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Comments from David Trimble and Gerry Adams after their meeting at Stormont

UTV Live at Six - 10 September 1998

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David Trimble

Interviewer: First Minister, how do you classify this morning's meeting with Gerry Adams?

Mr Trimble: Merely one of a series of meetings that we were having with all the parties with the point of view of taking the next steps to getting the Assembly up and running. That is the basis on which we were meeting. Of course people tend to attach significance to this because we were speaking directly to Sinn Féin, knowing that we didn't during the talks. But the talks were then followed by an Agreement.

Interviewer: Can the decommissioning issue delay political progress?

Mr Trimble: The decommissioning relates very much to a question of confidence. All these institutions, all the elements would have to work. There is no point in people saying that everything else works except the little bit that they are in charge of. It all has to work or it doesn't work. It cannot work without the necessary confidence being there. I hope that people act to create that confidence as quickly as they possibly can. There is no point trying to take refuge in tortuous interpretations of the text of the Agreement to evade a failure to create the necessary confidence. I hope that those people, who are in a position to do it and I am thinking here of the people involved in paramilitaries, not just

Sinn Féin, there are others as well who have to do this. I hope that they will do it because we are all supposed to be engaged in a process whereby those engaged with paramilitaries are coming over bridges from terrorism to democracy. They do have to convince people that they are coming over into ^gdemocratic setup and that they are leaving behind them the terrorist organisations and the terrorist equipment. I think that has to be done.

Interviewer:

Did you get any sense in your meeting with Gerry Adams, that he thinks it is reasonable for the IRA not to decommission?

Mr Trimble:

Well, I'm not going to put words into his mouth or go into the details. We did have, in the margins of today's meeting which was on the structures of future administration, a discussion which touched on those matters. I'm not going to go into the details of what was said there and then except that I hope very much that we are able to solve this chicken and egg problem because to a large extent that is what it is - a lack of confidence on the part of the Unionist community in the intentions of the Republican movement and a fear on the part of the Republican movement that they are being led up the garden path and a lack of confidence in themselves. I hope that they manage to generate sufficient confidence in themselves to take the necessary steps and I hope they manage to do that soon. I got the impression too that Mr Adams hoped that the political problem would be resolved satisfactorily and I hope very much that we are able to do that.

Interviewer:

Gerry Adams said that you are not only a man with whom he has to do business, but a man with whom he can do business. How do you react to that?

Mr Trimble:

Well, I hope very much that Gerry will do the business.

Interviewer: With you?

Mr Trimble: And in terms of what has to be done in order to generate the confidence there.

Interviewer: How are you balancing the ~~station-ship~~ ^{state membership} required of being the First Minister designate with the ~~sectoral~~ ^{regional} requirements in the UUP?

Mr Trimble: I would get myself confused if I kept asking myself questions like that about everything I do. I think we just try to do the best we can in the particular situation we are in. That is not something I focus my mind on. I have things to do here and those things I believe to be in the interests of the UUP but also in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland as a whole.

Gerry Adams

Interviewer: David Trimble says he hopes you can do the business. Are you in any doubt that David Trimble is ready to do business?

Mr Adams: Well, I think we have to. It isn't down to he and I, it is down to all the leaders and it is bigger than all the leaders of the parties because this is the business of making peace, justice, creating freedom. It isn't for us, it is for our children and for the future.

Interviewer: But David Trimble surely, from your point of view, is the Unionist leader you have been waiting for for thirty years? A man who has

brought the party forward, who has led them out of entrenched positions?

Mr Adams:

Well I made that point to him today. I don't think that anyone else could have done what he has done. We have a long road to go and if I could appeal to Unionists that may be watching this programme, I know that they distrust Republicans, I know that they have suffered at the hands of Republicans but they have to understand that Republicans also distrust Unionists and that they have suffered at the hands of Unionists. All of us together have to try and bridge that gap and that has to be with David Trimble who has to bridge the gap, create space and build a future.

Interviewer:

But you know what Unionists want to see to help build the trust. Is it now reasonable for the IRA not to decommission something?

Mr Adams:

Well, I think you have to see it, if you could, from the IRA's perspective. First of all the IRA believe that they have created a central focus on this peace process by calling their cessations. Now people who are against the IRA will dismiss that. But look at it from the IRA's point of view. Secondly, in terms of the Good Friday Agreement, there is no pre-condition in there and it is Sinn Féin who are talking. Sinn Féin cannot deliver the decommissioning of IRA weapons. It is a shared responsibility for all of us to keep to the conditions, to tackle, address, remove the causes of conflict and then all of the armed groups will loosen up on those issues.

Interviewer:

But have you now, the confidence in this process to go to the IRA and say that it is in your opinion that it is now not reasonable for you not to decommission?

Mr Adams:

Well, you are going to turn this into a decommissioning interview?

Interviewer:

Well it is the big issue at the moment. It was a very positive interview today by all accounts.

Mr Adams:

Yes. But it wasn't the only issue that was discussed. It was I who raised that issue. The reality of that whole situation is that the weapons that I see in my constituency and in the Republican areas throughout the six counties are in the hands of the British Army, the RUC. We have a whole raft of issues right across every single factor of life from social, economic, cultural, military issues, which need to be addressed. Let's not erect any of those as pre-conditions. Let's see this issue of decommissioning as a problem to be resolved. How do we resolve it? We build alternatives, we move forward. This is a peace process so let us develop it. Let's mark today down as a beginning of an engagement between Irish Republicanism and Ulster Unionism and let's see if we can continue to make the type of necessary alliances to move this forward.