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ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

(54)

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Interview with Sinn Fein President, Mr. Gerry Adams,

Inside Politics, Radio Ulster,

Saturday, 12 June, 1993

Introduction (Jim Dougal) Good afternoon. The Secretary of State Sir Patrick Mayhew began what will no doubt become a series of separate meetings with the local party leaders when he had discussions in London during the week, first with the Ulster Unionist Leader James Molyneaux and then the SDLP leader John Hume. Sir Patrick is sounding out the parties on ideas which may form the basis of new negotiations if he can eventually coax all the parties back to the table. He has still to arrange meetings with the Alliance Party Leader John Alderdice and the DUP leader Ian Paisley. It does seem however that it will take quite some time if he is to persuade them all to agree on a formula for talks. In the middle of next week the Prime Minister John Major and the Taoiseach Albert Reynolds will no doubt add their voices to appeals for new talks when they meet in London. In the meantime John Hume and Gerry Adams had been meeting in an attempt to find an overall political strategy which would end violence. Their latest talks took place last night after which they said that their discussions would continue. During the week Mr. Adams' home in West Belfast was attacked by the UFF. His wife and son, who were in the house at the time, escaped injury. When I spoke to Mr. Adams I began by asking him about that attack. Since in this case he is speaking in a personal capacity and not on behalf of Sinn Fain, the broadcasting restrictions do not apply so his words can be broadcast.

Mr. Adams: Well it was only last night that I realised in fact that the grenade struck the bedroom window, the window of

my wife's room and that it was deflected by the reinforced glass, so really she had a very narrow escape. Had the reinforced glass not deflected the grenade it would have went into the bedroom where she was asleep at the time. It brings home, obviously, the danger that republican families are in. I went to Joe Austin's house after the attack on his family and I spoke to Gerard McGuigan and I think that these clearly are indiscriminate attacks against republican families. It wasn't, as I said before, an attack upon me, it was an attack upon Colette and Gearoid.

Interviewer: I then asked Mr. Adams what he would say to the people who carried out that attack? (Because of the Government's broadcasting restrictions and since he is speaking on behalf of Sinn Fein, his words are spoken by an actor).

Mr. Adams: Well I don't think there is really any point, I mean the terror campaign that they are running, and it has been applauded and the cheer leader support has come from some of the main Unionist parties, has failed in terms of intimidating Sinn Fein. Because in every area where we had a person killed we stood candidates in the last local government elections. It has only succeeded insofar as that 12 republican families have been robbed of a loved one and scores of other families have been pressurised or had loved ones hurt or injured but it has failed in terms of its aim of intimidating Sinn Fein.

Interviewer: But couldn't one say that the kinds of attack which the loyalist paramilitaries are carrying out are similar to the kinds of attack which the republican paramilitaries, the IRA, are carrying out?

Mr. Adams: Well I don't think so. But I also think that that's a very unfair question because when there is some action by the IRA one doesn't ask the victim, the intended

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victim, is that not fair game because of what (say) the British Army are doing or the RUC are doing or the UDR are doing. I can't walk through West Belfast without being stopped. Yet we have had a number of incidents in West Belfast under the eyes of the British Army or close to them where in fact Alan Lundy was killed or where there is an attack on republican houses. The overall situation must be brought to conclusion by way of a resolution of the conflict, because the loyalists, I mean even the loyalists who have attempted to kill me on a number of occasions, and they have killed many of my friends and associates, they are part of the political equation. I don't feel any great umbrage about what's happening. I think that one's annoyance is that this is continuing to happen at a time, for example, when a former Prime Minister Ted Heath is making the statements that he is making, that the British politically, militarily and every other way are being out-manoeuvred. He talks about the terrorists, I presume he means the republicans. When Brooke makes the type of statements he makes, when Mayhew makes the type of statement he makes, when its painfully obvious we need an inclusive peace process. That's the way to deal with all of this. If I could just add a wee personal foot-note ... the silence from the other parties about the attack upon my family was resounding, including local representatives of the SDLP.

