



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/48/358

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland.
May only be reproduced with
the written permission of the
Director of the National
Archives.

**Report
of the
Sinn Féin
Peace
Commission**



Foreword

On behalf of Sinn Féin I would like to thank all those who contributed to the Peace Commission. I've never believed the search for peace in Ireland was straightforward nor could it be achieved speedily; centuries of conflict cannot be unravelled easily.

To some extent these difficulties are reflected in the range of submissions Sinn Féin received. But if there is one message emerging from the over 200 submissions it is that a viable peace process can be put in place, and that everyone involved in the conflict must be involved in that process. There is a democratic solution to this long-standing conflict and Sinn Féin is committed to playing its part in bringing peace to Ireland.

Sinn Féin President,
Gerry Adams

Contents

| | Page |
|---|----------|
| Introduction | iii |
| Report Format | 1 |
| Section 1 | |
| 1.1 Historical context of Sinn Féin peace strategy | 2 |
| (A) April statement from Hume-Adams | 3 |
| (B) September statement from Hume-Adams | 3 |
| (C) November statement from Hume-Adams | 3 |
| (D) <i>AP/RN</i> article, 30 September 1993 | 3 |
| (E) Extracts from Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams and his address, February 1994 | 4 |
| (F) Speech by Gerry Adams to National Committee on American Foreign Policy, 1 February 1994 | 8 |
| 1.2 Political Commentary on the Declaration | 16 |
| Section 2 Analysis of Submissions | |
| 2.1 Commission hearings' summaries | 21 |
| 2.2 Paragraph 1 | 22 |
| 2.3 Paragraph 2 | 25 |
| 2.4 Paragraph 3 | 26 |
| 2.5 Paragraph 4 | 27 |
| 2.6 Paragraph 5 | 34 |
| 2.7 Paragraph 7 | 36 |
| 2.8 Paragraph 9 | 37 |
| 2.9 Paragraph 10 | 38 |
| 2.10 Paragraph 11 | 39 |
| 2.11 General (A) | 40 |
| Section 3 | |
| 3.3 Index of Submissions | 42 |

Introduction

On January 8th the Ard Comhairle of Sinn Féin established the Peace Commission.

Objectives of Peace Commission

The objectives of the Sinn Féin Peace Commission as set out by the Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle were:

1. To assess the Downing Street Declaration in terms of Sinn Féin's overall peace strategy.
2. To consult with the widest possible spectrum of public and private opinion on how to establish a lasting peace in Ireland.
3. To create a dialogue around the issue of a lasting and durable peace.
4. To make our findings public.

The Commission panel were Sinn Féin Vice President, Pat Doherty, Dodie McGuinness Ard Comhairle Derry; Ann Speed, Ard Comhairle Duġlin; Councillor Caoimhghin O'Caolain Ard Comhairle Monaghan; Councillor Una Gillespie; Fiona O'Hagen from South Derry and Larry O'Toole from Dublin. The Commission Convener was Ard Comhairle member Mairead Keane.

The Consultation Process

In order to consult with a representative sample of opinion in the shortest possible time period, the Peace Commission organised one hearing in each of the four provinces in Ireland. These hearings were held in Derry, Ulster on 21st January; Dublin, Leinster 29th January, Galway, Connacht 5th February; and Cork in Munster 12 February. The Peace Commission received permission from the Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle to hold one extra hearing in Belfast on 4th March.

We publicised the fact that we were seeking submissions through the media, letters to national and local newspapers, individuals, organisations and through local advertisements. The Commission gave people the option of presenting their submission in public or in private session. We offer our apologies to those who were disappointed that we did not hold hearings in their particular area.

The Commission established a Secretariat which had the responsibility of summarising and processing all the submissions which we received.

The submissions came from community activists, religious groups, trade union officials, women's

rights activists, Irish language and cultural rights activists, tenants associations, campaign groups, politicians and individuals.

The Commission provided an opportunity to anyone, including individuals and groups who are hostile to our political position, who wished to make a submission. It must be seen in the context of Sinn Féin's peace strategy. Sinn Féin believes that inclusive dialogue and debate are the basis of successful efforts to resolve conflict.

We welcome all views expressed to us through our Peace Commission. The submissions have been the subject of much discussion and debate within our party and have contributed to the developing peace process.

We were impressed by the response of the public to the Peace Commission.

Sinn Féin Peace Strategy

Sinn Féin's desire to hear the views of the public is not something new or unusual. We have over the years solicited opinions on how to establish a durable and lasting peace in Ireland.

The document *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, launched at our Ard Fheis in 1992, was distributed widely to the Irish and British governments, to politicians, media, church leaders and community groups. It was also distributed to individuals, organisations and political parties in Ireland, England and internationally. And we invited discussions regarding the document with all those interested in establishing peace in Ireland.

Our peace objectives and the strategy for their achievement were outlined:

1. To eradicate the causes of conflict in Ireland.
2. To bring about the exercise of the right to national self-determination of the Irish people as a whole.
3. To establish a peace process to bring this about.

Sinn Féin pointed out that *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* was a discussion document. It was not set in stone. We also offered clarification on any of the points of contention in the document.

At all times we were willing and eager to listen and to take into consideration the views of others on how a real peace process could be achieved, while grounding our analysis on the principles of democracy and the right to national self-determination.

Throughout this period Sinn Féin was involved in dialogue with a wide range of people. The most important of these discussions was between the President of Sinn Féin Gerry Adams and John Hume, leader of the SDLP.

These talks resulted in the Hume/Adams proposals, the broad outline of which emerged in a series of joint statements issued by Mr Hume and Mr Adams. There was widespread support among Irish nationalists for the efforts of the two party leaders and both governments were kept informed of developments.

The IRA leadership expressed its support... "if the political will exists or can be created, it could provide the basis for peace".

This opportunity for peace was disregarded by the British government.

However, it was against this backdrop that the Downing Street Declaration emerged on 15 December 1993. Its ambiguity made a definitive response difficult. Requests by us to the British government for clarification were rejected.

Despite this prevarication by the British government which unnecessarily stalled the evolving peace process Sinn Féin commenced a process of consultation among our membership. During that period we received several papers from groups and individuals outside our membership. There were useful and interesting, providing us with other views of the Declaration.

The Submissions

228 submissions were presented to the Sinn Féin Peace Commission. There was a vast range of opinions across the 228 submissions about the cause of conflict in Ireland and on how a lasting peace can be achieved. Almost all of the submissions believed that a viable peace process was possible. The differences in the submissions arose over what were the next steps in such a process.

The Downing Street Declaration

The majority of the submissions felt that the Downing Street Declaration was an ambiguous document. Most supported our right to clarification. After 5 months the British government responded in a 21 page document to the Sinn Féin request for clarification. This was a result of the

most recent Sinn Féin initiative facilitated by the active and positive role of the Dublin government.

The submissions presented to us helped to inform the debate within our organisation and were analysed in the context of our peace strategy. It is obvious from the views presented to us that people had diverse opinions on the role of the Downing Street Declaration in the peace process.

Those who gave qualified support to the Declaration included those who felt that it was a good starting point, that it could be built upon, that British sovereignty had been weakened, that the British government was conceding something new in Paragraph 4 on self determination and that Paragraph 11 on the proposed Forum for Peace and Reconciliation provided republicans with a means to pursue their objectives with Irish nationalists.

