

Paddy

DRAFT - to be

worked on further

Speaking Points forPress Conference following hypothetical meeting
between Taoiseach and Sinn Féin LeaderQ & A also
in preparation
later

8/11/96

1. The Unequivocal Restoration of the August, 1994 Ceasefire

The Government have already warmly welcomed the restoration by the IRA of its August 1994 ceasefire [and particularly the terms of the announcement].

I would like to begin by paying tribute to all those who have striven so long and so hard to bring about this restoration, particularly those who are with me today [Dick Spring, [Proinsias De Rossa], John Hume and Gerry Adams].

I also commend the many other people involved - in the leaderships of the SDLP and Sinn Féin; other Ministerial colleagues of mine; and officials of the relevant Departments here.

I also want to acknowledge the role played by Prime Minister Major. [as exemplified by his article published on xday last].

That article was the proximate occasion for the announcement of the ceasefire but, of course, it was also just the latest turn in his intensive involvement in the Northern Ireland issue. He and I have had an intensity of personal contact that must, I believe, be unprecedented among Heads of Government.

The restoration was the logical conclusion of an internal debate that has been under way within the Republican movement for almost 10 years, that intensified prior to the August 1994 ceasefire and that gathered fresh momentum over recent months, [during which there has been a widespread process of consultation within that movement]. That internal debate has also, of course, been influenced by the Hume-Adams dialogue over a long period, including intensive discussions in recent months and by the wider process of interaction with other parties and viewpoints, most notably perhaps through the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.

I have long emphasised that, in my view, the logic of the Sinn Féin strategy for peace and for all-party talks, as set out by themselves, pointed to the restoration of the ceasefire, especially in the light of the commencement of talks on 10 June last. It is clear, from events since last February, that not all in the Republican movement necessarily saw the logic of the situation in the same way.

But we know that the process of serious rethinking and debate continued throughout that period and I am glad that its culmination and further dialogue involving John Hume, without the full support of the Government, have led to this hopeful new step in the transition from a politics that included the use of what was referred to as "armed struggle" to one that excludes resort to force or coercion.

There is, in my view, a solid acceptance now by the Republican movement that the use of force in pursuit of their political aims is a self defeating and counterproductive way to proceed. Equally, there is a firm recognition that the democratic and peaceful route is the only way forward that enjoys universal support throughout this island, North and South.

Inevitably and indeed understandably, some people are asking - particularly in the Unionist community: why should we trust the Republican movement this time round? After all, the IRA broke its previous ceasefire in February last! Where is the evidence that they won't do the same this time?

The truth of the matter is that the answer boils down to a question of belief, to an assessment that had to be made now, not in three months time or three years time but now.

It is inevitable that, after the ending of a previous ceasefire, there should be doubts as to whether we have indeed an unequivocal restoration or as to the value of a restoration of what was declared in August, 1994. I would not be honest if I said I was completely free from such doubts myself.

But I and my colleagues in Government are prepared to give the Republican movement the benefit of whatever doubt may exist. There is a risk that we could be wrong in that judgement. But there were risks whatever judgement we made. And very grave risks in a situation where a Republican movement which, after a difficult internal debate, had come down in favour of opting for exclusively peaceful and democratic means, were to be excluded from the multi-party process of negotiations. That way could lie, in a worst case scenario, the reversal of the choice that had been made, a return to violence, the breakdown of the Loyalist ceasefire and a descent into reciprocal slaughter and destruction on a scale even greater than before.

The Government must take risks for the enduring peace that is so ardently wished for by all Irish people and by people throughout these islands. We have sufficient grounds for belief that the restoration is indeed unequivocal as to

strongly tip the balance of risks towards accepting the credibility of the IRA announcement.

I and the Tánaiste have repeatedly said over recent months that it was up to the Republican movement to convince the rest of us on this question of credibility, that each successive bombing made that task more difficult and that the terms of an announced ceasefire would be an important and decisive factor. Happily, the terms of that announcement are strongly persuasive in this regard. [Elaborate, as appropriate by reference to terms].

