



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/96/2

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Accession Conditions: Open

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

24



PRESS RELEASE

The following is the text of a statement issued to our office.

17/3/94 Embargoed until 1pm - Thursday
St. Patrick's Day Address by Gerry Adams 17-3-94

Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams today spoke of the "great goodwill" which exists around the world for Ireland and the Irish and for a "settlement of this age-old conflict".

Mr Adams spoke of the need for a "healing process" and of the importance of the USA role in helping the peace process.

Mr Adams said that he remained "convinced that the IRA is willing to deal positively with any new eventuality. It is crystal clear that the IRA are interested in developing the search for peace."

The Sinn Féin President called for "a new beginning" arguing that "the problem cannot be solved by the same thinking that created the problem in the first place. New thinking is required.

The Full Text of Mr Adams Address

I read in the papers this week that there is going to be a St. Patrick's Day Parade in Japan. There's also a parade somewhere in Alaska. Japan, Alaska, all over the world people are celebrating being Irish - it's a great thought. Now I know that for some of us the green beer and shillelagh aspect of these celebrations does not strike many chords and does not reflect for us the celebration of Irishness as we see it.

But it is people the world over saying 'We are proud to be Irish', and people wanting to identify with Ireland and the Irish

Sinn Féin Press Centre
51/55 Falls Road, Belfast
PHONE: 230261 FAX:231723

with the displaced and the dispersed, far from the land of their birth and with this country in its present travail. There is great goodwill out there for Ireland and great support for a settlement of this age-old conflict, which can bring the peace and prosperity that we all desire.

I'd like to send St. Patrick's Day greetings from West Belfast to the Irish and the Irish-for-the-day all over the world, particularly to San Francisco who invited me to their parade!

However, I am very happy to be celebrating this day here with you in Belfast.

There is much talk about the division of our people and the need to heal those divisions - ironically from the very people who caused the division. We understand too what this has meant for our people. As republicans, the healing of division and the removal of the causes of division are central to our ideals. Today is an appropriate time to restate again that the Ireland we seek is an Ireland for all here people - open, inclusive, undivided.

I am sure in his day St. Patrick too also got bad press and was misquoted and his message distorted.

Efforts by sections of the British and Irish political establishments to put the blame on Sinn Féin for the continuation of the conflict are not only short sighted and transparently counter-productive, they are also without any validity whatsoever. Especially when the criticism of our party comes from elements who have done little to aid the peace process.

As I have said on many occasions, and at least once this past week, all sides to this conflict must accept their own particular responsibility for the situation. That includes Sinn Féin which has, with every other party, a responsibility to find a peace settlement.

This is particularly so at this point in the peace process, and in the wake of events at Heathrow and continued killings and attacks in Ireland,

Sinn Féin 'committed to building peace'

Let me reiterate Sinn Féin's position. We are committed to building a peace process. Of all those involved in this process, I have been most consistent in my realistic assertion that there are no quick fixes, no deadlines and that the search for peace will be difficult and dangerous. It will also be open to exploitation as each side or faction seeks to advance its own position. Depending on what has occurred the pressure may, at times, be on the republicans or the unionists or the British. There is no doubt also that some events may cause particular problems for the Dublin government. In this context, most attention recently has focussed on the IRA operations at Heathrow and there have been efforts to present these as the end of the peace process.

When I tried to explain last week, in the course of an RTE radio interview, that the contrary should be the case this was misrepresented in an attempt by some to seek what they saw as some sectional advantage for themselves against Sinn Féin. There is always this danger in oral exchanges so it is important to be particularly selective in the words chosen lest ones opponents put their 'spin' on it. Such distortion or misrepresentation, a hazard for all spokespersons, is a particular concern for Sinn Féin especially in the context of a censored and hostile media.

Thus for a period last week the distorted version of my comments received as much attention and reaction as the more serious events of that week. However, opportunism, no matter about its immediate effect, has little relevance in the longer term. This is borne out once again by last week's experience because when these distractions are set to one side those engaged in armed conflict before the distractions are still so engaged. The distractions have solved nothing.

Why? Because the causes of conflict remain. These causes still need to be removed. How? By patiently building a peace process which does this. That was my message last week. It is my message again this week.

The message of all armed actions - whether by the British forces, their loyalist allies or the IRA - as I have said many times before, is that there has not yet been an end to the Anglo/Irish conflict. Tragic and intolerable though it may be, this is the reality.

The message from Sinn Féin is as valid now therefore, if not more so, as at any time in recent years. Sinn Féin is not engaged in armed actions. We are engaged only in unarmed activity and neither condone nor encourage armed actions. On the contrary we seek to secure an end to all such actions. We seek demilitarisation of the situation.

The challenge, after last week, remains. Not only for Sinn Féin but for others also. That challenge is the greatest one facing us all. It is to find a formula for a lasting peace.

Momentum for Peace

In every conflict situation there comes a time when the peace process develops such an impetus that it cannot be deflected, despite continuing hostilities, equivocations and the mutual distrust of the various protagonists. We in Sinn Féin are firmly committed to creating such a peace momentum. We have a clear view of what is required and we have a viable strategy to achieve a lasting peace founded on democratic principles.