Other submissions felt that we should accept the Declaration for tactical reasons in the interest of the developing peace process.

Those submissions which criticised the Declaration did so on the basis that it was designed to sideline the Hume/Adams initiative; that it offered nothing to nationalists; that it was drafted for the Unionists while offering no constitutional guarantee to Nationalists; that it was not a foundation stone for lasting peace and that it was designed to isolate republicans.

The Peace Process

There was one theme which was prominent throughout both the submissions and the five hearings; the belief that a viable peace process was possible. Some submissions focused on the role of the parties, the gaps which needed to be filled and the issues which needed to be addressed in order to advance the peace process.

The British Government

There were a number of submissions which focussed on the need for the British government to withdraw its support for the Unionist veto in order to advance the peace process.

Some submissions reflected the fears of the nationalist community regarding British intentions in Ireland and the links between the loyalist death squads and the British.

There were many nationalists, particularly at the hearings in Belfast and Derry, who felt that they had no rights in the Six-County state and that nationalist rights and the unionist veto could not co-exist. They did not trust the British government.

There were submissions which argued for the need to address the structures and institutions of conflict i.e. policing, demilitarisation, harassment etc.

The Dublin Government

The positive attitude and involvement of the Dublin government in seeking to develop and then promote a peace process was welcomed.

A number of submissions took the view that the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation was a good idea, although concern was expressed at the preconditions on participation which were being applied.

A number of submissions expressed concern at what they viewed as Dublin's support for the unionist veto in the Six Counties and the obstacle and dangers that creates.

The IRA

Of the 228 submissions, 26 submissions, just over 11% specifically mentioned the need to create a process of demilitarisation involving all of the parties to the conflict.

A number of submissions, 85 or 37% believed that Sinn Féin should encourage the IRA to call a unilateral ceasefire; or a cessation of offensive military operations; or initiate a three month ceasefire to enter negotiations; or called on the IRA to take up the offer made by John Major at the launch of the Declaration.

The Irish Peace Initiative

There were submissions which focussed on the Hume/Adams proposals and the potential which they held. Some contributors to the oral hearings expressed disappointment that Hume/Adams was disregarded by the British government as they felt that it had the dynamic to resolve this conflict. Others felt that the Hume/Adams initiative should be made public.

There were views expressed on the importance of a nationalist consensus and the need for the Dublin government to continue to take a pro-active role in the peace process.

The Unionists

A majority of submissions which addressed the unionists took the view that the Declaration had repeatedly reaffirmed the unionist veto and that this guaranteed that the unionists would remain inflexible and opposed to any change in the status quo and the existing structures and institutions.

Some submissions from the unionist community felt that the reluctance to consider any new arrangements is seen as a major stumbling block.

It was also said that the British government should take a more pro-active role in creating the conditions for political change.

Submissions from unionists expressed the view that the concept of national self determination frightens unionists and that Republicans must engage in dialogue with unionists.

Others argued that both communities share a responsibility for injustices suffered and both communities will have to take courageous decisions.

Loyalist Death Squads

A number of submissions argued that the loyalist death squads are not reactive but are working to their own political agenda.

It was also felt that they must be involved in any political settlement.

Women in the Peace Process

Submissions from Women's groups and from individual women felt that women should be centrally involved in the peace process as equals and that this should be reflected publicly. There was a feeling expressed that the peace process is dominated by men and that women are being sidelined. Other submissions argued that women should be involved in promoting discussion on structures, a Bill of Rights and a new constitution which would have equal rights for all, including women.

International Assistance

Submissions in this area argued that the international community has an important role to play in conflict resolution in Ireland. This was argued for in specific terms in the form of mediators, intermediaries and guarantors.

Other submissions felt in general terms that the Dublin government should harness the good will of

the international community in support of the peace process.

Summary

There were a number of opinions expressed in the submissions on conflict resolution which we feel are of interest and need further debate and discussion. These are:

- The need for the British government to recognise that there must be political change and to adopt a policy to allow such change occur.
- The need to achieve a total demilitarisation.
- The need to remove the Unionist veto
- The need to address the issue of consent of all sections of the Irish people.
- The need to debate and discuss the steps needed to develop the peace process.
- The need to address the grievances of the northern nationalist community, including discrimination, collusion and Irish language rights.
- The need for Republicans to outline their vision of a United Ireland.
- The need for women to play a central role in the peace process.
- The need for republicans and nationalists to persuade the Unionists that they have nothing to fear from a United Ireland.
- The need to involve the International community in the peace process.

- The need for republicans, nationalists and democrats to agree a strategy for the achieving of national self determination.

Conclusion

The Peace Commission was an important initiative undertaken by Sinn Féin.

In a comparatively short period of time, with relatively few resources, we held 5 public meetings, received 228 oral and written submissions and processed all of that material in a positive and constructive manner.

The submissions were diverse and covered many different political opinions.

All of these submissions have been carefully examined in the context of Sinn Féin's peace strategy.

This productive effort by Sinn Féin is one of the elements which is helping to inform our response to the Downing Street Declaration.

I would like to thank all of those who made a submission, as well as those who sat on the peace Commission, helped organise the public hearings and prepare this report.

Is mise
Mairead Keane
Convener

Report Format

The report of the Secretariat of the Sinn Féin Peace Commissions is broken down into three main sections with a small appendix.

The aims of the report are to provide both an analysis of the 228 submissions that Sinn Féin received, and to summarise conclusions, showing the contexts in which the submissions viewed the Declaration.

Section 1

To that end the report opens with a first section that includes a subsection on the history of the Irish Peace initiative. The Secretariat felt that the Hume-Adams talks and the Irish Peace initiative created the momentum which brought about the Downing Street Declaration. So in order to put the submissions and our analysis in context we include the Hume-Adams statements from April, September and November 1993, an article from *An Phoblacht/Republican News* of 30 September 1993; extracts from Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams' February 1994 and his speech and his speech to the National Convention on US Foreign Policy also in February. Finally there is a commentary on statements by the Dublin and London Governments since the Declaration was launched on 15 December.

We include these because we feel they provide an essential insight into the Sinn Féin peace strategy and its impact on the political situation.

The three Hume Adams statements are also of importance as they are the public record of the Irish Peace initiative and many submissions made reference to them. The 30 September *An Phoblacht* article gives a summary of the events from April to September and provides a relevant context for the statements. The extracts from Gerry Adams and his address and other speeches provide a public statement of Sinn Féin's peace strategy and the Irish peace initiative.

Section 2; Dealing with the submissions

Faced with over 200 submissions and a time

constraint on our brief to produce a report, the Secretariat constructed a uniform approach for the consideration of submissions and the composition of a report.

Each submission was read by Secretariat members. The core details assessed from each submission by the Secretariat and the Commission panel were references to and analysis of both the Downing Street Declaration and the Sinn Féin peace strategy. The Secretariat attended the actual hearings and listened extensively to the recordings of the hearings themselves.

