



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/96/39

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.

AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

BÉAL FEIRSTE

*PI fact
p. 10
DIT*

(27)

*Ass
BT
Mr. Finlay
ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT
Mr. F. Murray
BELFAST
Mr. T. Dunne
Dr. M. Hanrahan*

FOR: PRESS SECTION/LONDON

DATE: 10 OCTOBER 1994

FROM: S. NIC COITIR

PAGES: 10

Interview with An Tanaiste, Dick Spring
BBC Radio Ulster, 9 October, 1994

Earlier in the week, Foreign Minister Dick Spring took time from the wheeling and dealing over the Whelehan affair to reflect with me on the events of the last five weeks, North and South. In the Georgian splendour of Iveagh House, the H.Q. of the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin, I asked him for his gut assessment of the prospects for peace.

Tanaiste: At this stage I am optimistic and I think for every day that goes past without violence in Northern Ireland from, certainly from the IRA side, and hopefully from the other side, I think that is a step in the right direction. It's going to take time and I can understand people wondering and questioning but I would hope that over a period of time without violence everybody will come to accept that the war is over, that we want to enter into a democratic political negotiation and that we want to bring all sides into those negotiations.

Interviewer: But you're pretty sure now that the war is over? Why are you so sure?

Tanaiste: Well I'm as sure as, as sure you can be about anything in the sense that there has been as far as I'm concerned fairly definite confirmation from Sinn Fein/IRA that they have brought an end to the military operations, they have expressed the desire to get involved in democratic politics and they want to be involved in inclusive negotiations. I also think there is a mind-set, North and South, at the

- 2 -

present time and I'm not sure what the reasons for this are - is it generational, is it passage of time? - that indicates to me that the war is over, that people want to get involved in democratic politics, and perhaps also there is an acceptance - that if you continued with the violence, you weren't going to achieve anything. In fact as the violence erupted over the last 25 years, I think it drove people further apart in terms of the attitudes in the South, whatever sympathy there was for Sinn Fein IRA 20/30 years ago, for every violent incident, for every explosion, for every killing, I think it drove people in the South further away from Sinn Fein/IRA, as their electoral returns would suggest, and from what they were looking for.

Interviewer: Why do you think the British aren't so convinced?

Tánaiste: Well I think the British have a different constituency to the Irish Government and I think they are very mindful of their constituency. I also think that the Prime Minister has to be wary in relation to his Party Conference coming up very shortly. Perhaps after that Conference, when he gets an opportunity of outlining what he wants to do in relation to Northern Ireland, he may have more freedom. But I believe that they are coming closer to accepting it, and every day that goes by without acts of violence is helpful to the British Government, and I would think over a short period of time they may well be in a position to say, "right, the clock is ticking. We are going to allow the three month period and start negotiation".

Interviewer: But isn't it extraordinary that at a time of such hope and optimism after 25 years of awfulness and depression that we seem to be locked on a single word.

Tánaiste: Well, yes, I don't think that's the reality. I mean, I think that, in effect, if the British Government had

- 3 -

said "please say complete" the IRA were never going to say it, or Sinn Féin wouldn't use it. I think that's part of the historical problem. I don't think we should get tied down on the word. I think what's important is what happens on the ground, what is being said and I think that, in fairness to Mr. Adams in the States, he has tried to get round, if you like, the deadlock in relation to the wording. But let's not hold up what everybody wants. I also think that in relation to the acceptance or otherwise of the permanence, there is probably a psychological mind-set which has to be changed. I don't think that anybody believed two years ago, indeed if not six months ago, that this would actually happen. I think that's going to require a huge shift in attitude from a lot of people on all sides of the divide in Northern Ireland, and people will have to say "Now, OK, the opportunity is there, what are we going to do with it, how are we going to use the opportunity, let's get involved, let's get stuck in and let's do something with it".

Interviewer: But isn't there a kind of logic in the arguments that were being put forward by Ken Maginnis in America in the interview on the Larry King Live programme, that how can you have a ceasefire when there is still thousands of tonnes of weapons somewhere in this country?

Tánaiste: Well I think you have more than a ceasefire. You have a permanent cessation of violence and I respect what the concerns expressed by Ken Maginnis, and they are concerns that the Irish Government would share. Of course there are caches of arms all round the country, North and South. If you take, for example, others who would have come away from violence it would appear that they never surrendered their arms. But I think that's something we will have to discuss down the line, and I would hope that with the stabilising of the permanency of the cessation that we will then move on to discuss those matters. There are a lot of matters which have arisen in the last, say, five weeks in terms of what's going to happen to

- 4 -

prisoners, in terms of what's going to happen to the arms and I think quite frankly they are issues to be discussed down the line. Let's start working on the political side of this. Of course there is no need for arms now that one has given up the violence. But I don't think it's going to be easy to get those guns until we see that we're actually making progress. But I would hope that the Governments can convince those who have the arms to surrender them, and that means arms from all sides, let's get the arms out of the equation. I think we are in-process of taking the violence out of the equation. Let's get the arms out of the equation as well.

