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Reference Code: 2021/97/26

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*Americans for a New Irish agenda: Visit of Delegation headed by
former Congressman Bruce Morrison,
Department of the Taoiseach 24 July, 1995*

The visiting delegation consisted of Mr. Bruce Morrison, Mr. Joe Jamison, Mr. Nial O'Dowd and Mr. Chuck Feeney. The Taoiseach and Tánaiste were accompanied by Mr. Sean Ó hÚiginn, (Department of Foreign Affairs), Mr. Sean Donlon and the undersigned.

Following some welcoming remarks, the Taoiseach described the current state of the Peace Process and his concerns about its progress. In particular he addressed an anticipated British initiative and the risks of non-participation or rejection by Unionist Parties. He was concerned that everyone in Northern Ireland should have a sense of ownership and a commitment to the Framework introduced to seek a resolution of the difficulties. He expressed concern about the British proposal which was not currently affording sufficient regard and consideration to the Unionist position. It was his particular concern that no Irish people should be left without choices in arrangements to be adopted. The Tánaiste also welcomed the delegation and expressed his appreciation of their efforts.

Mr. Morrison thanked the Taoiseach and Tánaiste for this meeting and described his meetings in Northern Ireland of the previous few days. He expressed concern that the normalisation of everyday life was diminishing the historic achievement of the cessation of violence. He was gratified that neither Nationalist nor Unionist elements were threatening a resumption of violence and it was his opinion that there was a real and shared commitment to peace. He expressed concern at the apparent lack of movement in the period since the

● ceasefire. With the conflicting and partisan demands for priority between "all party talks" and "decommissioning", he was concerned that there was limited space for movement. He said that Hume and Adams had been clear and eloquent on the need for substantive talks. While he believed that weapons surrender was not imminent, he felt that Unionists needed to see something. The Nationalist needs were for visible progress and evidence of "the working process". Mr. Morrison saw the need for the Irish Government to avoid symbolism destroying the substance of the Peace Process. He expressed his belief that Adams could not deliver the IRA at this time to decommissioning and that fact must be accepted in good faith.

The Taoiseach asked how far he thought the republican movement were willing to go to buy into the Peace Process.

Mr. Morrison suggested that Sinn Féin could be persuaded to pursue a parallel process but that there would be a problem if the timescale was different for a settlement discussion. Decommissioning is a legitimate important principle that shouldn't be dogging the discussion. Whatever is agreed must also be workable.

The Taoiseach expressed concern that the proposal to decommission in such a parallel process could be to "park" the issue until the all-party talks yielded a satisfactory result. He was concerned that this was effectively a facility to negotiate with the gun under the table. He mentioned the British instalment proposal for decommissioning of weapons and said that the Irish Government didn't accept the token/instalment idea. The Taoiseach suggested that to convene talks in September leaving decommissioning to some third party was

not a satisfactory arrangement either. He thought that the Unionists would likely not be represented in such talks in that situation.

Mr. Morrison suggested that Hume and Adams were clear on possible actions and were keenly aware on what could be approved by their communities. In this regard the decommissioning of weapons presented Mr. Adams with a difficult proposal for which to gain popular support.

The Taoiseach suggested that everyone had to sell something to their supporters and that there should be an equity of pain for meaningful compromise to be produced. He expressed concern about the Unionist reaction to a talks initiative and about the physical risks in border areas from radicalised Unionism.

Mr. Morrison said that Adams is as concerned as anyone at the risks. Violence anywhere augurs the end of the Peace Process. He had no delusion of the tough talks and the compromise necessary. He felt that Adams had been making a effort and that there had been movement. The original Sinn Féin proposal for the ceasefire had been short term and that had been surmounted. There had been both movement and compromise on the Nationalist side. He asked that the Government respect any Adams/Hume conclusion on "a bridge too far" whenever its called. No one in Northern Ireland has any doubt about the required inclusion of the process. He also drew confidence that Unionists could overcome their usually negative initial reaction to proposals. They had turned up at the Washington Conference although they originally said they wouldn't. Mr. McGimpsey had travelled to New York for a debate with Sinn

Féin organised by Nial O'Dowd. He believed the DUP would not join anything until the process is much more advanced.

Mr. O'Dowd suggested that arms collection will be a problem. The community don't recognise this as a legitimate issue. Violence may be entailed in weapons collection and disposal. He expressed concern about the gap between Northern Nationalist thinking and the Irish Government. He acknowledged that the Government drives the Peace Process, but argued that any bilateral deal with London needs Adams' and Hume's endorsement to work.

The Tánaiste said that the British Government are engaged again in the Peace Process having dealt recently with their leadership issues. He was satisfied that they were active in the pursuit of progress. He mentioned his meeting later that afternoon with Secretary of State Mayhew and that the two Governments were working together to seek to achieve progress.

The Taoiseach spoke of his concern that the Irish Government might use its maximum influence with the British Government to develop a formula for party talks and decommissioning and of their compromised position if following such effort Sinn Féin did not agree. He was concerned about using political capital when there might not be a corresponding flexibility on the other side.

Mr. O'Dowd again mentioned a concern about violence if there was any attempt or scheme to have enforced collection or surrender of weapons. The Taoiseach suggested that this was a new theme and asked for the background.

● Mr. O'Dowd said that it came from his meetings in the last few days in Northern Ireland and his belief was that it was an internal IRA difficulty.

Mr. Morrison said that his group have no independent interest in the shape of any deal other than that it would be workable.