The Secretariat's study of the submissions we received is contained in Section Two of the report. The structure of this section is as follows. It is based on the structure of the Declaration itself. In that for each commission hearing we summarise the arguments, analysis and opinions on relevant paragraphs of the Declaration. We also include the actual text of the Declaration for each paragraph. Very few submissions addressed each paragraph, the bulk of them concentrating on paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 5 and 9. So the Secretariat's work reflects that.

We do this for each of the hearings and a sixth group titled Central. Central submissions are basically those that arrived in Sinn Féin's Head Office in Dublin. It is the biggest single group of submissions, 50 in all. It has a much more diverse response than other areas. The Secretariat found that there were regional differences between hearings, both in the types of people and groups making submissions and in the issues they raised.

Also included in this section are small introductions to each group of submissions and a General category of relevant points which were either not referable to any particular paragraph in the Declaration or were considered relevant by the Secretariat and worthy of inclusion

Finally at the end of the section on the relevant paragraphs of the Declaration is the Secretariat's summary of the points raised by the submission. We addressed each paragraph offering our interpretations based on the submissions.

Section three

This section is an appendix which contains a list of all the submissions and references as to where they are mentioned in our report.

Section 1.1 A

Statement on 23 April

by Gerry Adams and John Hume

A meeting between us held on Saturday, 10 April, in our capacities as party leaders of the SDLP and Sinn Féin, has given rise to media coverage, some of which was ill-informed or purely speculative.

We are not acting as intermediaries. As leaders of our respective parties, we accept that the most pressing issue facing the people of Ireland and Britain today is the question of lasting peace and how it can best be achieved.

Everyone has a solemn duty to change the political climate away from conflict and towards a process of national reconciliation, which sees the peaceful accommodation of the differences between the people of Britain and Ireland and the Irish people themselves.

In striving for that end, we accept that an internal settlement is not a solution because it obviously does not deal with all the relationships at the heart of the problem.

We accept that the Irish people as a whole have a right to national self-determination. This is a view shared by a majority of the people of this island, though not by all its people.

The exercise of self-determination is a matter

for agreement between the people of Ireland. It is the search for that agreement and the means of achieving it on which we will be concentrating.

We are mindful that not all the people of Ireland share that view or agree on how to give meaningful expression to it. Indeed we cannot disguise the different views held by our own parties.

As leaders of our respective parties, we have told each other that we see the task of reaching agreement on a peaceful and democratic accord for all on this island, as our primary challenge.

We both recognise that such a new agreement is only achievable and viable if it can earn and enjoy the allegiance of the different traditions on this island, by accommodating diversity and providing for national reconciliation.

We are reporting our discussion of these matters back to our respective parties. They have fully endorsed the continuation of this process of dialogue.

We will be picking up on where the talks between our parties ended in 1988 and reviewing the current political situation.

At that time, we engaged in a political dialogue aimed at investigating the possibility of developing an overall political strategy to establish justice and peace in Ireland.

Section 1.1 B

Joint statement from Gerry Adams and John Hume on 25 September:

Our discussions, aimed at the creation of a peace process which would involve all parties, have made considerable progress.

We agreed to forward a report on the position reached to date to Dublin for consideration.

We recognise that the broad principles involved will be for wider consideration between the two governments.

Accordingly, we have suspended detailed discussions for the time being in order to facilitate this.

We are convinced from our discussions that a process can be designed to lead to agreement among the divided people of this island, which will provide a solid basis for peace.

Such a process would obviously also be designed to ensure that any new agreement that might emerge respects the diversity of our different traditions and earns their allegiance and agreement.

Section 1.3 C

Joint statement By Gerry Adams and John Hume 20 November 1993

"We naturally hope that the British government will respond positively and quickly to the clear opportunities for peace which this initiative provides. The most pressing issue facing the people of Ireland and Britain, as now appears to be agreed by all sides, is the question of a lasting peace and how it can best be achieved.

"We are personally greatly encouraged by the popular and widespread support which has greeted the initiative and by the many personal messages of support and encouragement that we have received. We remain committed to this peace initiative and to the creation of a peace process which would involve both governments and all parties.

"We also remain convinced despite all the difficulties, that a process can be designed to lead to agreement among the divided people of this

island which will provide a solid basis for peace. We are examining ways to advance the initiative.

"We have taken no decision on the publication of the substance of the initiative, the objectives of which have been made clear in our previous statements."

Section 1.1 D

Developing a strategy for peace AP/RN 30 September 1993

The talks between Gerry Adams and John Hume became public knowledge in April of this year. After their second meeting on 23 April they issued a joint statement which ruled out an internal solution within the Six Counties and stated that the Irish people as a whole have the right to national self-determination. Since then the talks between the two parties have dominated political events in the Six Counties.

Writing in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* on 3 June last Gerry Adams said that he and Hume were reviewing the political situation and picking up where the talks between their parties had ended in 1988. "At that time we were engaged in a political dialogue aimed at investigating the possibility of developing an overall political strategy to establish justice and peace in Ireland," wrote Adams.

The 24 April statement was greeted with almost as much hysteria from certain quarters as last weekend's. Unionists, Democratic Left and the Progressive Democrats formed a chorus of criticism. Initially silent, and reluctant to be seen to criticise John Hume, Fine Gael later added their voice of criticism.

During the summer, reactionaries in the 26 Counties kept up a relentless barrage against the talks. The flagship of this assault was the *Sunday Independent* whose columnists concentrated their fire on John Hume. This opened up fissures in the political establishment in Dublin with former Taoiseach Garrett FitzGerald disagreeing with his former cabinet colleague Conor Cruise O'Brien who had slammed Hume.

Much of the commentary then and since has misrepresented the Sinn Féin position in the talks. This was spelt out by party chairperson Tom Hartley in *Swatragh* on Easter Tuesday when he said:

"In our discussions with the SDLP in 1988 and in our public comments since then we have urged

the SDLP and the Dublin government to join with us in developing a nationalist agenda which would tackle the problems of partition and Britain's territorial claim over this part of Ireland, and which could lead to a demilitarisation of the conflict.

"That is the context in which we engage in dialogue and that is the political project which we seek to advance in any discussion in which we are engaged."

Also part of that context was the strengthening of the nationalist agenda with the increase in the Sinn Féin vote in the May local elections. This had demonstrated the failure of the British government policy of demonisation of Sinn Féin and isolation of its electorate.

Nineteen ninety three had seen an escalation of the campaign of loyalist death squads against nationalists. This was mischievously linked to the Adams/Hume talks, a theme taken up by unionist politicians who repeatedly spoke of a pan-nationalist alliance, echoing the language of the loyalist death squads. What was generally ignored in the media was that death squads engaged in this renewed campaign had been armed with the assistance of British intelligence. Loyalist attacks on SDLP members in particular predated the Adams/Hume talks.

"Begrudgery" was the term used by Adams to describe those who had slammed the talks. He repeated the term on Tuesday when he reacted to Patrick Mayhew's remarks about the talks. Adams said:

"Patrick Mayhew's reaction to the efforts of John Hume and myself to initiate a peace process are little more than begrudgery.

Mr Mayhew will need to be much more positive if progress is to be made. Knee jerk reactions are not good enough. Yesterday's attacks on me and Sinn Féin by him serve no purpose whatsoever. If Mr Mayhew is aiming to persuade the unionists he should know from their reaction that he has convinced no one.

