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This is the 'UNEDITED' version of the transcript (also known as the 'Blacks').

Take Number: G
Next Take Number: H

DÁIL ÉIREANN

14.00 (2 o'clock)

22 January 1997

^ Message from Seanad. ^

An Ceann Comhairle: Messages have been received from Seanad Éireann stating that it has accepted the Appropriation Bill, 1996, without amendment, and passed the Oireachtas (Miscellaneous Provisions) and Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices (Amendment) Bill, 1996, without amendment.

^ CEISTEANNA - QUESTIONS. ^

1. **Mr. B. Ahern** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on the prospects for peace and political progress in Northern Ireland in 1997. [1355/97]

2. **Mr. B. Ahern** asked the Taoiseach the plans, if any, he has in conjunction with the British Prime Minister to provide a motive force within the talks process

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to ensure their continuing viability. [1356/97]

3. **Mr. B. Ahern** asked the Taoiseach the further support, if any, he will give to the pre-Christmas peace initiative of John Hume. [1357/97]

4. **Mr. B. Ahern** asked the Taoiseach the plans, if any, the Government has for changes with regard to maintaining a channel of communication to Sinn Féin. [1358/97]

5. **Mr. B. Ahern** asked the Taoiseach if it remains the position that all parties to the Northern talks are required to maintain a strict adherence to the Mitchell Principles. [1359/97]

6. **Miss Harney** asked the Taoiseach the initiatives, if any, planned by the Government to inject new momentum into the peace process. [1371/97]

7. **Miss Harney** asked the Taoiseach the contacts, if any, between officials in his Department and Sinn Féin since Wednesday, 17 December 1996. [1372/97]

8. **Miss Harney** asked the Taoiseach the discussions, if any, he has had with the British Prime Minister since Wednesday, 17 December 1996. [1373/97]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions 1 to 8 together.

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The responsibility for political progress rests in the first instance with the two Governments. We have exercised this responsibility through putting in place agreed procedures and mechanisms for the fair conduct of multi-party talks and the commencement of these talks on 10 June last year. In addition, we have made constant and unremitting efforts over the past seven months to move these talks into substantive negotiations in the three strands. The talks represent the best, and probably the only, way of achieving agreement among the parties.

The prospects for peace in Northern Ireland depend on all sides exercising their responsibilities. Of course, everybody does not have the same responsibility. People who kill, or encourage others to kill, bear a greater burden of responsibility for the lack of peace in Northern Ireland than those who passively support violence. Equally, those who passively support the politics of violence have a much higher responsibility for the lack of peace than those who support parties which reject violence. There is an onus on all democrats to speak and act against violence and sectarianism in all their manifestations. Violence and sectarianism continue because, regrettably, a minority continue to give them active or passive support.

The Government is convinced that, provided the will is there on all sides, and all are prepared to act responsibly, 1997 can be a year both of peace and of political progress. For our part, we will continue to do everything in our power, as we have done in the past, to secure these objectives. We will work in close co-operation with all who share, and who are committed to, exclusively peaceful and democratic methods of action. In particular, we will do everything we can to optimise the prospects for substantive progress in the multi-party talks, including, if possible, in advance of the general election in the United Kingdom. We continue to work in close contact with Mr. John Hume, with

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whom I recently had an extensive private meeting. We support his continuing efforts to obtain an IRA ceasefire.

On the question of contacts with Sinn Féin, the Government made clear, in response to a request for a meeting from the Sinn Féin leader, immediately after the IRA resumed its campaign by the bombing of Canary Wharf that we wanted the IRA ceasefire to be restored immediately, that the basis for the previous Government meetings with Sinn Féin had been that a total cessation of IRA violence was already in place, that further Ministerial meetings with Sinn Féin must be consistent with this long standing policy and that, notwithstanding the resumed IRA campaign, a meeting at official level could take place on the basis that Sinn Féin would bring forward its ideas on how the ceasefire could be restored at that meeting. That meeting took place and since then, there were a number of official level meetings within that channel of communication.