Interviewer: If I can turn to another subject. How do you reflect on the election results, the local election results for Sinn Fein?

Mr. Adams: Well I think we got the result we expected. We saw, about two years ago, the edge of our vote being gnawed. Bit of attrition, censorship, the propaganda campaign against it, we set in play a number of factors to address that. We saw the April 1992 result as an indication that it could in fact be reversed because we, in the areas where it was occurring, we did a year of work and we got the 12.5% having

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done that. We actually could have increased it and had the percentage of the vote we got, I think we have 50 odd seats, we could have got 70 odd seats. I think its a resounding tribute to the candidates, to the activists and to the voters.

Interviewer: In the immediate aftermath of the elections there were bombs in Belfast, Portadown and Magherafelt, now what ever you may say is the connection between your party and the IRA people have said, and surely with some justification, that nothing could have highlighted the armalite and ballot box strategy more starkly than that.

Interviewer: Well people would say that anyway. I don't mean ordinary citizens but I mean our political opponents would say that. If one examines it in some detail I don't think that is the case at all. The reality of the thing is that we have a military conflict here. We want to see, Sinn Fein wants to see, an end to it. We want to see a demilitarisation of the situation. We want to see a lasting peace. Now whatever way that military aspect of it manifests itself during an election campaign, outside an election campaign, directly after an election campaign, it will all be interpreted by our opponents as in some way a hand-in-glove existence. It certainly wasn't. I was going down to the City Hall on the Thursday of the count. I didn't want to be going down to the City Hall to be talking about anything other than our election count. I didn't want to be down there talking about bombs at the Opera House.

Interviewer: So the IRA embarrassed you?

Mr. Adams: No the IRA did not embarrass me. The IRA meant that people like you could ask me about questions I didn't want to answer at that time. I wanted to talk about what we though was going to be a relatively good result for Sinn Fein.



Interviewer: I then went on to ask Mr. Adams what he and John Hume were trying to do?

Mr. Adams: Well we've pointed it out and I have to keep coming back to this, we have dealt with it in a Joint Statement. We have outlined our objectives, which are, if I can put it like this, a lasting peace in Ireland. We have outlined the basis in which we get involved in talks, not as intermediaries but as party leaders. We have outlined where we agree. For example, no internal settlement is a solution, that Irish national self-determination is the basis on which we can agree. We have not attempted to disguise our differences. We have said we have different views. We have said that all of this requires accommodation and agreement and we appreciate that other people may not subscribe to the notions that we have, so in that formula of words we have tried to point in a certain direction and as we continue to talk we will perhaps come upon things which we disagree with and we will perhaps make some further progress on issues which we agree with. But at the end of the day what we are striving to bring about is a lasting peace in this country and if I can say so, the chorus of condemnation, I think, exposed the begrudgery of our detractors. I mean the statement we made was a significant one. What you have is the leaders of the non-unionist electorate of the six counties saying this is how we see it. We also got more agreement than all the drafts, PR, spinductor nonsense that has marked the Brooke and Mayhew charade.

Interviewer: What kind of support do you have within the broad republican movement for your talks with John Hume?

Mr. Adams: Well by the broad republican movement, I refer to the broad republic family and I have got nothing but encouragement. People want to see us moving, republicans moving into a new phase of struggle. The British Government have been a block to that. There is a need to make political

progress. People are committed to the objective of a lasting peace and whether John Hume or I succeed in that, people are prepared to give us encouragement and hope that we can succeed.

Interviewer: You see in the past you have said that the British Government and the Irish Government need to get together and decide that partition should end. That kind of a scenario would allow you perhaps to go to the IRA and suggest that violence ends. What, together, can you and John Hume do which would allow you to do that?

