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Sinn Féin

Nuacht raiteas/News release

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For immediate release: 8/7/96

Adams urges "utmost discipline" from nationalists

Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams has tonight again called for "calm and restraint despite the provocation of mass intimidation by orange and loyalist mobs".

Mr Adams said: "this is a time for nationalists to show the utmost discipline".

He added: "Responsibility for tonight's well orchestrated attacks rests squarely on the shoulders of David Trimble and Ian Paisley.

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Sinn Féin

For immediate release: 8/7/96

Nuacht rannas/News release

Nationalists Attacked by RUC

Sinn Féin Party Chairperson Michel McLaughlin has tonight accused the RUC of "engaging in systematic harassment and brutality toward nationalist protesters in Bellaghy and north Belfast who were peacefully seeking to oppose triumphalist orange marches passing through their areas."

Mr McLaughlin said:

"While the RUC will seek to use the confrontation at Drumcree as evidence of an even handed approach the reality is that it was the actions and behaviour of David Trimble and Ian Paisley last year which forced the RUC into taking a stand against this particular march.

Elsewhere however it has been very much business as usual. Orange and loyalist mobs have been given free rein to block roads, hijack vehicles and engage in mass intimidation.

In stark contrast nationalists who have sought to peacefully protest against triumphalist orange marches have found themselves on the receiving end of RUC batons in Bellaghy and North Belfast.

Clearly, it is not good enough that isolated nationalist communities are left to stand alone against the weight of orange mobs and the RUC.

This difficult issue of orange marches needs to be tackled on a six county wide basis with all sides being prepared to sit down and discuss an acceptable accommodation. The Orange and Unionist leaders must stop saying no to dialogue."

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IRA challenges British to end military mindset (headline)

Interview with a member of the GHQ Staff of Oglagh na hÉircann (strap)

AP/RN: There has been continuing speculation about splits in the IRA. Are there any grounds for such speculation?

ONH: It should be realised that the main strategic objective of the British government is to defeat the republican struggle and from their point of view the ideal method would be to split the IRA. So you have to suspect ongoing reports feeding that objective. Sometimes it is fed directly into the media by British intelligence or RUC sources which the media adopt without question; sometimes it's individuals with their own axe to grind and sometimes it's just journalists making up sensational stories. So to be clear, there is no question of a split within the IRA. Our Volunteers are thinking activists who have voiced and will continue to voice their individual thoughts on the political situation up the channels of command. This is sought after and welcomed. Looking for splits is a media pastime not an activist's endeavour.

AP/RN: What significance had the Manchester and Osnabruck bombings?

ONH: In ending the cessation in February of this year we said that it was with great reluctance that we returned to military operations. The British government in using the 18 months of cessation to try once more to defeat republicanism — instead of using that time to try to bridge the gap between opposing sides — made a return to armed struggle inevitable. The resumption is the result of a British government continually introducing new obstacles to inclusive negotiations which may have had the potential to move us all towards conflict resolution.

AP/RN: Is there no hope then of a restoration of the IRA cessation?

ONH: Well, in March of this year we repeated our "desire to see the peace process restored but that this must mean from our perspective, the establishment of a meaningful and viable process". The fundamental reason for the break down of the cessation in February was the British government's abuse of this unprecedented window of opportunity to move towards conflict resolution. It wasn't just that a year-and-a-half was wasted, it was that the British government used this period to try to defeat the republican struggle after having failed to do so throughout 25 years of war. Does anyone really expect that the IRA would be prepared to allow the

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British government to abuse such an opportunity again? Remember that during a year-and-a-half of peace instead of the British government introducing confidence measures they took a contrary stance which manifested itself in a marked deterioration in prison conditions for republican POWs in England, which continues to this day. Patrick Kelly, who is terminally-ill, was refused medical attention at the same time as a British soldier who murdered a young Belfast girl was not only released after two years of a life sentence but was allowed to remain in the British army.

White Leo Clegg was being transferred to England to be closer to his family POWs in England serving life sentences were entering their third decade of imprisonment, not only with no hope of release but still being refused transfer to prisons closer to their families. Some of our prisoners have been languishing in solitary confinement for months on end. Orange parades were being forced through nationalist areas in Ireland in such a way that nationalists were being made prisoners in their own homes.

These actions could only be seen as indicative of a British government's misuse of the peace process to achieve its own narrow party-political interests.

