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cc PST  
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SEEN BY  
 TAOISEACH

January 1994

Dear Gerry

As promised, I am putting in writing to you my views on the Joint Declaration by the British Prime Minister and The Taoiseach and my reasons as to why I believe that the Declaration contains the substance of the proposed joint declaration that arose from our dialogue, finalised in what we have consistently described as the June document. As you are aware, from the beginning of our lengthy and detailed dialogue there have been two central issues - the reasons that the IRA have given for their methods and Sinn Fein's challenge to the Irish Government and the SDLP to produce a political alternative.

The stated reasons by the IRA for armed struggle were that the British were in Ireland defending their own interests by force - economic and strategic interests - and that they were preventing the Irish people from exercising the right to self-determination. As you are aware I have argued that while these reasons were historically correct, they are no longer true in today's new Europe. Indeed following our published dialogue in 1988 in which Sinn Fein spelled out those reasons, reasons to which you know I drew the attention of the British Government and asked them to make clear that they had no longer any selfish economic or strategic interests in Ireland, the then Secretary of State, Peter Brooke, stated that very clearly in a major speech in 1990.

He also stated : "The obstacle to the development of a new and more inclusive Irish identity if people want this for themselves is not to be sought in Great Britain. Those who live here would not bar the way if at some future date that were to be the wish of the people of Northern Ireland themselves, indeed the Government has made clear on several occasions, notably in the Anglo-Irish Agreement that if in future a majority of the people of Northern Ireland clearly wish for and formally consent to the establishment of a United Ireland it would introduce and support legislation in Parliament to give effect to that wish." That statement makes very clear that Irish unity is a matter for those Irish people that want it persuading those who do not and it is self-evident that such persuasion can never be conducted by force.

That statement is repeated in the Joint Declaration when the Prime Minister "reiterates on behalf of the British Government that they have no selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland. Their primary interest" - which in my view is an acceptable and necessary political interest - "is to see peace stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island". They go further and underline that they would work together with the Irish Government

to achieve such an agreement, an agreement which would naturally have to address all the relationships that go to the heart of the problem. All of this is a clear affirmation of what our June document asked the British Government to say in relation to its own interests.

There remains the question of self-determination. We agreed in our first joint statement that while the Irish people as a whole had the right to self determination, they were divided as to how that right was to be exercised and it was the search for agreement and the means of reaching such agreement on which our dialogue would be concentrating. It is self-evident that the means of reaching such agreement could not possibly be through any form of force since an agreement by coercion is a clear contradiction in terms and is in fact impossible. It is implicit in all of that of course that agreement should be able to be made freely and without any outside impediment.

Our June document, presented to both Governments, asked for a declaration which would make clear that the British Government accepted "the principle that the Irish people have the right collectively to self-determination" and that the Irish Government agreed that the "democratic right must be achieved and exercised with the agreement and consent of the people of Northern Ireland and must, consistent with justice and equity, respect the democratic dignity and civil rights of both communities".

I believe that this principle is clearly accepted by the British Government when they declare in the Joint Declaration : "The British Government agree that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively to exercise their right to self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland if that is their wish". To underline that commitment to self-determination by agreement among our divided people. "They reaffirm as a binding obligation that they will, for their part, introduce the necessary legislation to give effect to this" (ie a united Ireland) "or equally to any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland may themselves freely so determine without external impediment".

In addition the British Government, while not using the word persuade, commit themselves to "encourage, facilitate and enable the achievement of such agreement over a period through a process of dialogue and co-operation based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland". Given the words of our June document and given our joint public statements which

made clear that any agreement among the divided people of our island must earn the allegiance and agreement of all traditions in Ireland and respect their diversity, is it not clear that the Joint Declaration clearly accepts the fundamental principles that we proposed to them privately and publicly?

None of that is to suggest that the problem has been solved. It does underline that, while past reasons given by the Republican movement for armed struggle no longer exist, the legacy of that past which remains and which is today's problem is the divided people of our island. It is clear that that problem cannot be resolved by force and it underlines and confirms the need for the second main request of Sinn Fein, put repeatedly in statements and speeches, to the Irish Government and the SDLP for an organised political alternative to tackle that problem. That alternative has been clearly offered by the Taoiseach in his offer of a permanent Forum for Peace and Reconciliation to face up to the challenges that face us if we are to peacefully resolve the problem of our divided people in a manner that threatens no section of our island people.