Mr. Adams: Well I don't want to be, you know, what I am looking for as I have said is a political proposition, a political package. John Hume represents the SDLP. He doesn't represent the Dublin Government. He doesn't represent the British Government. Perhaps as part of our discussions we may move somewhere along the line where we can agree upon some strategy but I mean that's a matter for us to find out. It would be very wrong for me to pre-judge or presume or move ahead. I have pointed out the generality of what we are trying to do and I have pointed out some of the specifics. I have stated the objectives. I have to refer everyone back to the Joint Statement which we eh,... I also don't want to be saying anything because, in fact, I think this is the first time I have spoken on this in some detail and that has been quite conscious. It isn't because journalists haven't asked me. It's because I have been dilatory about saying anything which could put any pressure upon what Mr. Hume and I are endeavouring because there are so many powerful people in the establishment who want to see us failing.

Interviewer: But is it possible that John Hume and you could find a strategy which does not necessarily give you an immediate response from Government but which would allow you to do what you said you would do and go to the IRA and suggest that they end their campaign?

Mr. Adams: Well let me answer that in this way. We have set ourselves a task of reviewing the situation and trying to find a process towards a lasting peace. Now we wouldn't even try that if we didn't think we could at least achieve that or achieve some progress towards that.

Interviewer: You must realise though that people out there are thinking about this. They are looking at it and they are not really thinking about whether or not you and John Hume can achieve an overall political strategy, what they are really asking is "will this bring an end to violence"?

Mr. Adams: Well we have pointed out what we are trying to do. The response I have been getting has been one of welcome, approval or support for what we are trying to do. That's the feedback I am getting. Now maybe cynical people or others, or opponents of this, have some other view. I think what we are doing is the only initiative, the only initiative on the horizon at the moment. What Mayhew is doing might even have more to do with him saving his political career with the leadership crisis in the Tory party than anything else. What we are doing is the only initiative that can move forward. But it needs more than John Hume and I, obviously, it needs the republicans, obviously it needs Dublin, obviously it needs the British, obviously it needs the Unionists, so lets not move too far ahead of ourselves, lets just give the same sort of, if not approval, the same sort of general encouragement to this process so, you know, as was given to the nonsense that the British were involved in.

Interviewer: But really can you and John Hume, together, find a way in which violence can be removed from the equation?

Mr. Adams: Well that as I said is the challenge facing us. I am committed to that. I am quite sure that Mr. Hume is committed to that and if we don't succeed it will not be our fault.



Interviewer: Are you hopeful?

Mr. Adams: Republicans have to be hopeful. I wouldn't be a leader of a party which has been written off by everyone a year ago if I wasn't hopeful. I have a confidence in the republican position. I have a confidence in Sinn Fein's position. I have a confidence in John Hume's commitment and as I have said other factors are involved but I am certainly facing into this on the basis if there is a way of succeeding, we will succeed.

Interviewer: One general point to you finally and its this ... that you have a right obviously to ask for an end to partition. Some other catholics have a right to say that they want to stay within the United Kingdom. The SDLP has a right to talk about an agreed Ireland, the Alliance Party has a right to talk about power-sharing and the Unionist parties have every right to say that they want to remain within the United Kingdom. Now surely what you don't have the right to do and what the IRA don't have the right to do is to say "we are going to use violence to make sure that we get our way"?

Mr. Adams: Well if you follow that through to its logic, the British don't have the right to use force, or the loyalists, but I don't have the right to talk about partition. Well whose voice are you hearing now? What British Minister talks to me? What British Minister talks to our Councillors about the issues in which our people were elected? What other parties recognise the validity of the Sinn Fein vote? So lets not get tied up in the rhetoric of the position. Sinn Fein voters are not given their democratic rights. We are denied them and that's part of the injustice which breeds the whole cycle of violence and we want to break that cycle.

Interviewer: And if they did talk to you would it begin to break the cycle?

Mr. Adams: Of course. Because people are always better talking than not talking. No dialogue means conflict.

Interviewer: That was an interview with the Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams whose words were spoken by an actor because of the Government's broadcasting restrictions.