During the 11 month period in which these meetings were taking place, the Irish Government secured a fixed date for the opening of all party talks, eminent and independent chairmanship of the talks, agreed rules of procedure to protect the position of minority parties within the talks, Irish Government involvement in face to face discussions in the talks with parties, some of whom had never previously had contact with the Irish Government, the effective removal of the Washington Three precondition, as well as a clear commitment in statements from both Governments that Sinn Féin will be admitted to the talks once it complies with the terms set out publicly.

Despite all these advances, which were designed, *inter alia*, to secure an IRA ceasefire, and the meetings which were held at official level with Sinn Féin, we have seen in the interim - not an IRA ceasefire - but more and more IRA violence which has intensified to the point that at least nine IRA attack attempts, of a major kind, took place in the past

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three weeks.

IRA violence, more than anything else, has isolated the nationalist community in the North from all those who wish to help them to achieve parity of esteem. IRA violence is partitionist. IRA violence has provided a pretext and a context for sectarianism. IRA violence is an invasion of human rights which, in some nationalist areas, has substituted arbitrary and unaccountable penalisation by a secret organisation, for accountable justice through an open courts system.

The intensified activity on the part of the IRA, over Christmas and so far this year, makes it difficult to believe that the Republican movement is not now deliberately attempting to pursue a parallel ballot box and armalite strategy, which is unacceptable to democrats and which accordingly, should not be assisted politically or otherwise by a democratically constituted Government. The official channel of communication, to which I referred, can be used whenever the Government receives reliable assurances that an IRA ceasefire is attainable in a genuinely short term horizon, and that previously identified and realistically attainable things need to be discussed at the meeting, and done, that will achieve that end. If such assurances are received, meetings can be arranged at very short notice. The sole purpose of any such meeting would be to end IRA violence, once and for all, and quickly.

In response to question No. 5 from Deputy Ahern, I can confirm that all parties to the multi-party talks are indeed required to maintain a strict adherence to the Mitchell Principles. This is made clear beyond doubt in the 28 February 1996 communiqué, the ground rules paper, and the agreed rules of procedure for the talks.

I have already reported to the House on my meeting with Prime Minister Major on 9 December last. I do not believe it is always appropriate or useful to report on every

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contact with the Prime Minister. I can however assure the House that this year, as during last year, intensive contact will be maintained at political and official level with Downing Street wherever desirable or necessary. This is of course additional to contacts already under way with the British authorities, including intensive contacts on a daily basis in the context of the multi-party talks.

The multi-party talks process, as any political realist could have seen from the outset, is an inherently difficult one. It was set up to achieve agreement on profoundly divisive questions affecting allegiance, between a diverse range of parties, some of whom previously had little or no dialogue with one another. We need to remind ourselves that the underlying assumption of the peace process has been, from the outset, that such an agreement, although difficult, is possible. The concept that such an agreement could be imposed, rather than freely negotiated, is contrary to the basis on which the all-party talks were sought and agreed to. The Governments do, of course, have a responsibility to give proactive leadership in the talks at appropriate junctures.

The slow pace of the talks is naturally a matter of regret. To those in the majority community in Northern Ireland who may be reluctant to move from traditional positions, I would point out that the outcome of the talks has to be approved by the people by means of a referendum. To the minority community, I would point out that the involvement and endorsement of the Irish Government is contingent on the achievement of an agreement within the three strands which is fair and just to nationalist aspirations. Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, so all parties have a specifically designed structure, within which they can make contingent concessions to one another's positions, in the interests of an ultimate overall agreement. I urge all parties in the talks do that, so that there can be forward movement, and Northern Ireland can enjoy a stable and universally accepted

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political structure, which is the precondition for all durable economic and social development.

Section to follow:

Section H follows.

Last Modified by:	Ann Maxwell at 22/01/97 15.45.57
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H1

This is the 'UNEDITED' version of the transcript (also known as the 'Blacks').

Take Number:

H

Next Take Number:

J

DÁIL ÉIREANN

02.10 p.m.

