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Report
of a Meeting between
the Taoiseach
and Bill Flynn (IAEAB) and Tom Moran
Wed. 16 October 1996 @ c 3:20 p.m.

Attendance

Taoiseach

Bill Flynn

Tom Moran

Official

Dr. Albert Jordan

The **Taoiseach** welcomed Mr. Flynn and Mr. Moran.

Mr. **Flynn** explained that this was a courtesy call. During this trip to Ireland they had also visited the Loyalist paramilitaries. He said that a week ago the Paramilitaries were extremely pessimistic but now appear to have "gotten over the Lisburn thing" he did say however that it still would not take much to push them over the edge. He commented that the Loyalists were "dressed better" - i.e. moving more into the Political process. He said that relations with the Loyalist paramilitaries were very friendly. He thought "we Americans did more good talking to those folks than .." (in many other areas). There was, he said, a great feeling of trust. He said they had told the IRA the same thing. He told them that overseas their support is drying up to an extent that is just incredible and there is a danger that continued violence will also invoke condemnation of them from America. He said that they would also give this message to the Press if they got a chance. Besides condemning IRA violence he said he also condemned their thinking - the strategies that lead to violence. That was counter productive to their own objectives. He also reported that from his various talks it was becoming clear that the idea of decommissioning weaponry prior to - or even during - the talks is "a non starter" - i.e. nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. He said that the IRA are now wondering what they have to do to "get themselves off the hook".

Mr. **Moran** also stressed that the IRA were contemplating what they must now do to get themselves "back in". He believed that Gerry Adams had a sincere desire to pursue the Political process but he did not have sufficient argument to be able to convince others of this. It was a real impasse which could get worse. Loyalist, he said, were showing tremendous will power in remaining in the Political process and not using force but he reckoned that might not hold in the long run.

Mr. **Flynn** said that he believed that the Loyalist parties feel that they have the IRA on the run. He stressed again that the feeling was that the IRA themselves believe that they are on the run and don't know how to "get off the run".

The **Taoiseach** explained that decommissioning is part of the normal run for a peace process - it is not a strange thing. He said that it was very difficult to see how to get around this issue except perhaps with some "constructive ambiguity". He explained that the Governments had now agreed a fourth strand - parallel decommissioning - during the talks - in line with Mitchell's compromise. The Taoiseach said it all comes down (as he said in the Dáil just prior to the meeting) - to a matter of belief. The issue is how the IRA can convince people that there will be no more use of violence. If they can do that people would then not care so much about decommissioning. It was only a problem because people think that they will turn again to violence if they don't get what they want in the talks. If there was genuine conviction this time that the IRA were for real then they probably would not be pushed to hand over arms etc. But if they were to continue punishment beatings or to continue issuing covert threats like Gerry Adams did when he said "the IRA hasn't gone away you know" - decommissioning will be pushed. It all depends therefore on the IRA's own behaviour.

Mr. **Moran** said that he was amazed how good the Mitchell Report was. He said that he thought the IRA's feeling was that the British Government were in fact serious they would in fact be willing to give up arms.

The **Taoiseach** emphasised that the talks process was as good as they're going to get and there are seats there for them. If the IRA expect the Governments to coerce the Unionists - that won't happen. He said that the IRA infuriate him, they infuriate him not just because of their killings but they also infuriate him because they continuously look to and criticise others and complain about others laying down conditions they do not think what they can do. They are, he stressed, ignoring their own responsibilities. It was time for them to concentrate on what they could do.

Bill Flynn put three questions to the Taoiseach.

Do you believe the British Government is sincere?

Do the Unionists really want Sinn Féin in the talks?

Would the Taoiseach be optimistic about the prognosis for the situation in the North?

The **Taoiseach's** response:-

Yes he believes the British Government is sincere - certainly John Major is sincere. Sinn Féin will do no better with a different Prime Minister. Unionist attitude is mixed. There were probably many that did not want Sinn Féin in the talks - but they know in the end that the only way forward was to include Sinn Féin. He conceded though that a lot of them were "iffy" about Sinn Féin. The Taoiseach added that the only way to disarm the Unionists is by being so forthcoming and understanding that they are "gobsmacked" by events like Lisburn.

On the third issue about optimism the Taoiseach recalled that he got into trouble in Washington about expressing optimism regarding the ceasefire. He believes it is on a knife edge really. He commented that if there weren't to be another ceasefire there would probably be further violent action and we are "running out of condemnation at this stage". He recalled that he had compared the IRA to the Nazi's - because there were real parallel's and also for a purpose - to demonstrate to Loyalists that we in this State have no time for the IRA. The Taoiseach explained that his first duty was the protection of the people in this State. What can we do - he commented that contact could be broken off.

The **Taoiseach** further commented that he finds it distasteful that his officials have to meet these people (Sinn Féin) - they, or at least some of their friends have blood on their hands. He conceded though that it had to be done. He thought though that there would come a time when they would have to "finish it" if violence by the IRA continues.

Mr. **Moran** asked how best to progress towards a ceasefire.

The **Taoiseach** reiterated that the IRA know that if they declare a credible ceasefire, with commitment to the Mitchell Principles, they're into the talks. He said he was deliberately not saying there will (or indeed that there wouldn't) be a cooling off period. If that were done the IRA could simply call a ceasefire, say they were "committed" (ha ha) to the Mitchell Principles, and "hey presto we're in the talks in two months automatically!" Instead he preferred to put it to them to convince us that this time the ceasefire was real.

Mr. **Moran** commented that he got a sense that David Trimble might perhaps prefer to see Sinn Féin kept out, as he was worried about his electorate.

Mr. **Flynn** commented of the IRA's fear of another 18 months delay - to which the **Taoiseach** replied the talks are now in place - so that can't happen. He stressed the talks were put there to accommodate Sinn Féin.

Note

While walking Mr. Flynn & Mr. Moran from the taoiseach's Office to the reception area Mr. Flynn was moved very slowly and on the stairway he negotiated the steps slowly and with some difficulty. On reaching the bottom of the flight of stairs he requested a glass of water. Though he insisted he was fine the apparent poor state of his health is something we might want to be conscious of.

Mr. Flynn spoke on Morning Ireland on Thursday 17 October (at 8:40) - transcript attached. The most notable comment - and the one extracted by RTE as one of the main news items - was that he believed that Gerry Adams was opposed to violence and committed to the political process.

A. J. Jordan