"Mr Mayhew needs to recognise that British policy in Ireland is in tatters.

"The failures of the past proves that there are no partial solutions and that there cannot be partial solutions about the future of the people of this island.

"The question of partition, of the British connection and of peace in the North is an all-

Ireland issue. It is the British connection and partition which subvert democracy."

Adams added that: "Anything which is genuinely aimed at laying a basis for a peace process has to tackle the causes of the problem. Mayhew's talks were never intended to do this.

"Rather they were an attempt to deflect international opinion from the ongoing conflict in Ireland while the British war machine, including the loyalist death squads, made a determined effort to demoralise and defeat the struggle for Irish freedom.

"This has not happened. The talks have collapsed and the republican struggle remains as strong and determined as ever. The strength of the republican vote in the North's local government election was not the result the British wanted. Mr Mayhew needs to look forward."

Section 1.1 E

Extracts from Sinn Féin

President, Gerry Adams and theis

Speech 26 February 1994

Sinn Féin believes that a lasting peace can be achieved by the eradication of the causes of conflict. We have reasonably and rationally held up the democratic and universally accepted principle of national self-determination as the route through which that can come about. We have argued that both the London and Dublin governments should adopt this as their policy objective, to be achieved within an agreed timescale – in other words, as part of a process.

Again, both reasonably and rationally, we have argued that this be accomplished in consultation with all the parties involved, and the consent of the unionists must be actively sought during this process, a process during which national reconciliation can begin, a process of negotiations culminating in a negotiated settlement.

In all of this we have correctly identified the British government as the major player. They have the power and responsibility to move things on. Their policy in Ireland casts them, either in the role of keepers of the status quo or as key persuaders in forward movement towards a lasting peace, founded on democratic principles.

We have also correctly recognised that a united Irish nationalist/republican voice in support of such

an end and a process for its achievement, as being a potent political force, not just in Ireland itself but in Britain and internationally.

The sub-theme of that, of course, is that Irish republicans, by ourselves, simply do not possess the political strength to bring about these aims. While that situation obtains, it must continue to influence the political and strategic thinking of Irish republicans. However, we do possess the ability to create conditions which can move the situation towards these aims and we have the power to prevent another settlement on British government terms, which would subvert Irish national and democratic rights.

We fully accept and acknowledge that there is no quick-fix to this. A peace process has been set in train. Our immediate and ongoing task is to move this process onwards. With the evolution of policy and in particular, our thinking on Sinn Féin's peace strategy, we aimed to provide a broad strategy, a momentum and a framework which took on board both the political reality confronting us and our desire, despite the many difficulties this represented, to advance our peace strategy. It is in this context that we should examine the potential of any proposal put before us.

Our party paper, *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, clearly places the onus on the two governments to secure change. It especially calls on the British government to "join the persuaders" and on the Dublin government to persuade the British that partition is a failure, the unionists of the benefits of Irish reunification, and the international community that they should support a real peace process in Ireland.

The prolonged contact between Sinn Féin and the British government, which began in late 1990, must be seen in this context. I will deal with this only in summary form here. It is by now a matter of detailed public record, but because of the controversy which marked it, I would like to extend a special word of appreciation to our representatives and the others involved in this specific aspect of our project. They served the cause of Irish democracy and peace with distinction.

The British government is not in contact with us at this time. It unilaterally ceased communicating with us in November last year. However, I am confident that this is merely a temporary, though

totally intolerable, tactical manoeuvre and an unacceptable standoff. It is my confident prediction that we will be in dialogue again, either with John Majors' administration or with his successors. For our part, we are ready to recommence talks at any time. The British should move speedily to engage with us. They were right to talk to us in the past and should be commended for this. There cannot be peace without dialogue.

I wish to deal only with one part of the dialogue with London. At the beginning of this year, the British government proposed delegation meetings between Sinn Féin and its representatives. We negotiated the preliminary procedures for these discussions. In order to assist this process, the IRA responded positively to a British request for a temporary suspension of operations. The British then moved away from this position. Fair enough. Such to-ing and fro-ing in negotiations is not unusual.

But the British government had decided that it dare not admit that it had made a proposal which met with a principled, flexible, but positive response from both Sinn Féin and the IRA. So, John Major threw this back in our faces and, in order to cover his own failure to engage meaningfully in a dialogue for peace, he abused the line of communication and tried to lie his way out of it.

Why do the British government behave in this way? Why the exclusion order against me? Why, more recently, their hysterical opposition to an inclusive peace conference in New York? Why the lies, omissions, falsifications, forgeries, diversions and distractions? And remember, London did not confine itself to dealing only with Sinn Féin in this way. Our dialogue with London was conducted against the background of the developing Irish Peace Initiative and both governments were kept fully informed of all developments at every stage of my discussions with SDLP leader John Hume, before and after these discussions became public.

The British government knew, for some long time before its existence became public knowledge, that the Irish Peace Initiative represented a real opportunity for peace. John Hume told them this privately and publicly. Yet John Major denied any knowledge of its contents. We told them this privately and publicly. John Major denied being in contact with us. The Dublin government told them also. (As did public opinion,

in both Ireland and Britain, with the exception of the unionists.)

The British government's attitude to peace proposals from nationalist Ireland, whether represented by Albert Reynolds or John Hume or Sinn Féin, has been despicable, devious and damnable. It has been marked by stalling tactics, refusals to engage meaningfully in the peace process, diversions, lies and petty manoeuvrings. This phase of our history, when the opportunity for peace was so near, is one of the most shameful in 25 years of conflict, or perhaps since the partition of this country. It is a story which must, in the greater interests of the peace process, remain largely untold at this time. Suffice to say, that at all times in its dealings with nationalist Ireland, the British government sought to insist on its position, tried to apply pressure, to create and win a contest of wills, to mislead as to its bottom line and to demand concessions and one-sided gains. It sought victory on its terms, not peace on democratic terms, and it aimed at all times to fragment the consensus around the Irish Peace Initiative.

Observers and apologists for the London government may seek to discount these allegations and I have provided no evidence. Fair enough. But let us not forget, that in the battle of the documents, Sinn Féin's version of the exchanges with the London government was proven to be the correct and truthful one. So when we witness the stalling tactics of the British since the Downing Street Declaration, remember this stance goes back beyond 15 December, through its dealings with us, to Major's very public rejection of peace-making efforts by John Hume, to the exclusion order imposed upon me, to Major's Tory conference speech, to his dependency on the unionists and his own right wing. If you are concerned at British responses at this time, then remember the distractions, the diversions and the lies which marked British attempts to sideline the Irish Peace Initiative at all times since its conception.

So, we must be patient. Making peace is a very difficult business and we must persevere with our efforts, despite the British government's stance. We have to always see this against the failure of British rule in our country.

But there are positive aspects to this situation. For example, no government on these islands can ever again claim that there is any popular support

for a policy of excluding Sinn Féin. We have always known this. We knew there was never any principle involved in the British stance. The pompous, self-righteous rhetoric of British government officials and of John Major that he would not talk to us, has been totally exposed as cheap political manoeuvring. People support inclusive dialogue. Even the British House of Commons supports dialogue with us, despite all the posturings of the past by all of the parties in that establishment.