22 January 1997

^ CEISTEANNA - QUESTIONS. ^

Mr. B. Ahern: Does the Taoiseach accept there is growing pessimism in regard to the peace process and the overall position in Northern Ireland since the House last met? Furthermore, does he agree that this has been caused for three reasons, first, the deplorable irresponsible actions on the part of paramilitary organisations on all sides; second, the lack of leadership in the talks process on the part of many of the parties, some of whom are more concerned with their electoral position and backing than with peace; third, that the Government appear to have given up in recent weeks endeavouring to break the deadlock? While the Taoiseach has furnished a long reply, concentrating mainly on events over the past year or so - with none of which I disagree - would he inform the House what he is endeavouring to do to reverse the present deteriorating position, my main concern as expressed in Question No. 1, where are we going and what can we do now to try to assist the parties and respective communities to reverse the position? I am conscious that it will

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be a matter of weeks only before the marching season begins - earlier this year at the end of March - though we await proposals which we hope will be useful in dealing with those marches? I put it to the Taoiseach that, had he been more vigorous in assisting Mr. John Hume in mid December last, in putting John Hume's initiative to the British Government - which merely sought a date for an unequivocal ceasefire - far more progress could have been made. Would the Taoiseach say whether he perceived a greater difference at that time than was apparent on the surface because I am inclined to think that was the case? I cannot understand why neither Government, on the face of it, tried hard to resolve the then position.

Finally, may I ask the Taoiseach-----

An Ceann Comhairle: This question appears to be rather long.

The Taoiseach: It is a weighted question.

Mr. B. Ahern: I listened to the Taoiseach's reply over some 12 minutes whereas I have been on my feet for a mere minute and a half, so that would appear to be a fair balance unless the Taoiseach wants to monopolise Question Time giving Members lectures and history lessons.

The Taoiseach: Ah, no.

Mr. B. Ahern: Would the Taoiseach inform the House the present position of

his efforts to assist John Hume - noting that he said in the course of his reply he had recently had an extensive private meeting with him, the contents of which I do not expect him to divulge? May I take it from the coded language used in the Taoiseach's reply that the Government has stopped meeting Sinn Fein at official level?

The Taoiseach: I take issue with the way Deputy Bertie Ahern presented three reasons for peoples concern at present, as if they were all more or less on some level of equivalence with one another. He should realise that the reason we have had no peace in Northern Ireland over the past few weeks is that individuals have gone out with guns to shoot others, have gone out with bombs to kill or hurt others. People who do that sort of thing have a responsibility for their own acts. No amount of complaint about what this Government, that Government or any other Government is or is not doing excuses anybody from the primary and overwhelming responsibility for their own actions. The people who order young men and some young women to go into a children's hospital with guns with an intention of assassinating politicians have the first responsibility for the lack of peace. Any presentation of the problem in Northern Ireland seen as to list three reasons - lack of leadership in the talks, the Government not doing enough and what Deputy Bertie Ahern rather coyly described as deplorable, irresponsible actions - I can find stronger words than those to describe the actions of the IRA and of the Loyalists who attacked a number of people; they are more than deplorable, they are attempts at murder. We must reach a point in discussion about this subject at which we describe

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acts for what they are and ascribe responsibility as it ought to be ascribed. I do not believe, as far as the peace process is concerned, that everybody has the same level of responsibility. Having said that, I agree that we can all do more and must do more not just to stop people shooting others - because if people want to shoot other people they will shoot other people - we must all do more to deny them any excuse of any kind, however distorted in their minds for the actions they are taking. That is why the Government has invested such effort in the talks, in trying to get those talks moving, in trying to find a way around such obstacles as at present remain between us and moving the talks into three-stranded discussions. That is why also I have had intensive discussions with Mr. John Hume about the initiatives he is currently taking, discussions of intensity and frequency of a high level; also in maintaining close contact with the British Prime Minister in regard to this matter. But nothing that we do can be seen as taking away from those who order killings or who order mortar attacks for the responsibility for those decisions.

