

Ms. Nolan

Passed on to the Taoiseach

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Comments by Seamus Mallon, SDLP

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Interviewer What would you say to Ken Maginnis to convince him that it is not a clever deceit?

Mallon I would say to Ken and everyone else suspend judgement. I don't know whether this is a tactic or whether it is a very substantial and fundamental real movement by Sinn Féin away from the whole process of supporting violence into a situation where in terms of the Mitchell report that there must be democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues.

Interviewer They don't break deals ?

Mallon I don't break deals. I don't know the answer to that question, but what I do know is that if it is real and my understanding is that it is real, then that is a substantial sea change for any part of the Republican movement and it is of substantial, not only in terms of the six principles themselves but in terms of the method by which decommissioning can be sought in terms of one of those principles and that is the verification by a decommissioning commission as recommended by Mr Mitchell and I think we should never lose sight of that because that's going to be very important as we go down the line.

Interviewer But if Sinn Féin can't negotiate on behalf of the IRA, what role do they have to play in the decommissioning debate ?

Mallon Well, if there is no ceasefire and Sinn Féin are not there, then of course I think the talks are going to be even more unreal than they look like being at the present moment of time. But the ball is in the court of the IRA and the onus is on those people to ensure that there is a ceasefire so that in effect the political position of Sinn Féin can be put to the electorate and not just that, but that they will be at the talks to present their position in those negotiations. Now, that seems absolutely essential and if they are serious and I believe there are people within Sinn Féin who are serious and indeed genuine about moving into a position where they are trying to take the gun out of politics and end violence for ever, then this statement of Mr Adams yesterday is a very significant statement. If it is as Mr Maginnis implies, a tactic, then it is a tactic which will rebound because it would be seen by the electorate and by the media and by other people simply as using the situation, manipulating the situation to get maximum benefit pre an election without making the type of steps which we all believe are required.

Interviewer Well, should there be a positive response from the British Government by which I mean, should they change the rules to allow Sinn Féin now to be involved in the inter-party talks on 10 June, irrespective of an IRA ceasefire ?

Mallon Oh, the rules will not change, there is no question or doubt about that. The Irish Government has a position and a very firm position on it. It was restated yesterday by John Bruton and indeed it was restated by the leader of the opposition there, Bertie Ahern. They have a particularly strong position because of the sovereignty factor in relation to any grouping within the State trying to replace it by force of arms, and that won't change nor will the British Government's position change. What has to change is the position of the IRA. Sinn Féin have changed, I believe, substantially in relation to this and I repeat it because I think we should recognise it. But the change that is required now to let all the fluids flow is that statement from the IRA saying that there will be a cessation of violence and then we'll put this to the test and then we'll know. But if we don't have that, we're not going to know. Maybe Ken Maginnis could be right, maybe I could be right, but we're never going to know it if it's not put to the test.

Interviewer And briefly, what does your political water tell you. I mean, do you genuinely believe some time between now and 10 June, there is a good prospect for an IRA resumption of the ceasefire ?

Mallon I would hope that there will be. If I had to bet on it I would bet that there will be. But I am simply hoping that that is not just wishful thinking. But I would suggest to everybody that if we don't see that ceasefire before the negotiations begin on 10 June, then I think there is going to be a remarkable sourness, not just in the electorate themselves, who have gone through the process of this election, but among Governments, among international opinion and among many people who have tried and gone great distances to ensure that there would be a lasting peace derived from this period of time and it is for that reason that I more in hope than in confidence say that I think there will be a ceasefire.

END.