Interviewer: When you say all sides, are you also talking about the official arms, the British military presence as well, are they part of the equation?

Tanaiste: Well, I think ultimately, I'm talking primarily about the Loyalist arms. I mean we are of the view, and I think it's well understood by all sides, that they obviously have supplies of arms which they got over the last number of years as well. They have got to be taken out of the equation. In relation to the British army and the presence and obviously the job they are doing in Northern Ireland, if we remove the violence from the conflict, if we have a verification of the removal of violence, which obviously would mean the arms being handed up, then I think you will see the serious withdrawal of British army troops from the streets of Northern Ireland because they won't be required there. I think that's the ultimate aim of everybody, and I sure that the people who presently feel they are being protected by the British army will feel that that protection is no longer necessary, because the threat of violence will be removed.

Interviewer: Tanaiste, you said yourself at the last Anglo-Irish Conference Meeting that the British and the Irish Governments were both on the same track, moving at slightly different speeds. I think within the British establishment

- 5 -

there is, you would recognise, some concern that perhaps the Irish Government is moving too fast, and that perhaps rather more early than should be, the IRA/Sinn Fein, the Republican movement, is being politically rewarded, can I say, for stopping doing something that they shouldn't have started doing in the first place.

Fanaliste: I wouldn't say they are being politically rewarded, I would say that they are being politically facilitated. After all the Downing St. Declaration made it very clear that if the violence came to an end, that there would be a generous response from both Governments. I think that, and I know the expression was used previously about being politically rewarded, there are no rewards for ending violence. But there are opportunities, and those opportunities obviously extend to people and organisation who have been involved in violence on both sides. The ultimate aim from my perspective, is that you are bringing people into democratic politics. Obviously people will have to go before the people in due course and take their chances like all of us do in elections and to get a mandate for themselves. The Sinn Fein organisation has 10% of the Nationalist vote, 10% of the vote, in Northern Ireland. They obviously are entitled to express their views, but the big change that has taken place now as far as I am concerned, is that they are not subscribing to violence as a means of achieving political aims. We have always said, every Government in the South has said over years that there would be no dialogue, no discussion until there is a renunciation of the violence. That is there now, so surely we have to move on and open political channels.

Interviewer: But who else with the political mandate of 10% in Northern Ireland, and 2% or so in this country, gets to talk to the American Vice President?

Fanaliste: Well I think you have to look at it in a different light. If Mr. Adams is capable of delivering the Sinn Fein

- 6 -

and the IRA away from violence, I don't think it matters if he has a conversation with the Vice President of the US or any other conversations for that matter. He's got to shift these people, he's got to bring them with him and that I think is being recognised. On the other hand as Ken Maginnis would have said on TV and others, I mean they obviously resent, if you like, what's happening in the US to Gerry Adams. I don't. I think it's a necessary part of the process and I felt the same about his original trip to the US. There is a huge Irish American lobby which over the years has been supportive of Sinn Fein/IRA, far above and beyond what we would have seen as acceptable. They have to be convinced that what Sinn Fein is doing now and the track, they are following is the acceptable and only track and path and obviously that's part of Adams' task in the States.

Interviewer: Can we talk a little bit about the way forward? What's the Irish Government's perspective on the next move?

Taniste: Well I think there is a dual perspective. Firstly we want to complete the Framework Document with the British Government. Work on that is going apace. We may well have by the end of this month, we may well have brought it to finality and obviously then that would lead onto a meeting at Prime Ministerial level, a summit meeting, to have that document ratified so to speak. Then that document would be put into the public domain. It would be presented to the parties, and hopefully on presentation people would take it for reflection and for consideration, and then also in the South we are looking at establishing the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, which is to facilitate Sinn Fein to come into democratic politics and to have an opportunity at having discussions with the political parties in the South, which hasn't happened obviously for years. We would hope that both of these would move simultaneously. We would obviously hope to re-open round table negotiations with all the parties in Northern Ireland within a matter of months and start the

- 7 -

process of finding the solution. I think at the moment all we are doing is preparing the ground for the solution. It was obviously felt very strongly that if we can take violence out of the equation that solving the problem would be that much easier.

Interviewer: You said "we're" hoping to get round table talks started with the parties in the North. Was that a slip of the tongue? Who's the "we"?