The challenge that now faces all of us is a clear political challenge - how to heal the deep divisions among the people of Ireland, divisions which have political, social and above all economic implications particularly for the areas of high unemployment within the North and the border counties. One of the two major challenges which you presented to me at the beginning of our dialogue in 1988, repeated often since then by Sinn Fein in public statements and speeches and central to our resumed dialogue, was the challenge to the Irish Government and to the SDLP to produce a political alternative to what your people describe as the armed struggle.

In the very first document submitted to you on St Patrick's Day 1988 I made a proposal to deal with that request from Sinn Fein, the setting up of an all-Ireland Conference by the Irish Government, involving all parties. It would set as its objective, agreement on how the Irish people as a whole would exercise self-determination and how the people of our diverse traditions would live together in peace, harmony and agreement. If, as we would expect, the Unionist parties refused initially to participate in such a conference, the rest of the participants would take up the challenge of how to progressively break down the barriers of distrust, difference and division that go to the heart of our problem.

As you are aware that proposal has been central to the Taoiseach's proposals in the Joint Declaration that has emerged from our dialogue. Our proposal for an Irish convention is now called the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation but it is exactly the same as our proposal and has exactly the same objectives.



There can be no doubt of the powerful impact that such an institution would have. Given that there would be permanent northern representation together with the South for the first time since 1920, that representation would ensure that all problems would be consistently and positively addressed. It would have a powerful social and economic impact which at the end of the day is what all politics should be about. Wrapping the flag around our young people and pride in our Irishness is not of much value if at the end of the day those young people have to earn their living in another land or spend their lives in dole queues in our own. In meeting this challenge we will be working together, not only to harness the positive energies and talents of all our people but to harness as well the powerful international good will that arises from the fact that we are the biggest wandering people in the world - a strength that we have never harnessed.

A simple example, as we both know, is the enormous good will of Irish America. In the last census there, 42 million people declared themselves Irish in origin. If they were to spend only 5 dollars a week in purchasing Irish products that would be 10 billion dollars a year which would transform our island economy. I know that that may sound rather simplistic but it is a realistic objective that we can achieve along with many other economic objectives that we can harness from the enormous good will of international response to peace in our land. Part of the task of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation would be to set up permanent bodies to achieve such objectives.

There are also many other powerful forces in our favour. With peace, the border will in fact be gone. There will be free movement of goods, people and services throughout Ireland in the new Europe without land borders. The British army checkpoints are the only remaining signs of a border anywhere in the new Europe; and they will disappear with peace and natural social and economic activity will resume for the first time in 70 years particularly in the border regions. Indeed research carried out by business leaders, mostly from the Unionist tradition, has already indicated that the development to the full of the economic potential of internal free trading within Ireland as a whole will create 75,000 jobs.

I have not mentioned of course the powerful and special assistance that will come from our friends throughout Europe as well - as has already been indicated by present European leaders. Let us not forget that our problems with Britain were European in origin. Ireland historically has always had positive and powerful links with Europe - links which were powerfully interrupted to Irish disadvantage by the English presence in

Ireland. Indeed the origins of our present Northern problem, the Plantation of Ulster, was England's response to our links with Spain and the Act of Union was the response to Irish Republican links with France. We are now totally free, particularly if we are organised, to resume and develop our powerful links across Europe for the benefit of all our people and to give hope in particular to our young people.

The other deep problem that we will be facing, a problem that will be powerfully eroded by economic development, is the division in the hearts and minds of our people, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter. That is the major political problem that we face. It is self-evident that it can only be solved by peaceful means and as we have both agreed by a healing process. Partition is not the Irish problem. It simply institutionalised and deepened the existing difference in the hearts and minds of our people that had been there for centuries. It has also made that division worse. Those differences go back even beyond the Plantation because our geography and our special geographical relationship with the neighbouring island were always part of that problem. In the 6th Century St Columba returned from Iona and at the Convention of Drumceatt settled a bitter and bloody quarrel between the clans in Antrim - the Dal Riada - who claimed their loyalty to the King of Argyll - and the clans in Tyrone, Derry and Donegal whose loyalties were to Irish Kings. Indeed those special links with Scotland are reflected in our Northern accents and indeed in the similarity of Donegal Gaelic today and the Gaelic spoken in the Highlands and island of Scotland today as compared with Munster or Connacht Gaelic.