Now they tell us they want peace. We shall look for the evidence of that. We are keen to find it. We will seek to do so in indications of a clear and irreversible British strategy for peace, one indication of which must be their public recognition of the legitimacy of the Sinn Féin electorate, their public recognition of the legitimacy of the electoral mandate bestowed upon Sinn Féin by our voters.

The Irish Peace Initiative

My talks with SDLP leader John Hume have been the most significant element in the peace process so far. As is now well known, we reached agreement on a process based upon a set of principles, containing the political dynamic which could create the conditions for a lasting peace and a total demilitarisation of the situation. This was dependent on the adoption of these proposals by the two governments and a positive attitude from the leadership of the IRA.

John Hume has been subjected to a lot of vilification for engaging in this dialogue and initiative. It has been a risky enterprise for him. I am sure republicans, for totally different reasons, have also been mindful of the risks from our perspective and I have no doubt that there must have been, (maybe there remain), and there may be again, occasions when some of you will be justifiably nervous about what is, or is not, going on. After all, Sinn Féin and the SDLP remain locked in electoral, as well as ideological battles and we have lots of reasons from our respective experiences to be distrustful of each other. John Hume and I have never attempted to disguise the political differences between our parties. What we have attempted to do is to put the cause of peace and a negotiated settlement before narrower party political considerations.

My republican analysis is, of course, not

identical with that of Mr Hume on all the issues of the day. For example, I would not agree with his views on the out-of-datedness of the nation state, which we regard as the basis of democracy. Also, we do not believe that we are living in a post-nationalist world. But we are at one with him to holding that 'an internal settlement is not a solution' and 'that the Irish people as a whole have the right to national self-determination', and 'it is the search for that agreement and the means of achieving it on which we will be concentrating'.

It is obvious that the Irish Peace Initiative – and particularly the agreement between Mr Hume and myself – acted as a major catalyst, not only on Irish nationalist opinion, North and South, but also on focussing the two governments on the issue of peace in Ireland in an unprecedented manner.

There would have been no Hume/Adams Initiative without John Hume. We have yet to realise the prize of peace that all our people desire, but when it is achieved there will be no doubt of the central role that John Hume has played in bringing this about, despite the petty nastiness of 'Independent' newspapers and the orchestrated barrage of reaction from Dublin 4.

Credit must be given also to Albert Reynolds. No matter about our opinion of the Downing Street Declaration, or of government policy on many issues, Mr Reynolds is the first Taoiseach to have taken the steps he has taken to address the core issues of a negotiated settlement. Sinn Féin's recognition of the central role of the Dublin government in the creation of a peace process was a major shift in the traditional republican (and northern nationalist) attitude to Dublin. Our involvement in this process and the time and energy we have committed to it is an illustration of our seriousness. I acknowledge that the present Dublin government shares this commitment to find a settlement. This is evident, for example, from Mr Reynolds' efforts to provide the necessary clarifications for us, from his perspective, of the Downing Street Declaration. His attitude to the issue of clarification has been a commonsense one, while the attitude of the British government throughout, has significantly added to an already difficult situation. In addressing these matters, Mr Reynolds has resisted the antinational malevolence of the Harneys, MacDowells, de Rossas and Brutons, all of who, despite their hypocritical protestations of wanting peace, would like nothing

better than that the whole peace process should be sidelined, with Irish republicanism politically isolated.

It is in this context, in the context of the ongoing development of our peace strategy, and of the Hume/Adams Initiative, and the Irish Peace Initiative, that the Downing Street Declaration was produced.

A peace strategy

Sinn Féin has a clear view of what is required to achieve a lasting peace founded on democratic principles. We have a clear peace strategy aimed at moving the situation in that direction.

It is my view that Sinn Féin should attempt to keep building on the conditions created by our peace strategy and the Irish peace initiative and to seek to ascertain what role there is for the Downing Street Declaration in advancing the peace process.

This would involve Sinn Féin in bringing into play, in a very direct way, what we have to offer. Theoretically, what we have to offer is our electoral mandate, our total commitment to establishing a lasting peace in our country and whatever political influence we have to secure a political package so that the IRA can make judgements in relation to future conduct of its armed campaign.

The reality is, however, that the IRA will take its own council on this. We are not the IRA. Sinn Féin is not engaged in armed struggle but we have helped to formulate proposals which have been enough to move the IRA to say publicly that their acceptance by the British government could provide the basis for peace. The rejection by the British government of this offer has made our task more difficult. Nonetheless, we must seek to move the situation forward and we must do so in conjunction with those who formed the Irish Peace Initiative.

What is additionally required are narrower, more specific short-term and intermediate-term objectives to advance the possibilities which our established peace objectives have provided.

The political reality of all this is that there can only be advance, continued advance, if we grasp the opportunities of the times. This means working together, even though we are rivals with other parties. It means winning and maintaining the backing of the Dublin government for the long neglected northern nationalist people and

cooperating together to obtain the powerful international allies the Irish nationalist cause needs.

In the short to medium term we need to advance the position of northern nationalists in every conceivable way. This means strengthening the nationalist agenda.

It means no return to unionist domination over local nationalist communities in the Six Counties. What is abundantly clear, and the political representatives of unionism must tell themselves and their supporters, that there is no going back to the days of Stormont and unionist rule.

It means local republican activists being able to represent and speak for our communities in conditions of peace, uninterfered with by the British military or the RUC, free of personal harassment and free from the threat of the death squads.

It means the real ending of job discrimination against Catholics, who are up to 3 times more likely to be unemployed than Protestants.

It means full recognition of the rights of gaelgeoirí and an equality of status for the Irish language including proper funding.

It means the speedy release of all long-term prisoners pending a full amnesty for all political prisoners.

It means an end to all repressive legislation.

It means an end to collusion.

Section 1.1 F

Address to National Committee on American Foreign Policy by Sinn Féin President, Gerry Adams

1 February 1994

I would like to begin today by thanking the National Committee on American Foreign Policy for giving me this opportunity to address you on the peace initiative in which Sinn Féin has been engaged and the opportunities for peace in Ireland which currently exist. I wish also to publicly acknowledge and thank all those who helped to secure a visa for me to attend this conference, and the many Irish Americans and supporters of free speech who have tirelessly campaigned against visa-denial. I wish to extend greetings also to the many people here in the USA who have worked

consistently for the cause for freedom, justice and peace in Ireland.

The recent past has seen important movement towards peace through negotiation and dialogue in some of the world's most difficult trouble spots. The progress towards democracy and an end to apartheid in South Africa was followed by the beginning of negotiations between the PLO, representing the Palestinian people, and the Israeli government, after decades of hostility and war. The lessons are clear; conflict resolution requires dialogue and negotiation.

The conflict in Ireland is no different and, over the past months, important steps have been taken in this direction. Sinn Féin has always expressed its willingness to engage in discussions without pre-conditions. Our political priority is to advance a peace process based on inclusive negotiations. The development of open debate and dialogue can only assist such a process. No situation is improved by ignorance or misinformation.

This forum, organised by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, by encouraging such necessary dialogue and the free exchange of information, can assist the developing peace process in Ireland. I am, therefore, pleased to address you here today. I am sorry that only one unionist party is represented here today. Mr Paisley and Molyneaux should be here to assist and contribute to these proceedings. So too should the British government.