The Taoiseach again stressed the necessary sense of ownership of any process by all in Northern Ireland. He favoured an evolution of Unionist thinking but was fearful of creating any "day of crisis". Historically in Anglo-Irish relations, progress had been sought by initiatives which would transcend Unionist intransigence. The Anglo-Irish Agreement had not included Unionists and that was its only defect. The Sinn Féin interest is now to push towards all-party conferences. He was concerned that without Unionist consent and participation in that process, the most moderate and benign proposals would none the less be unworkable as "the fruit of the poison tree".

Mr. Morrison believed that the path to progress was to "finesse" the current difficulties through language and interpretation. He believed that a package of "finessed" points and concessions should be balanced and tied. He reported that Sinn Féin believed there has been backsliding on what was originally promised in the Peace Process.

The Taoiseach expected that Unionists would grow to trust the Peace Process and suggested that victims could not reasonably be expected to become flexible overnight.

Mr. Morrison argued that the longer the process takes to get underway the more the historic moment is lost. He said that Hume/Adams were asking for an all-party conference which would not wait for all-party consent. He saw that exploratory bilateral meetings were part of a "finessing" procedure towards talks and would be akin to "finessing" on the decommissioning issue. He felt that the need was for two fig leaves to be provided on these issues. He wanted to emphasise that his group was not a "green machine" that would dismiss the Unionist interest, but that they were anxious to preserve the momentum and historic impact of the cessation of violence and Peace Process.

Mr. Morrison spoke of his meeting with Mr. Ancram, who he found to be quite forthcoming. Mr. Ancram had acknowledged that surrender of weapons was unrealistic and that the British Government knew that. Their interest was to have progress anyway. Mr. Ancram had been concerned at the risks inherent in street demonstrations and the highlight of tensions which they cause. He had been enthusiastic about the forthcoming visit of President Clinton and the opportunities it presented. He indicated that there was a degree of flexibility in the British position and gave the impression that they were not as obdurate as sometimes their rhetoric conveyed. The overriding sense of his meeting was that the British were "willing to move".

The Taoiseach said that he believed that the Irish Government had shifted the British Government enormously recently. Previous efforts (e.g. the Anglo-Irish Agreement) had assumed that the British Government was persuading and managing Unionist opinion. Experience suggested that they do not. Unionists are not engaged and are not an abiding concern of the British Government. It is possibly a Unionist mistake not to talk more to the Irish

● Government, because ultimately we need their consent for harmony on the island.

Mr. Morrison said that community attitudes were not always as one might have expected. Drawing some parallels to the South African situation, he instanced a population holding the Offices of State, comforted by the ~~S~~ Status quo, and yet feeling disadvantaged, betrayed and untrusting. They would undoubtedly respond nervously to any proposals.

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The Taoiseach expressed concern about any initiative which would make Unionists jump the wrong way.

Mr. Morrison said that Unionists needed to be both pressured and facilitated to move and that this is a basic principal of political negotiation.

Mr. O'Dowd suggested that Sinn Féin were also in a vulnerable position. They had made the commitment of faith to the Peace Process, but needed to be reassured and vindicated in that action. Their relationship with the Irish Government was crucial and notwithstanding their experiences, they could be quite naive politically. In this regard he instanced the street protests campaign for all party talks.

The Taoiseach mentioned his disappointment with the campaign of street protests country wide and the complete lack of notice or consultation before embarking on this campaign. Such actions were bad for tourism and investment and possibly even counter productive to Sinn Féin's demands. He

was also concerned with the Sinn Féin belief that the delay from August 1994 meant that a "bigger" party talks process was now required as compensation.

Mr. Morrison felt that this was not so but that there was a need to show that the Peace Process was not a disingenuous initiative of the British Government.

The Taoiseach felt that the political situation had been greatly progressed. Unionists have seen the reality of the ceasefire and have been greatly reassured.

The Tánaiste added that the language of the Peace Process had become much more positive and that the phase of "two tracks", "exploratory talks" etc. was over.

Mr. Morrison considered that the British Government could also consider their language with greater sensitivity to take account of the needs of each community. He said the position of Sinn Féin with their community and the republican movement was quite precarious and that sometimes the wording of official statements was adding to the problems.

Mr. Feeney considered that the Peace Process had taken so long to engineer that it had been generally expected to progress rapidly. However it was now obvious that it would proceed slowly and indeed even that inertia might be a problem. He was satisfied that there was no Sinn Féin intention to change direction. A grand conference with equal participation would have Sinn Féin support. Sinn Féin have a genuine fear of the Unionist veto, which may be exercised through non-participation in any development. Paramilitary

prisoners seemed reasonably resigned to the fact that delay will occur before all cases can be addressed. However, generosity by the British Government in this matter would be well received. In economic matters, Mr. Feeney mentioned the Sinn Féin street campaign for all-party talks as a negative development. However, he believed that for businessmen the commercial instinct would determine their attitudes more than any traditional political position. He believed that Unionists were largely prepared to talk, although some would prefer to have their conference chairs empty. He regretted that there had been no meeting with Unionists on this trip. He will be looking for contact with them in the future, optimistic that they (Americans) can be persuaders towards a positive participation. The visit of President Clinton would bring great opportunities. There was enough time to have progress and to have some meaningful development in economic affairs.

The Taoiseach thanked the group for visiting and for the useful exchange of views. He believed the visit of President Clinton was optimally timed. He was pleased that there had been a lot of progress and felt that Sinn Féin should recognise what had been achieved. He emphasised his belief that no one should be pushed or cornered in the continuing Peace Process and that the two Governments would work together seeking to build with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland.

J. Kennedy