Indeed as the Joint Declaration makes clear, drawn again from our own agreed declaration, part of our final settlement will be the recognition of those special links. But those special links pose no political problems as we approach the 21st Century because in today's smaller world and new Europe, in today's technological and telecommunications world, neither geography nor peripherality are problems as all the ancient barriers between peoples are breaking down and as our common humanity transcends our nationality and as we freely develop our cultural traditions and diversity.

Indeed is it not a deep misunderstanding of the Ulster Protestant tradition that it is only British influence and not their own deeply-felt reasons that up until now have made them want to live apart from the rest of the people of Ireland. Reasons that go back beyond partition as indeed the founder of Irish

Republicanism Wolfe Tone underlined when he spoke of the need to unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter implicitly admitting that they were divided. Indeed although some of them might find it offensive to speak of their siege mentality, there is no doubt that it dominates their political thinking and attitudes. Today they are not colonists nor settlers but, like the rest of us, their heritage and attitudes come down from a past for which they are not responsible and there is a strong settler element in the deep seated fear of revenge which underlies the siege mentality.

That aspect of their heritage makes it even more important that physical force is in no way used against them or to bring about change since it only reinforces the siege mentality and justifies the fear of revenge mentality and in the end deepens our division. Indeed it underlines even more the necessity to recognise that the Unionist people are just as much victims of our past as we are and strengthen the challenge to us to show that we mean what we say when we talk of an Ireland "that will respect the democratic dignity and civil rights of both communities" to quote again the June document. It strengthens the need for the Forum to do all in its power to remove that distrust factor. Indeed that is the heart of the Irish problem and it can only be resolved peacefully and by a healing process.

Indeed I believe that in a peaceful atmosphere there will also be powerful forces in both sections of our divided people that will work positively towards that healing process. Indeed I hope that initial suggestions from Loyalist paramilitary and political sources that they will set up their own Forum are true. We can then with our two Forums commit ourselves, in the true Presbyterian tradition, to building a Covenant of Honour between our different traditions that will lay the foundations for a true healing process. (By the way, this idea was suggested to me in a letter in response to our talks by Fr Seamus Devitt of Clonard). Let us not forget that the basic philosophy of Presbyterianism - respect for the individual and his or her opinions and respect for diversity - is the basic philosophy that founded genuine Republicanism not just in Ireland but in writing the American Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution which was the beginning of the end of imperialism.

The challenge that we now face is, by observing and implementing the same principles, to remove the last remaining legacy of imperialism in Europe, the deep divisions among our island people and to do so in a manner that respects our basic humanity and our basic diversity. It is an enormous challenge and it is a major challenge to all of us. It is a challenge that, as I have said



publicly, will require from the Republican movement, given the experience that its members have been through, one of the greatest acts of moral courage of this century. But at the end of the day it is moral courage that gives real leadership and that creates truly historic opportunity.

Put more simply and directly, if we look forward to the next 25 years and compare 25 years of armed struggle with its cost and effect, to 25 years of committed peaceful and organised activity, harnessing all the energies of our people to face up to our problems and to consistently promote and develop the healing process should there be any doubt about the choice? Is whatever difference there is between our June document and the Joint Declaration, and I see no difference in substance, worth the cost of a single human life?

I am sorry, Gerry, that I have been so lengthy and perhaps wordy, in my promised written response to you but as we have both taken our dialogue and its objectives so seriously and so genuinely since we began many years ago my hope, as I know yours is too, is that as we approach the 21st Century, it will be the first century in the long history of our island people which physical conflict and its terrible consequences will be banished forever. I feverently hope that the serious dialogue now taking place within the Republican movement will lead to the objective for which we have both worked so hard - lasting peace and justice in our land.

Yours sincerely

John Hume