We live in momentous times, with those peace efforts underway in the Middle East, South Africa and Ireland. My role here is to tell you of our part in shaping that peace process in Ireland and to ask the help of the US government in achieving it.

Today, we in Ireland are very aware that 44.3 million Irish Americans claim roots from Ireland. Worldwide there are an estimated 70 million Irish in the Diaspora, an incredible figure if one considers that Ireland today is an island of only 5 million people.

Here in the US, millions of Irish, fleeing repression and famine, found a welcome refuge in the United States. No other group with the exception of African Americans came to these shores with less prospects, no group rose to prominence so quickly. In the lifetime of many people here, the Irish have gone from 'No Irish Need Apply' signs to the White House, from owning bars to running boardrooms. John F

Kennedy, the grandson of famine era immigrants rose to the highest political position in this nation. President Clinton too can claim Irish roots on his mother's side.

Amongst Irish Americans, there is also a continuing sadness at the ongoing tragedy in the north of Ireland. The memory of Abraham Lincoln and his extraordinary struggle to save this nation from partition has an eerie echo in Ireland where we have lived under the failed partition of our own country since 1921.

Wolfe Tone, the first political thinker to dream of an Irish republic was heavily influenced by the reality that beyond his shores lay a great sprawling nation called America already conceived in liberty and dedicated to equality.

Sinn Féin is actively engaged in seeking an end to this conflict, to all armed actions and a total demilitarisation of the situation. Our peace strategy is the central function of Sinn Féin as a political party. At a personal level, it is my over-riding priority and we have advanced the search for peace to the point where it is at the centre of the political agenda in both Ireland and Britain. US help is vital.

Sinn Féin's Peace Strategy

For Sinn Féin, the search for an effective peace process began over 7 years ago. It was clear that an effective political initiative was necessary to break the military and political dead-lock and to move us out of what was developing into a permanent conflict. Successive British initiatives – political, economic and military – had failed precisely because they were just that, British initiatives, which ignored the central causes of the conflict – partition and the denial by Britain to the right of the Irish people to national self-determination.

It is ironic that while the British government was engaged in its propaganda war against us and those we represent, while it was censoring Sinn Féin and preventing me from entering Britain, and through pressure, the US, they were simultaneously engaged with Sinn Féin in prolonged contact and dialogue without pre-conditions.

Sinn Féin entered into direct contact with the British government in a genuine attempt to advance the search for peace. During the course of this contact the British government proposed that a

British government delegation should meet with a Sinn Féin delegation for an intense round of negotiations. We were asked to seek a short suspension of IRA operations to facilitate these discussions. Given the importance of this Sinn Féin sought, and was given, a commitment from the leadership of the Irish Republican Army that it would suspend operations for two weeks to facilitate these discussions. This was conveyed to the British government in May last year.

Although we were informed that this positive response by republicans to the British proposal was the subject of a series of high-level meetings by British ministers and officials, including John Major, there was no positive response by them. In fact, the British moved away from their proposal and refused to follow it through.

The bad faith and double dealing involved in this clearly represents serious difficulties for us in assessing the sincerity of the British government in relation to the present opportunities for peace. The history of this contact underlines clearly that republicans are serious and are prepared to show flexibility in the search for a lasting peace.

The British presence

Britain's role in Ireland has never been benign. It has always acted as a dominating colonial power. Britain's presence and influence has been divisive and destructive and has prevented the Irish people from resolving our differences. The whole notion of Britain as a peace-keeping agent in Ireland flies in the face of historical and present reality.

The divisions and conflict in Ireland today, as in the past, stem from the immediate realities of the British presence. The 'Northern Ireland' state was created by Britain in 1921 when London partitioned our country, without the consent and against the wishes of the vast majority of the Irish people. Since its creation this state has been in a state of perpetual crisis, existing only by virtue of draconian legislation, by repression and injustice and in a permanent 'state of emergency'.

Since 1969, when the reality of life for Irish nationalists living in the British created sectarian state was exposed to international scrutiny, despite some modest reforms, the overall situation has not improved for nationalists. This is despite the sophisticated propaganda of the British government that their contribution over the last 25

years has been to reform and improve the sectarian state. The inequalities and injustice on which the state was founded have not been removed. Rather new layers of repression and injustice have been added as the British struggle frantically to stabilise their crumbling colony.

Britain has the worst record on human rights abuse of any signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights. It has been brought before the European Court on 31 occasions and has been found in violation of the convention 21 times. Now, however, they have the opportunity to play a positive role in the definitive peace process.

National Self Determination

Self-determination is a nation's exercise of the political freedom to determine its own economic, social and cultural development, without external influence and without partial or total disruption of the national unity or territorial integrity. Ireland today clearly does not have this freedom, nor does the pretext for partition hold good against these criteria.

In the words of Sean MacBride, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize:

"Ireland's right to sovereignty, independence and unity are inalienable and indefeasible. It is for the Irish people as a whole to determine the future status of Ireland. Neither Britain nor a small minority selected by Britain has any right to partition the ancient island of Ireland, nor to determine its future as a sovereign nation."

The right of the Irish people, as a whole, to self-determination is supported by universally recognised principles of international law.

Sinn Féin considers the realisation of the right of the Irish people to national self-determination as our primary political objective. The denial by the British government of this right to our people is the major source of conflict in our country today.

It is the British government's refusal to recognise Irish national rights — nationhood, integrity of the national territory, national independence and sovereignty — which is at the heart of the political divisions and conflict in Ireland today. The primary political divisions in Ireland, north and south, and between north and south, result from partition and from the British claims to jurisdiction in Ireland.

The partition of Ireland does not only affect the north of Ireland. It affects all Ireland socially and economically. It saps our national morale and

consciousness and actively retards our ability as a nation to shape all our affairs, to resolve the causes of poverty, emigration and unemployment, as well as the other more obvious causes of death and destruction and the conflict itself.

The Unionist Veto

The British government's public justification for its involvement in Irish affairs is that the unionists have a veto. That is, that there can be no movement without the consent of a majority in the British created state. This is a perversion of democratic principles. It is also a subterfuge. The British claim to jurisdiction in Ireland is based on the Government of Ireland Act. So far as British constitutional law is concerned, the sovereignty of parliament is absolute. The Government of Ireland Act is an act of British parliament. That parliament is constitutionally empowered to end its jurisdiction in Ireland if so wishes.

Today's unionists represent some 20% of the Irish nation. They are a national minority; a significant minority but a minority nevertheless. To bestow the power of veto over national independence and sovereignty on a national minority is in direct contravention of the principle of national self-determination.

To accept the veto means accepting that there can be no progress. It means accepting the failed policy of partition. Although the Six County state has existed for 70 years, it has not developed a democratic integrity. The Six County state had no political, democratic or economic validity when it was created by Britain. It has no validity today. It survives only by massive military force, by torture and summary execution, by the perversion of all accepted forms of justice and law, by the controlled use of loyalist death squads. 70 years of injustice is an argument for an end to partition, not for its continuation.

The Six County state remains politically and economically unstable and unviable. Partition locks northern nationalists into a state to which they owe no allegiance. It ties unionists to a negative larger view of themselves and their future.