The credibility of the ceasefire is also underpinned by objective factors. These include:

- the clear evidence, including from recent opinion polls, that Republican supporters want a lasting ceasefire and peace and a settlement that respects justice and is fair, as much as Loyalists do - not surprising since it is those two groupings that have suffered most from the violence in Northern Ireland.
- the fact that an inclusive and comprehensive process of negotiations, without preconditions, is now available in a form which has all the characteristics for which Sinn Féin called.
- the clear evolution of Republican positions over recent years, as a result of internal debate and in the face of the realities, increasingly acknowledged, that no military victory or defeat is available to any side; that military campaigns can neither bring about a British Government withdrawal against the wishes of a majority in Northern Ireland nor win the support of such a majority, and, moreover, have served to alienate the people of the South and incline many to turn their back on the North. That evolution was seen in the deliberations of the Forum here in Dublin, even if there was not full agreement on political principles. It has also been seen in the fact that, however we may deplore the attacks that did take place and their consequences, the military campaign was not resumed on a full scale.
- the intensive work that Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and others within the Republican leadership have put in since February last to bring about the conditions in which there would be an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire.

Our history and the development of various parties in Ireland should show us that constitutional politicians should never, and must never, rebuff those who, in our considered view, are genuinely abandoning violence in favour of exclusively peaceful and democratic means.

What was the alternative to the judgement I and my colleagues have made? There has been talk of a quarantine period, a time-lag during which credibility would be tested. Whenever that was raised in recent weeks, I resisted the idea. I note that on 4 November, Mr. David Trimble said that looking at periods was misleading, that what was important was that there is genuine commitment to peaceful means in a democratic process and that the first way in which to show that is in the language by which you renounce violence and embrace peace.

I have repeatedly said that a new ceasefire must be for good and not merely a tactic. I say it again today. But I did not set down any test period. For what kind of period would you need to be absolutely and utterly sure that a restored ceasefire was not merely tactical? It would have to be measured in years rather than months. But then you would have a classic chicken and egg situation or, perhaps better described as a vicious circle. If Sinn Féin entry to talks were to be delayed until one was 100% sure that a ceasefire was enduring, one might never get such a ceasefire in the first place. That is unpalatable - it certainly is to me and to all who believe that violence was never, is never justified - but it is reality.

To take a line of total assurance would be to cut off one's nose to spite one's face. Better surely to take the risk for peace that is involved in the judgement we have made, in the belief and hope that it can help set off a virtuous circle and kick-start a process in which trust and confidence can be built up by degrees, certainly not without difficulty, but where an openness to dialogue and compromise can release a new dynamic.

In this respect, I and my colleagues took particular note of the statements made to Vincent Brown by senior Belfast Republicans at the Conway Mill in Belfast on 30 October, that they would abide by the agreed outcome of any process of fully inclusive negotiations. [This, of course, has now, effectively, been stated by the IRA in their ceasefire announcement].

have done so, in the context of the talks. [Today, Gerry Adams has reaffirmed that Sinn Féin will in the talks process, as others have done, make its commitment absolute] [Today, when he speaks here after me, Gerry Adams will be reaffirming that Sinn Féin will, in the talks process, as others have done, make its commitment absolute].

As I have said many times, those principles are very far-reaching in their implications. They are not some empty formula. They clearly exclude any reversion to the option of violence at any time. They are unambiguous and exacting in the demands they make on those who sign up to them.

I have set out the positive indicators in regard to credibility. I, of course, acknowledge, that there have been significant negative pointers. But weighing up all the indicators, and, particularly, the underlying trends, my colleagues and I have concluded that the Republican movement has decisively, taken the option for peace and inclusive negotiations.