Tánaiste: No. Sorry, I suppose I can't speak for the British Government, but the inclusive "we". Both the British and Irish Governments are ad idem in terms of wanting to start the round table negotiations. Yes, I mean both governments I would say in that respect. Perhaps the "we" was representing the Anglo Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

Interviewer: The Framework Document, obviously I won't press you on what's in it but is it a kind of blue print, is it a template? What is this Framework Document?

Tánaiste: I would see it as a major statement of principles, an agreed statement of principles between both Governments. An analysis of the present situation, an analysis of the aspirations of both communities in Northern Ireland and, if you like, a signpost as to how we might make progress. Obviously it will look at areas where there are sensitivities on both sides. I mean for example, there is major concern among Unionists about the Irish constitution so obviously we will respond to those concerns. There's concerns among (the) Nationalist community in relation to the situation, the Government of Ireland Act, NI, that would be looked at and obviously the whole question of some links between Dublin and the North, cross-border links and they are the main areas of concern. And then you look at the whole raft of areas in terms of personal rights, in relation to personal freedom, in relation to parity of esteem, respect for both traditions. I

- 8 -

think you will see everything, if you like, all the issues that are being debated within Northern Ireland and without Northern Ireland.

Interviewer: But will there be anything in that document that's any more radical than what was in the Downing St. Declaration?

Tánaiste: Well I think it will be developing on the Downing St. Declaration and probably will have to harden up on what the Governments are prepared to do in relation to moving forward. What is important I think is that you have got to get cross-community support for this document. There is little point if we are going to continue the debate on a strictly community divide. Obviously in terms of the prospect of referendums being held North and South, there is no point even attempting referendums unless you have cross-community support.

Interviewer: Why then would you need referenda? If you have cross-community support you don't need referenda.

Tánaiste: I think you would be reinforcing and making a very public statement. Signifying cross-community support, because if there isn't a prospect of cross-community support, we're not going to make progress in terms of finding a solution in Northern Ireland. Because if you make it a straight Nationalist/Unionist issue we all know how the votes would go in that respect. What you have to do is build in some form of consensus, some new consensus between the communities. I think that's achievable. It may take a certain amount of time because a lot of confidence has to be built up because there is a huge reservoir of distrust in Northern Ireland at the present time and I think it's going to require huge steps forward on both the Unionist and Nationalist communities together.

- 9 -

Interviewer: You must have taken a great deal of comfort this week from the apparent move by your sister party in Britain, the Labour Party, towards a consensus on the Downing St. Declaration. There is almost a political consensus here. That frightens Unionists, it makes them feel that somehow they are standing alone and they are being rail-roaded into something that's dark and misty and not to be trusted. What do you say to reassure them?

Tánaiste: Well I have said on many occasions, and I like to think from private conversations that they are listening to me, that they have nothing to fear. They should be coming along to the table from a position of strength and they should be negotiating from that position. I think that the Irish Government and the British Government, indeed as you say, the British Labour Party want to work with them. We are mindful of their place on the island of Ireland, we want to work with them, we want to respect their traditions, we accept the validity of it and I would hope that they would take the bona fides of the Irish Government. Things have changed in the South, attitudes have changed in the South, things have moved on, life has moved on. Whereas 40 or 50 years ago I don't think there was an understanding or acceptance of the Unionist tradition, I think that is very firmly anchored and rooted in the Irish Government's position and indeed all the political parties in the South.

Interviewer: Just a final question to you. You and I are both of an age to remember 1973/74 - the last major initiative which looked like succeeding - the power sharing experiment. It fell because of a general election in Britain. Is there the danger that because of domestic politics in this country that that could happen again?

Tánaiste: I would hope not. In fact I would be reasonably certain that domestic politics will be reconciled if I may say it that way. Ironically as somebody said to me yesterday,

- 10 -

here we are trying to preach peace and reconciliation, end of conflict in Northern Ireland and we have a domestic row so they said "put your domestic row, which is of a much more minor scale obviously than what we are trying to achieve in Northern Ireland, put that aside and get on with the real job that confronts the Government".

Interviewer: We are both talking about the same thing I take it?

Tánaiste: I assume we are, yes.

Interviewer: The Whelehan affair.

Tánaiste: The difference in positions between Fianna Fail and Labour in relation to the Presidency of the High Court, yes.

Interviewer: And you see that being resolved?

Tánaiste: I think we are well on the way to resolving it, and I would hope that we can do that because the prospect that's before us now in relation to bringing peace to this island, I think is certainly worth preserving.

Interviewer: Well there's news for you. Foreign Affairs Minister Dick Spring giving us food for thought.

END.