Unionist Rights

Sinn Féin recognises that unionists have democratic rights which not only can be upheld but must be upheld in an independent Ireland. We believe that those democratic rights would be

greatly strengthened in an independent Ireland.

Sinn Féin has long accepted that northern Protestants have fears about their civil and religious liberties and we have consistently asserted that these liberties must be guaranteed and protected.

We seek to be part of the building of a society which can reflect and uphold the diversity of all our people. Our vision is of a free Ireland, a peaceful Ireland, a unity of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter with all citizens guaranteeing the civil and religious rights of all other citizens. We hold to the words of the 1916 Proclamation which said:

“The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences, carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.”

Sinn Féin seeks a new constitution of Ireland with a charter of rights, which would include written guarantees for those presently constituted as ‘loyalists’. Their participation would ensure that the new Ireland would accommodate the diversity of the Irish people.

As unionists have frequently pointed out, most emphatically since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, the British government has, where it sees fit, chosen to ignore the wishes of the unionist population. This concept of consent is one applied selectively, and rarely, by the British government and only when it coincides with their own political interests.

The ‘Consent’ Argument

The argument that the consent of the unionist population is a pre-condition for any political movement is entirely bogus and without democratic basis. Consent, applied in this absolutist way effectively becomes a veto, locking the unionist community into a no-change mind-set. There is no reason for them to reach an accommodation with the rest of the Irish people as long as their present position is guaranteed and underwritten by Britain. We are left in a situation of political stale-mate and ongoing conflict.

The late Catholic Primate of all-Ireland, Cardinal O Fiach, speaking in 1985, four days after the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed commented that:

“The present policy of the British government – that there will be no change in the status of Northern Ireland while the majority want British rule to remain – is no policy at all. It means you do nothing and it means that the loyalists in the north are given no encouragement to make any move of any kind”.

And of course the theory of consent has never been extended to nationalists and ignores the fact that 600,000 nationalists were forcibly coerced into the Six County state. Where is the principle of democratic consent for northern nationalists?

The argument that the consent of a national minority, elevated into a majority within an undemocratic, artificially created state, is necessary before any constitutional change can occur is a nonsense. It ignores the fact that the present constitutional arrangements, based on partition, have led to decades of bloody war and that all attempts to find a solution within these confines have failed. It ignores the reality in Britain and international law that the British government, if it wishes, can legislate itself out of Ireland.

British Responsibility

The exercise of the right to Irish national self-determination requires a change in current British government policy and the removal of the veto.

Within the context of such a policy change Sinn Féin believes that agreement between people of the nationalist and unionist traditions becomes, for the first time, an achievable objective.

We believe that consent can be obtained if the relevant parties, and particularly the London and Dublin governments, demonstrate the political will to achieve it. Both governments should accept Irish national self-determination as a policy objective within an acceptable time frame to achieve this.

The Irish Peace Initiative

Sinn Féin has attempted to create a political debate around these core issues and, in so doing, to develop a peace process which could address the central causes of conflict in Ireland.

The publication of our discussion document, ‘A Scenario for Peace’, in 1987, marked the public launch of our peace strategy.

This peace strategy resulted from an intensive analysis and review of the conflict and overall political situation in Ireland. It was clear that the resolution of the conflict was dependent on the

removal of the fundamental causes of that conflict and that peace would only result from a negotiated settlement which dealt politically and effectively with the key issues. Sinn Féin concluded that the first step in this process was to put these key issues at the centre of the political agenda.

In 'Pathway to Peace', published in 1988, and other areas of private dialogue, were elements of the development peace strategy.

While the British talks proceeded and faltered, republicans argued that the whole approach of the British government was fundamentally flawed and that the resolution of the national question and the securing of the right of the Irish people to national self-determination was the most urgent issue facing us all. Lasting peace could only be achieved by the creation of a national democracy which could accommodate the diversity of the Irish people. This could not be achieved by partitionist arrangements which perpetuated division and conflict.

The document, 'Towards a Lasting Peace', adopted by Sinn Féin at the 1992 Ard Fheis, significantly refined Sinn Féin's analysis of the conflict and the means by which it could be resolved.

It acknowledges in its opening paragraph that the

'heartfelt aspiration of most people in Ireland is for peace... A peace process, if it is to be both meaningful and enduring, must address the root causes of the conflict. For our part, we believe that a genuine and sustainable peace process must be set in the context of democracy and self-determination'.

As we increasingly addressed this area of political activity, the Sinn Féin peace strategy became our central function as a political party.

Members of our national leadership were given specific responsibilities to engage with as many organisations, groups and individuals as possible, including our political opponents and enemies at both public and private levels, to encourage the development of an overall peace process. The prolonged contact between Sinn Féin and the British government, which began in late 1990, was one element of this. It allowed us to test the British government's attitude towards a real peace process in Ireland.

My talks with SDLP leader, John Hume, was another and, as it transpired, the most significant element in this initiative. In our joint statement of

10 April 1993, we outlined our attitude on the key issue of national self-determination when we said:

"We accept that the Irish people as a whole have a right to national self-determination. This is a view shared by a majority of the people of this island, though not by all its people.

The exercise of self-determination is a matter for agreement between the people of Ireland. It is the search for that agreement and the means of achieving it on which we will be concentrating.

We are mindful that not all the people of Ireland share that view or agree on how to give meaningful expression to it. Indeed we do not disguise the different views held by our own parties.

As leaders of our respective parties, we have told each other that we see the task of reaching agreement on a peaceful and democratic accord for all on this island as our primary challenge.

We both recognise that such a new agreement is only achievable and viable if it can earn and enjoy the allegiance of the different traditions on this island, by accommodating diversity and providing for national reconciliation."

By September 1993, we had reached agreement on a set of proposals which, we believe, could form the basis of a viable peace process. This was dependent on the adoption of the proposals by the London and Dublin governments. Both governments were fully informed of these matters at every stage in our discussions.

The proposals were based on a number of basic principles;

- * That the Irish people as a whole have the right to national self-determination.

- * That an internal settlement is not a solution;

- * That the unionists cannot have a veto over British policy;

- * That the consent and allegiance of unionists, expressed through an accommodation with the rest of the Irish people, are essential ingredients if a lasting peace is to be established;

- * That the British government must join the persuaders;

- * That the London and Dublin governments have the major responsibility to secure political progress.

A process to realise these principles was agreed, containing the political dynamic which could create the conditions for a lasting peace and a total demilitarisation of the situation.

The Downing Street Declaration

The Downing Street Declaration is a response to all of this.

Republicans have to make fundamental assessments. Does the Downing Street Declaration represent a first step for the British government in the direction of a lasting peace? Or is it merely a political response by a British government, under pressure from the Irish peace initiative, aimed at avoiding a political confrontation with the Dublin government, at fragmenting nationalist consensus and bringing pressure to bear on Sinn Féin so as to damage us?

And even if our assessment is that it does not represent a first step for the British government Irish republicans should not allow this is unduly influence our considerations on taking risks.

The consideration of any option available to us must be in the context of Sinn Féin's peace objectives and the strategy for their achievement.

That is:

1. To eradicate the causes of conflict in Ireland.
2. To bring about the exercise of the right to national self-determination of the Irish people as a whole.
3. To establish a peace process to bring this about.

