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TRANSCRIPT**TODAY**  
THURSDAY 27/10/94

A BBC News and Current Affairs Programme

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JOHN HUMPHRYS

The time is ten past eight. Both the British and the Irish Government now agree that there is one overriding obstacle standing in the way of a peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland, the great caches of arms and explosives held by terrorist on both sides. The Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds said last night that there could be no successful conclusion to the peace process before that had been resolved. He also said Sinn Fein recognised the fact, the Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams will be making an important speech tonight supposed to be an important announcement in that speech. On the line now is the chairman of Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland Mr Mitchell McLaughlin. Good morning.

MITCHELL McLAUGHLIN

Good morning John.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

There can obviously be no point in holding onto weapons given that this peace is permanent.

MITCHELL McLAUGHLIN

Well I think the people would recognise the difference between a cease fire and a permanent peace. I think that we do have a considerable amount of work to do, although I do believe a very significant beginning, has already occurred and I look forward to all of the parties involved in this long running conflict agreeing to commit themselves to processing this matter to a successful conclusion.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

You say people would recognise the difference between a cease fire and a permanent peace. I was under the impression we were being led to believe that what was happening in Northern Ireland now was irrevocable that they had permanently renounced violence.

MITCHELL McLAUGHLIN

Well let's hope that we have a permanent peace John, what we haven't got as yet because we are not even in the necessary negotiations is agreement on the political structures for the Island of Ireland. Those very very crucial negotiations are now possible because the British Government has moved to engage in the process and I think that we are at a very significant moment in history.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

But you can't expect other parties to any negotiations to sit down at a table with you on the assumption that if things don't go the way that Sinn Fein, for instance, wants the IRA might pick up the gun again.

MITCHELL McLAUGHLIN

Oh I think that that's a very legitimate concern. I think its important always to recognise that what has happened is that they that those who were involved in the war so to speak have agreed to step back, no one has been defeated, no one has been forced to surrender. The politicians now have the opportunity, a unique opportunity to come together and to agree between them a set of democratic...

MITCHELL MCLAUGHLIN (continued)

... structures that would make it impossible for the Gun to come back into Irish politics, that certainly has been Sinn Fein objective all along.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

But when you use language such as step back that is going to fuel the fears of loyalists in the north isn't it? That if things don't go quite your way then they'll step forward again and you can't hold talks under this sort of threat can you? That's what the last 25 years has been all about.

MITCHELL MCLAUGHLIN

No I think that in every other conflict situation there was in fact a pause there was a a an opportunity created by those who were directly involved in fighting agreeing to allow negotiations to begin. I think that the product of successful negotiations and hear I agree totally with Albert Reynolds. The product of successful negotiations will be that all those who are in possession of weapons will agree that they be surrendered.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

But the whole point about what is happening now is that we've been told that it is much more than just a pause to use your words.

MITCHELL MCLAUGHLIN

I am describing the circumstances and the opportunity and how that opportunity was created and I'm trying to do in a realistic a fashion as possible, for example to insist that as a precondition to either side or to any side that they must surrender their weapons before people will talk to them does in fact invite this very fragile consensus on the moment that presents itself to collapse. So I think that the people should engage and that they should engage with a view to consolidate with the opportunity.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

So no weapons will be handed over at least before talks will be in?

MITCHELL MCLAUGHLIN

My view and I think that I have an informed view over this matter, is that there is a considerable amount of distrust both in the British Government's track record in Ireland and in the failure of constitutional politics over the last 70 years for it to be realistic to expect that either the IRA or indeed the loyalists would hand over weapons before there is clear evidence that those politicians have seriously engaged and that there is a consolidated prospect for an agreement on political structures.

JOHN HUMPHRYS

Mitchell McLaughlin thank you very much.