I have listed in the House all of the things the Government has achieved already which have justified an IRA ceasefire. We have a fixed date for talks, with Senator Mitchell chairing those talks, we have rules and procedures fair to all, we have removed the Washington III condition and this Government is in direct face to face talks with parties in Northern Ireland who never previously would have spoken to us. All that has been achieved but it has not been good enough for the Republican movement yet. It is time the Republican movement said exactly what it is they want that will satisfy them if that does not satisfy them. To my mind any reasonable democrat should be satisfied with what is

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on offer if they are looking for agreement with others as distinct from an attempted imposition of one view at the expense of another, which is a recipe for further problems.

Miss Harney: Given that the Loyalists' ceasefire has clearly broken down, is the Taoiseach fully satisfied that the leadership of the fringe Unionist or Loyalist Parties are fully committed to the peace process and the Mitchell principles?

The Taoiseach: The position in regard to that matter is set out in Article 29 of the rules for the talks. These state that if, during the negotiations a formal representation is made to the independent Chairman that a participant is no longer entitled to participate on the grounds that they have demonstrably dishonoured the principles of democracy and non-violence, this will be circulated by the Chairman to all participants and will be subject to appropriate action by the Governments, including due regard to the views of the participants. That is the rule which governs the question raised by the Deputy. So far no complaint has been lodged in regard to any party taking part in the talks. If a complaint were lodged, obviously it would have to be on the basis that the party concerned had demonstrably dishonoured the relevant requirements in regard to non-violence. It is also the case, and worth noting, that the CLMC has not, to my knowledge, taken or announced any decision to abandon their ceasefire or cessation of violence. It is also the case that the Loyalist Parties have indicated that they are working hard to maintain the Loyalist ceasefire, despite what might appear to be deliberate provocation

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designed to unhinge that ceasefire on the part of the other paramilitary organisation, the IRA. Obviously, it is a matter of concern that actions have taken place which could be ascribed to organised Loyalists but, as of now, there is no demonstrable dishonouring of the requirements by the parties concerned, but if a complaint is lodged, of course, that can be investigated in accordance with the procedures I have outlined to the Deputy.

Section to follow:

Section J follows.

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Ann Sheerin at 22/01/97 03.12.36 p.m.
Ann Sheerin

Text not yet available to Deputies - 'Blacks' not yet fully typed.

Take Number: J
Next Take Number: K

DÁIL ÉIREANN

14.20

22 January 1997

^ CEISTEANNA - QUESTIONS. ^

Mr. B. Ahern: The Taoiseach answered my question on the Mitchell principals. I have no wish to see the loyalists driven from the negotiating table because their presence is essential. Will the Taoiseach tell the House when he believes we reached an absurd situation? There have been three loyalist attacks and at least nine republican ones. On one side, loyalists are engaged in the argument about who accepts responsibility. Is it not absurd that one group is at the talks although some of its members are engaged in these actions, while another which offered an unequivocal ceasefire through Mr. John Hume has not been allowed into the talks and has been told it must go through other hoops?

The Taoiseach answered my question on mid December by telling me what happened since 1 January - I have no argument with what happened on that date. He can use whatever words he likes and I will sign up to them. Going back to mid December, is it correct that John Hume had reached a situation where he could get the republican movement to give a commitment to an unequivocal cease-fire provided he got a date and that the difficulty was that the only response he got from

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the British Government on that matter was that there would be several other hoops through which the republican movement would have to go before it got a place at the table? If that is not correct, will the Taoiseach point out where the differences lie?

As we go through 1997, will the Taoiseach outline the present position given that the initiative taken by John Hume before Christmas did not work? What would be the Taoiseach's view if there was an unequivocal ceasefire now, which unfortunately seems unlikely, or before the British general election. He did not say whether the Government is meeting Sinn Féin at official level as frequently as some months ago.