The issue of self-determination is central to the resolution of the conflict. That fact has now been identified and it is firmly on the political agenda.

Democracy demands that Britain recognise the right of the Irish people to determine our own future in our own interests and on our own terms.

Any new agreement must respect the diversity of our different traditions and earn their allegiance. Present policies and political structures have prevented this from happening. Partition has deepened the divisions.

The Joint Declaration is described by its authors as 'the first step' towards a peace settlement. Sinn Féin is committed to such a settlement and I am concerned, I am indeed anxious to be persuaded that the Downing Street Declaration can provide the basis for this. And even if this is not the case, if there is a gap between what is required and what is on offer, then we should all move to bridge that gap.

Clarifying the Proposed Peace Process

Sinn Féin and the nationalist community at a wider level are examining the Downing street Declaration

in the context of the overall search for a real and lasting peace. This is the criteria within which the Declaration will be judged; whether it seeks to advance the peace process in a real way or is a cosmetic response to the Irish peace initiative.

The reality is that the Downing Street Declaration was formulated well into the present peace initiative. One thing at least is clear from this. This peace initiative did not come from the British government. They were quite prepared to sit on their hands. In fact their response to developments in all aspects of the peace process was to undermine moves towards a peaceful settlement.

The present momentum for peace results from the Irish Peace Initiative.

There is, therefore, an understandable degree of suspicion and scepticism among Irish nationalists and republicans regarding the real motives and intentions of the British government. If it genuinely wishes to move forward, the first step for the British government must be an acceptance of its obligation to provide clarification on the Downing Street Declaration. It has already done so for other political parties. Its refusal to provide clarification for Sinn Féin must be a matter of deep concern for everyone interested in peace.

In contrast, the attitude of the Dublin government has been more constructive. It is clear that for the first time a Dublin government is making a serious attempt to address the issue of peace and a political settlement in the north of Ireland.

This is a development which I welcome and which I hope will be built upon. The first tentative steps in what may be a difficult, and at times, frustrating task have been taken. The Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, has already taken steps to clarify his position in relation to these key issues. I am hopeful that this will assist us in assessing the Declaration and how it can contribute to an overall peace process.

In this context, I wish to commend Albert Reynolds. He has taken a positive and common sense attitude to the need to provide clarification. A letter from Mr Reynolds awaits me on my return to Ireland and I hope it contains Dublin's view of the core issues, and of how the peace process can be advanced in a real and meaningful way.

Our inability to come to a definitive attitude, however, is tied totally to the British refusal to

provide clarification. In other words, the sooner they provide this clarification the sooner we can move forward. I hope that they will follow the lead given by Mr Reynolds.

The only logical reason for the British refusing clarification can be that they are working to their own political agenda.

Since the signing of the Declaration there have been contradictory commentaries from the British and Irish governments as to its meaning and significance. Clarifying the Declaration in the British House of Commons for Ulster Unionist Party leader, James Molyneaux, the British Prime Minister, John Major said that the Declaration meant:

* No – to the value of achieving a united Ireland.

* No – to a united Ireland.

* No – to Britain joining the persuaders.

* No – to any timetable for a united Ireland.

* No – to joint authority.

* No – to any change in the unionist veto.

* Nó – to a Dublin say in the affairs of the north.

– a view which is at odds with the Irish government's understanding of the Joint Declaration.

There are three issues that need to be clarified. There are aspects of the Declaration itself. There are the statements made by the authors of the Declaration – Mr Reynolds and Mr Major – which contradict one another. Then there is the whole issue of processes, measures, steps envisaged.

In its first paragraph, the Declaration is described as the government's "first step". What then is the second step? Or the third? What processes are envisioned – what measures are these to move the situation forward?

These are reasonable questions from a party with an electoral mandate. Clarifications have been given to other parties. Why not Sinn Féin? And of course, is all of this the kind of signal the British are seeking to send by their stalling and delaying tactics?

There is little evidence that they are willing to join the persuaders. Are they? The Dublin government raises the issue of political prisoners and says there should be an amnesty as part of a settlement. Downing Street says NO!

Downing Street also dismisses Albert Reynolds' suggestion about demilitarising the situation.

What we have at the moment is a free-standing joint statement. What does it lead to? We are told

that the British government is going to facilitate and encourage. What programme do they envisage? No matter about the validities of anyone else's interpretation of the Downing Street Declaration, the British government view of these matters is the crucial one.

Despite this, the potential for peace in Ireland has never been more realisable. If the British believe they have the basis of a settlement they must tell us what it is. As I have already said, if there is a gap between what is on offer and what is required to move us out of conflict, then everyone involved has a responsibility to try to bridge that gap. This requires courage, imagination and flexibility. I have stated my willingness to assist in this process.

Sinn Féin has also initiated a series of peace forums in Ireland, which are open to everyone. We are actively engaging in our open and democratic way with citizens who wish to engage us on how peace can be established. It is our intention to publicise the oral and written submissions received by us. We have no hidden agenda. Peace needs peace to build and sustain it and our consultative process is a way for securing this direct involvement.

The United States Dimension

It is clear that international interest and concern can also play an important and constructive part in the development of a viable peace process. There has been a consistent need for the international community to exercise its goodwill and influence to assist in the resolution of conflict worldwide. This is generally recognised and is at times acted upon. It has now, however, been a factor in the Anglo/Irish conflict. This situation needs rectified.

There is widespread interest in, and concern about, Ireland within North American public opinion. This stems from the historical links between the two countries and the large Irish American community in the US. The potential has, therefore, always existed for the US to play a part in the construction of an effective response to human rights abuses and this has been done particularly in the MacBride Campaign for Fair Employment. It is only proper that this potential is realised in the wider search for a lasting settlement and I would appeal to all those in civic, political and industrial leadership in the USA to apply their energy in this direction.

Progressive opinion in the USA can assist in the development of a peace process in Ireland. There is an urgent need to break the current deadlock and to move the situation on towards a negotiated settlement and a lasting peace.

The US government can play a significant and positive role in encouraging the peace process by helping to create a climate which moves the situation on. It can do this by facilitating the free exchange of information, and in this context I commend President Clinton for the waiver on visa denial which allows me to address you directly here today. The US government can assist at a wider level by actively seeking to encourage dialogue and agreement.

Sinn Féin has played a central and pivotal role in moving the situation from an apparently intractable conflict to one where there is now a focus on resolving the issues involved and building a lasting peace. I welcome the substantial and significant support which has been generated on these matters in the past several weeks in the USA. This is a concrete

contribution to the search for peace from concerned individuals and organisations here.

It is clear that the British government have used all their influence, as in the past, to impede any progress on this or in any other matter which could influence or inform perceptions about the current situation in Ireland and the British government's responsibility for the present intolerable stand-off.

Notwithstanding this, let me reaffirm my commitment to move this situation on. The prize of peace for the Irish people, and the British people, is too important and the opportunity for peace cannot be squandered. Sinn Féin will seek, therefore, to overcome any obstacles and to be resourceful and imaginative in how we encourage and develop the peace process.

We will continue to press ahead with our peace strategy in our search for a negotiated settlement and for a lasting peace in our country.

It is our intention to see the gun removed permanently from Irish politics.

This conference has made a unique and valuable contribution to this process.