The key to a real peace lies with the British and unionists looking for a political settlement to our political problems instead of being stuck as they appear to be in the mindset of still dealing with the conflict from a purely security point of view. Let them honestly address the problem as a political one and not as a security one. But yes, there is always hope. There needs to be a good-faith engagement involving real all-party negotiations with no preconditions and no predetermined outcomes. All-party negotiations cannot be allowed to become a decommissioning conference. Negotiations need to deal with the fundamentals of the conflict. Blocks on that road need to be removed. A timeframe is essential. A timeframe for negotiations is now a well tried and tested method of introducing momentum into any peace process. It also prevents any single party from running negotiations into the sand. Everything including constitutional change has to be on the table. There needs to be confidence building measures and no to confidence wrecking measures as witnessed during the '94 cessation.

AP/RN: Can the gap of mistrust between the British government and the IRA be bridged since you have diametrically opposing political positions?

ONII: I think there are issues raised in your question which need

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separated.

Firstly, distrust between enemies and opponents is normal. I would say that all political parties distrust each other to different degrees. This includes the two governments and is quite well demonstrated at the moment between the two main unionist parties. Trust in that sense only comes during negotiations.

It is of course true that the British government and the IRA are diametrically opposed. The British government holds on to a part of Ireland which they took by force and keep through military occupation. They never asked the Irish people for a political mandate to be here and their primary objective is to maintain the union.

The IRA derives its mandate from the British government's denial of the fundamental right of the Irish people to national self-determination and sovereignty. Our primary objective is a united Ireland, independent and free. We remain fully committed to our goals.

The distrust between opposing sides is therefore massive. However, the issue at stake is really one of integrity. Even enemies can act with integrity and good faith with each other. In August '94 the IRA announced a complete cessation of military operations on the specific understanding, publicly given, that all-party negotiations would start within three months of an IRA cessation.

The IRA declared a cessation which lasted an unprecedented year and a half. The British government did not act with integrity. It reneged on its commitments and as result all-party negotiations did not begin. We took our responsibilities seriously and enhanced dramatically, we believe, the potential for conflict resolution and the chances for a just and lasting peace. We remain prepared to do so again if the circumstances are right. But the British government must take its responsibilities in this situation seriously. Let John Major be unequivocal in removing the obstacles placed by his government to meaningful all-party negotiations. If he is committed to talks being meaningful let him demonstrate that commitment. Let us see evidence of a new approach to enable real negotiations.

For John Major to state that a restoration of the '94 cessation is now not enough or for John Wheeler to demand surrender by decommissioning within weeks only creates further problems and increases the logjam.

AP/RN: What is your view of the talks at Stormont?

ONH: To me the Stormont talks are very reminiscent of the failed forums, conventions and assemblies of the past in which republicans were not involved. They are obviously not all-party negotiations since 15.5% of the electorate have been excluded and therefore cannot bring

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about the resolution of the conflict. There is much talk of a summer recess which puts it all on the long finger yet again. The question in the public mind must be are we facing into another sterile round of talks about talks about talks?

AP/RN: What is your view of John Bruton in light of his recent remarks about the IRA especially in the aftermath of the Adare shooting?

ONH: Well, first let me repeat our regret for what happened in Limerick. It was wrong and was damaging to our struggle. More importantly it was a great tragedy for the grieving families involved. John Bruton is clearly coming at the present situation from a different perspective than republicans. The search for a just and lasting peace presents all of us with great difficulties and challenges but everyone must try to overcome these difficulties. This is especially so for those in political leadership and particularly for the two governments.

AP/RN: The Dublin government was very critical of arms finds in Laos and elsewhere. Do you have a comment?

ONH: Put simply, any army while it exists sees it as its duty to be prepared. The cessation ended in February of this year — that's nearly five months ago. I should point out that the British have not only maintained their military machine, but continually reinforced it over the full period of the cessation. There was a massive military building programme which continues as we speak.

Loyalists also targeted nationalists over the last 22 months and in the last number of weeks there have been orchestrated attacks by loyalist paramilitaries on individual Catholics and on housing estates in Belfast and elsewhere.

The job facing us in knowing all this is to concentrate on the search for a true resolution of the conflict.

AP/RN: Are you optimistic or pessimistic for the future?

ONH: I don't think it comes into it. We've spoken about building trust and integrity and that's a two way street. We have an historical problem. In our opinion it is not an intractable one. Armed struggle is there in the absence of a viable democratic alternative route to national democracy in Ireland. The challenge to all the parties involved is to find a way to a lasting peace with justice in Ireland. We remain prepared to

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