The atmosphere of suspicion and doubt in Ireland and between Ireland and Britain must be filtered out so that rational and pragmatic discussions can replace the old animosities. Each side must accept that democratic compromise can provide the way forward. Sinn Féin seeks a negotiated settlement and a new constitutional arrangement.

The present arrangement is based on the 1920 Government of Ireland Act and is clearly flawed. Irish nationalists and democrats want to bring an end to the Government of Ireland Act.

Whilst all involved have to make a contribution, the British Government, more than any other party, ultimately holds the key to progress. It is the sovereign power.

Sadly, the British Government, whether because of their cynical and short-sighted "arrangement" with the Unionists in the House of Commons, or because of some outdated belief in their own imperial standing, have as yet proved unwilling to make the measures that would transform an understandable desire for peace into a genuine peace process.

Time for Realism

Despite the hard-line posturing from British politicians, realism and accommodation are not impossible. These qualities have been exhibited on occasions in the past when it suited the British to show flexibility. For example in the process which brought peace and democracy to Zimbabwe.

It is time for the realism displayed then to be shown again in relation to their long term intentions in Ireland. Their current stance of refusing to provide clarification of the Downing St. Declaration, set against the background of 3 years of private contact with Sinn Féin is illogical.

Sinn Féin has the democratic authority and the electoral mandate to represent an important section of the Irish people. Our mandate is as valid as any other party. The people who voted for Sinn Féin have an inalienable right to be represented in any genuine peace dialogue.

At our Ard Fheis I stated, "Sinn Féin has accepted that the Irish Peace Initiative could form the basis for a lasting peace.

Nevertheless, we are politically and morally bound to consider the Downing Street Declaration in the context of our own peace strategy with a view to determining what contribution it has to make to the development of a peace process aimed at delivering a lasting peace" (Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, 26/2/94)

Constitutional Negotiations

This commitment underscores our reasonable call for the British government to provide clarification to us. We have no great concern to be engaged in bi-lateral discussions on constitutional matters with the British Government. These matters are more properly the business of all party talks, including the British Government and with the Dublin Government as the principle representative of the Irish side.

As far as such talks are concerned I have no doubt that Sinn Féin and the British Government will be involved in dialogue. The British have conceded this in principle. Unfortunately they have stalled on the conditions.

These issues are not the point of the reasonable call for clarification being made by us. Clarification has been provided to all other parties on request. Sinn Féin and our electorate have the right to equality of treatment.

Neither is clarification required as a means of negotiation. Clarification is necessary so that we properly explore how the peace process can be moved forward. It should be provided on that basis.

The British may be reluctant to talk publicly to republicans. We too have a decided reluctance to deal with the British Government based on past experience of British bad faith. But peace is worth the risk.

John Major's response to this issue reiterated in the British House of Commons yesterday is disappointing.

In a recent public debate with Sir Patrick Mayhew at Trinity College, Dublin, the SDLP's Seamus Mallon, who has missed no chance to attack Sinn Fein, stated that the partition of Ireland and the subsequent behaviour of the British Government, "has given nationalists in the North of Ireland a deep, and entirely rational and justifiable wariness about the intentions and motives of British Government and of Unionist leaders".

Nationalists do not trust the British Establishment, nor do they trust a Unionist leadership that still argues for a return to the old Stormont days.

Northern nationalists have lived in a vicious and violent statelet for 70 odd years. We were forced, at the point of a gun, into an arbitrarily created unionist state. We were given no choice, were not asked for our consent. We had no veto, no domestic or international protector of our rights. We were victimised and discriminated against, oppressed and imprisoned, denied our aspirations and our political validity. We were treated as second-class citizens, dehumanised and driven from our official history. Yet we are still here, still determined, and still willing to be generous.

17/03 '94 13:36 0232 231723

S. F. PRESS CENTRE --- RTE

0009.0

Opportunity for Peace remains

There is no doubt, in my opinion, that the opportunity for peace remains. For all of us the prospect is at the same time exciting and frightening. Republicans are ready to play our full part in this most important phase in our history. But peace making is everyone's responsibility.

The Irish and British Governments, their respective Parliamentary oppositions, the SDLP, the Unionists, the political community representatives of all the people on this island, the Churches, the Unions, the cultural and social bodies, are all pieces in the Anglo-Irish jigsaw. They must be involved, they must all be part of the process. As indeed must the international community. But we must be careful and patient. Making peace with one's friends is easy. Making peace with one's enemies and opponents is a very difficult business. We must expect set-backs, disappointments, and diversions, but these must be overcome.

The development of democracy in Ireland has been retarded by Partition and the British 'connection'. Irish nationalists and Irish unionists share a common turbulent history. It is my firm conviction that Unionists can be persuaded to recognise that they share a common peaceful destiny with their fellow country men and women in the common territory of Ireland. Irish history has been scarred and mutilated by the support which the British Government gives to unionism and the consequential inability, of unionists to come to a democratic accommodation with the rest of the Irish people. The British government's role as persuaders is key. - This is obvious.

