happen if we don’t get a comprehensive agreement. Let’s try to make it happen.” Adams - foot in mouth—again!

Speaking alongside Mr. Ahern, Mr. Adams said the photograph was never a runner, particularly since Ian Paisley described it as being part of a process of humiliation. The focus can be on words. The focus can be on photographs. It can be on all of these matters. But it needs to be on the substance of what has to be required, and then how that is verified and presented.”

After Mr. Adams met Mr. Tony Blair in London, Sinn Fein declared the issue of photographs “dead and gone and buried in Ballymena”.

It seems to have been subject to a resurrection!