The Taoiseach: As far as the last part of the Deputy's question is concerned, I answered that question in some detail in my initial reply. I indicated the exact position as far as that matter is concerned. I have nothing to add to what I already said. The position as regards December is that the Irish Government took the view that a date should be set for Sinn Féin's entry into the talks once a ceasefire had taken place. Within the period of the ceasefire and the date the relevant appreciation could be made as to whether the ground rules requirements, paragraphs eight and nine, were being complied with not only in terms of the ceasefire, but the behaviour following on it. The British Government's view was somewhat different. It felt there had to be a ceasefire after which it would look at whether the ground rules were being complied with. It was not willing to set a specific date without a ceasefire and it being allowed a margin for appreciation as regards compliance with the ground rules.

The difference was the subject of vigorous discussion between the Governments. Each Government, however, held its position on the matter as they are entitled to

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do. My view was that outlined, while the British Government had a somewhat different one. I assure the House that the position the Irish Government holds was pursued with the utmost vigour in December with a view to obtaining the relevant cease-fire and Sinn Féin participation.

On the other hand, it is clear under the ground rules that if the IRA had called a ceasefire, Sinn Féin would have got into the talks quite soon anyway. There was no question that Sinn Féin would not have got into the talks. Admittedly, there was the difficulty that it had not been told exactly how many days the discussion about whether it had complied with the ground rules would take. However, there is no doubt that if it had complied with the ground rules and had called a ceasefire, Sinn Féin would have been in the talks by now. There is no doubt in my mind that is so.

I regret the republican movement did not call a ceasefire on that basis. I appealed for one on that basis and there was no response. While we can analyse these matters as much as we like after the event, there was, and still is, an opportunity for Sinn Féin to take part in the talks if the IRA would call a ceasefire. That is the first step required. It is obvious from the lessons of 30 years of Irish history - lessons which have been well learned and are fully understood by the republican movement - that violence achieves nothing in the context of Northern Ireland. The republican movement has accepted that analysis. The inevitable conclusion of such an analysis is that a ceasefire must be called sooner or later, and the sooner the better from everybody's point of view.

Miss Harney: Does the Taoiseach believe Sinn Féin is doing everything it can to bring about an IRA ceasefire? Will he say when the last official meeting between the Government and Sinn Féin was held?

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The Taoiseach: I am not sure I agree with the implicit distinction the Deputy is making between Sinn Féin and the IRA. I think she may be making a mistake. I would be more inclined to agree with John Hume who said Sinn Féin is the political voice of a movement which has a military voice called the IRA and that it speaks with the same voice when it comes to the politics of our situation. That is the situation. In terms of the political direction of the movement, we are talking about a single movement which has a political and a military dimension. No party in this House has a combined military and political dimension - we all only have a political dimension.

Mr. M. McDowell: We are thinking about a military one.

The Taoiseach: In the Deputy's case, I have no doubt he would wage defensive warfare because he is such a gentle soul.

Mr. S. Brennan: More name calling.

The Taoiseach: I am trying to think of one for the Deputy, but it is taking me a long time.

I do not accept the distinction that Sinn Féin -----

Miss Harney: Nor do I.

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The Taoiseach: ----- is going to the IRA to do things. There is a difficulty here because we are effectively dealing with a unitary movement, as John Hume said.

This unitary movement must make up its mind about whether it is for peace.

Nobody can do that for it - it is a decision it must make itself. It must stop projecting its problems, decisions and, more often, indecisions on other people's shoulders.

The republic movement, Sinn Féin and the IRA, must make that decision.

Mr. B. Ahern: Since his recent discussions with John Major, is it his understanding that it is written in Westminster legislation that if there was a unequivocal ceasefire that by right, regardless of what other parties in the talks do, the British Government would have to allow Sinn Féin into the talks?

The Taoiseach: That is what is contained in the ground rules which are referred to in the legislation. Paragraphs eight and nine of the ground rules clearly indicate that if the requirement contained therein are met, Sinn Féin can enter the talks. Sinn Féin knows that and I have repeated that so often in the House that I thought at times the Deputy was getting tired of listening to me say it. Paragraphs eight and nine are quite clear and if they are met, Sinn Féin or any other party is entitled to enter the talks and nobody can stop them.