The significance of this and of other IRA remarks at that time should not be missed or misrepresented by those they are aimed at. The IRA statement of March 13 speaks for itself.

The one certain thing that can be said about that statement is that it doesn't need any clarification.

Set Aside the Past

Sinn Féin is willing to set aside all that has occurred up to now. I ask John Major to do likewise. I have frequently said that a new beginning is needed. I call upon all who are concerned to end conflict, to redouble their efforts to move the situation on, in a manner which takes account not only of all the sensitivities and difficulties involved, but more importantly, of the prize of peace which must be the basis for our commitment to this process.

Republicans want peace, we want to see the gun taken out of Irish politics forever. If the British Government is willing to show the openness and flexibility required then Republicans will commit all our energies to reaching a democratic agreement. And when such agreement is reached, we will continue to use all our resources to promote the healing process that will be necessary to bring the Irish people together in a unity that will protect the democratic dignity, civil rights and heritage of all our people. In the interim we must acknowledge the reality of the situation and proceed on that basis. Foremost in that is the reality that the problem cannot be solved by the same thinking that created the problem in the first place. New thinking is required.

The republican struggle is strong and confident. We have come through the years of vilification and marginalisation together. We are never going back to that. We are at that stage in this long struggle where we can be optimistic about the future by asserting the all-embracing ideals of Irish republicanism.

The culture of Unionism

At our Ard Fheis last month, republicans were asked if they could really grasp what it is like to be born into the culture of unionism. It was suggested that some of us in similar circumstances might have behaved in exactly the same manner as unionists and loyalists throughout the history of partition. We were reminded that a deep and genuine fear of abandonment by the British Government has coloured both the actions of Unionists and their motivation.

We in Sinn Féin have a duty to develop our contacts with the unionist community. We must recognise, be sympathetic and sensitive to what unionists are being asked to consider and commit themselves to, if a peace dialogue is to develop. We have stated, over and over again, that we wish to live in peace and without coercion with our unionist neighbours. There is little to be gained from measuring one wrong against another.

I am calling on nationalists and republicans to be aware of what it means to be a unionist as this century draws to a close. I ask the unionists and the British Government to make an equal effort to recognise the validity of the nationalist experience in Ireland.

There is also a need for unionists to engage in a debate with the British government, to seek clarification from their perspective from the British government of its long intentions in Ireland. Is this James Molyneux's view that the Union is not in danger or Peter Robinson's assertion that the Union has been violated. Surely this is a matter of grave concern to Unionists. Unionists and Nationalists have many things in common, this includes distrust of the British. The current arrangement with the British government will not last forever and Unionists know that.

I do not seek to minimize the depth of unionist anger, but, and I would be dishonest not to say it, unionists must recognize that there is no going back. There will be no return to Stormont. Those are the failed policies of the past. It is time to look forward not back. Unionists can be assured that Nationalists seek to join with them in the search for a new future based on equality.

The United States

Later on today the U.S. Government will host a reception for a number of leading members of the Irish and Irish American political, cultural and business world. I welcome the symbolic significance of this gathering.

I trust it is evidence of a developing relationship between President Clinton's administration and Ireland; a developing of interest and attention which will be put to the service of the quest for peace.

Regrettably U.S. foreign policy interests have traditionally led U.S. administrations to support British policy in Ireland.

This administration, however, despite sustained British pressure, have displayed a willingness to take a fresher approach to this conflict. It must be encouraged to continue to do so.

My trip to New York convinced me that there is unprecedented and growing goodwill in Irish America towards Ireland, and to the search for a just and lasting peace here.

The historic human link between Ireland and the U.S. contain the potential to develop new and powerful allies to assist in breaking new ground and moving the situation on considerably.

Indeed some progress has been made and clear indications have been given by significant sections and representatives of Irish America of their willingness to play a positive role in assisting the peace process in Ireland. This is welcome. It should also be encouraged and Irish republicans must apply ourselves to building on the substantial and significant support which has been generated on all these matters in the past several weeks in the U.S.A.

Irish America can provide the balance to the narrow concerns of self-interest which have guided the U.S. State Department's advice to successive U.S. administrations. I am convinced that there is a willingness to take up this role; a willingness to attempt to move the administration in the direction of directly contributing to the resolution of the conflict in Ireland on the basis of democratic principles.

Modification and Compromise Required

What is required to move the peace process forward is a spirit of realism, a willingness to bring about the conditions for peace and above all else, a change in British Government policy. Building peace may be messy and confused. It may be slow and circuitous. It may require modification and compromise from all sides. But, at the end of the day accommodation and negotiation are better than surrender and simmering resentment. The possibility for real and lasting peace still remains. It's achievement will be a victory for all.

I remain convinced that the IRA is willing to deal positively with any new eventuality. It is crystal clear that the IRA are interested in developing the search for peace.

It endorsed the Irish peace initiative when it publicly emerged last year. It repeated it's endorsement for it a few days ago.