There is a great deal of distrust - on all sides. We must now all work to overcome that distrust. It is my heartfelt hope that the unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire will be the first step that will lead to a change of atmosphere, so that we can recapture the sense of hope and of unlimited possibilities we all had two years ago.

We now have a fresh, historic opportunity for a new start for the people in Northern Ireland, in Ireland as a whole and in relations between the peoples of Ireland and Britain. This time all must grasp this opportunity to the full.

2. The Way Ahead

This meeting today is the first in a series that will lead directly to Sinn Féin's participation in the multi-party negotiations. The first step will be for that Party, in the talks context, to make clear its total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the report of the International Body, that is the Mitchell Principles.

The reason why I am standing here on the steps of Government Buildings with John Hume and Gerry Adams is two-fold; first, to mark the very welcome restoration of the IRA ceasefire and the roles of Mr Hume and Mr Adams in bringing it about, and second, to signal to the Republican community in the clearest way possible that, now that we have a ceasefire, this Government is once again prepared to do business with its political leadership.

This meeting does not represent the existence, or signal the reconstitution, of any pan-nationalist front aimed at undermining the legitimate interests of Unionists. As I said in the Dáil on 10 October, there is no pan-nationalist front, intent on pursuing a malign agenda to the detriment of Unionists. I said too that we, the people in the Republic, have no agenda of a progressive takeover of Northern Ireland against the wishes of a majority there. That is and will remain the position.

I am glad that, at long last, the IRA has done what was necessary, on their part, to enable a fully inclusive process of negotiation to be brought about. My Government have always believed that such a process of negotiation would give us the best chance of reaching an agreed settlement that would be capable of securing the allegiance and support of all shades of political opinion in Northern Ireland.

Sinn Féin, like all other parties, have now got the opportunity to represent their supporters who, in the North, constitute up to 15% of the electorate, on the basis of the talks election - and play their part in the shaping of a new agreed way forward.

As far as the Irish Government are concerned, our analysis of the situation remains as it always has been. Our approach to realising the full potential of peace through the multi-party talks remain as it was prior to the IRA ceasefire restoration.

A durable peace strategy must be based on agreement, it must be based on consent, and it must be predicated on respect for the equal value and legitimacy of both the Nationalist and Unionist identities.

I set out the Irish Government's approach to the negotiations in my speech at Finglas on 30 April last. I said then, and repeat now, that our position will be based on the "Realities, Principles and Requirements" document very largely agreed by the parties participating in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation and on the Joint Framework Document, agreed with the British Government.

We will use the proposals in that latter document as our signposts to give impetus, focus and direction to the talks.

Our approach will continue to be informed and guided by the balanced set of principles and realities set out in the widely supported Joint Declaration of 15

December 1993 and which were substantially taken up in the other documents I have mentioned.

The implementation of all aspects of the Mitchell Report will continue to be our bedrock as to how the decommissioning issue should be handled.

Summing up, our approach will certainly be vigorously to pursue the legitimate interests and concerns of nationalists but always in a fair balance with the equally legitimate rights of unionists. I said at Finglas on 30 April, that where - in the negotiations now underway - there is parallelism between the positions we take and those of other participants, we will be prepared to work side by side for the achievement of common purposes. That of course applies to the SDLP and Sinn Féin and we will be holding further meetings with these parties. But it also applies to all the parties involved in the talks, whether Nationalist or Unionist. At the end of the day, what we are seeking to develop - and what we must develop if we are to secure a settlement acceptable to all - is a common front, an agreed position - as between both Nationalists and Unionists.

I believe that we could now be on the threshold of a whole new beginning for the peoples of these islands. The opportunity is now available to build a future of peaceful co-existence and agreement. If we fail to take it, the consequences could be calamitous.

Despite the difficulties that undoubtedly will have to be faced and overcome, I am hopeful and confident that together - Unionists and Nationalists, Loyalists and Republicans, with the leadership and input of the two Governments - we can begin to write a new chapter on how we share this island together for the benefit of this generation and generations not yet born.