Miss Harney: I agree with the Taoiseach that there is no distinction between Sinn Féin, the republic movement or the IRA. On the last occasion I asked this question, he said he was convinced the leadership of Sinn Féin was doing everything it could to bring about an IRA ceasefire. Is that still the Taoiseach's position? Will the



Taoiseach tell me when the last meeting between officials and Sinn Féin was held?

The Taoiseach: There are people within the republican movement who might describe themselves as part of the leadership of Sinn Féin who are working for peace. That is undoubtedly true, although every time we see an IRA attack one must become more sceptical of their effectiveness. The IRA attacks which we are seeing against the background of the things which have been done so there could be an IRA ceasefire and the fact we see an intensification of IRA violence must lead to considerable scepticism about the seriousness or the weight of influence of the people concerned.

Section to follow:

Section K follows.

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Muireann Crowley at 22/01/97 15.58.41
Muireann Crowley

K1

This is the 'UNEDITED' version of the transcript (also known as the 'Blacks').

Take Number: K
Next Take Number: L

DÁIL ÉIREANN

02.30 p.m.

22 January 1997

^ CEISTEANNA - QUESTIONS. ^

That remains to be seen. It should be left open for us to pursue whatever hope there is.

I have indicated and set out in my original reply the position which applies in regard to any meetings sought. There was a meeting some time before Christmas but there has been none since.

Mr. B. Ahern: From his communications with John Major, does the Taoiseach believe the British Prime Minister will make any further moves with John Hume or anyone else to try to bring about a renewed ceasefire and renewed talks prior to the British general election?

The Taoiseach: I cannot say but the Deputy's focus on what the British Prime Minister must do to bring about an IRA ceasefire is to some extent placing the emphasis on the wrong place. It should be on the responsibility of the IRA and the republican movement to stop the killing now. This House should direct its attention to people who claim to be Nationalists like people in this House. We

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should try to influence those who claim to have the same creed as us to stop killing in its name. While I have no doubt there will always be something more than the British Prime Minister or any other British statesman can do, there is no doubt that the primary and overwhelming responsibility for the continuance of IRA violence rests with the IRA itself. Where previously there were no talks available for Sinn Féin to take part in, there now are. Where previously there were no ground rules to guarantee the rights of the minority in such talks, there now are. Where previously some Unionist parties would not talk to Irish Government representatives, they now sit around the same table with us. Sinn Féin can also sit at those talks under the ground rules we have negotiated if the IRA calls a ceasefire. While I certainly would like the British Prime Minister and will encourage him to do anything extra he can in terms of statements to make it easier for the IRA to call a ceasefire, I would not want such a statement to be interpreted as in any way removing from the shoulders of the republican movement the primary and overwhelming responsibility for its own acts and for the current lack of peace.

Mr. B. Ahern: The Taoiseach need not worry about anyone misinterpreting that. We have spent 25 years in Government renouncing violence and the republican movement. However, it is worth putting some emphasis on Mr. Major. The Taoiseach tried in December, supported by this side of the House, to look for an unequivocal ceasefire and to set a date, the result of six months' work by John Hume, supported by the Taoiseach, the Opposition and the Progressive Democrats, and this was rejected by John Major. When we try to

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convince the republican movement or the Nationalist people who might support them of the situation, what does one say about the British Government which rejects the Irish Government's and Dáil Éireann's proposals? That is still the position. I cannot stop the army council but I can urge the Taoiseach to get John Major to clarify where he stands. If we know that, we can then try to convince at least some republicans of the right thing to do. We are not at that situation because we failed and the Taoiseach failed to convince the British Government only a few weeks ago that the position was that if there were an unequivocal ceasefire, a fixed date would be forthcoming. It seemed to break up on the basis that we were talking about next Monday as the day the talks were to resume after Christmas and the British Government was saying behind closed doors that it was not Monday but might be Tuesday. If the difference were that small, why did we not succeed? That is why I strongly believe that the Taoiseach should try to encourage John Major to do something useful rather than considering himself for the next general election.

The Taoiseach: Sinn Féin was given a date when it could take part in the talks which was 10 June. It had months' notice of that date. If the republican movement wanted to take part in the talks, all it had to do was call an IRA ceasefire in good time and participate in the elections as it did and would then have gone straight into the talks on 10 June. It should not be put about that the republican movement is not represented in the talks because it never got a date. It did get one; 10 June. When members of the movement turned up, they knew they would not be admitted because the IRA was continuing its campaign of

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violence and had not reinstated its ceasefire. The conditions were set out in the ground rules which require a declaration of a ceasefire but also that the conduct of an organisation be consistent with a ceasefire. It is not sufficient just to declare a ceasefire and to behave otherwise. We were talking about the loyalists a few moments ago and questions were raised about whether the loyalist parties should be taking part. The reality is that it is not enough to declare a ceasefire. One's conduct must also be consistent with it.

Mr. D. Ahern: Drumcree.

The Taoiseach: An IRA ceasefire would not make any sense if the IRA were to continue military operations during it because it would only be a ceasefire in words alone and not in reality.

Mr. D. Ahern: Mr. Trimble at Drumcree.

The Taoiseach: The British Government's view was that it wanted some time to assess whether the reality on the ground matched the declaration. If the republican movement wants Sinn Féin in the talks, it knows it can and will be in the talks within a short time after the declaration of a ceasefire and compliance with the ground rules. It knows that well. Any attempt to pretend that, because it has not been given a specific date, although desirable, it justifies its continuing killing of people is hair splitting of the most weak-kneed and amoral kind.

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An Ceann Comhairle: I was hoping we might proceed to other questions but I observe Deputy Michael McDowell offering.

Mr. M. McDowell: Will the Taoiseach tell the House, once a ceasefire was declared, what further hoops the British Government would require Sinn Féin and the provisional movement to go through before it would enter into talks?

The Taoiseach: Basically, all that is required is that it comply after the ceasefire with the provisions of the ground rules which means abstaining from violence. A suggestion was made by the British Prime Minister that there would be bilateral discussions with Sinn Féin and other discussions which would last a short period of time before it entered the talks. In practice, it would be useful for any party coming into a process midstream to have bilateral briefings before it enters the plenaries. There is nothing difficult or in the nature of a precondition about arrangements of that nature which are probably common sense in any event and people would seek them.

The reality is that, since 10 June and long before, Sinn Féin and the IRA have known exactly what they need to do to comply with the ground rules and for Sinn Féin to enter the talks. They need to comply with paragraph eight, a ceasefire, and paragraph nine, conduct consistent with a ceasefire. That is all and, once a reasonable brief time has been taken to ensure that paragraph nine as well as eight is being complied with, there will be no delay in Sinn Féin entering the talks if there is an IRA ceasefire. People should not give credence

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to the sort of sophistry which is emerging from the republican movement at this time on this matter.

An Ceann Comhairle: Can we proceed? Deputy Ray Burke is offering.

Mr. R. Burke: If it was all as simple as the Taoiseach has just outlined for us, why was there such a difference between the position of his Government and the British Government in December in relation to John Hume's initiative?

The Taoiseach: I have explained the situation as far as the difference is concerned.

Section to follow:

Section L follows.

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L1

This is the 'UNEDITED' version of the transcript (also known as the 'Blacks').

Take Number: L
Next Take Number: M

DÁIL ÉIREANN

02.40 p.m.

22 January 1997

^ CEISTEANNA - QUESTIONS. ^

The difference was that this Government took the view that it would be sensible to set a date and say that as long as there was a ceasefire in the meantime and in the interim, between that date and the ceasefire, there would be sufficient time to ensure that paragraph 9 in particular was complied with. The view of the British Government was that compliance with paragraph 9 would be rendered meaningless by the setting of a date. I do not believe that is the case, the British Government was mistaken in the view. The overriding reality is that if the IRA had called a ceasefire before Christmas Sinn Féin would be in the talks by now. The Deputy knows that as does Sinn Féin and everyone else. The IRA chose not to have an IRA ceasefire.

9. Mr. B. Ahern asked the Taoiseach when he expects the ratification process of Partnership 2000 to be completed. [1365/97]

The Taoiseach: The document Partnership 2000 has been under