

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW : Q and A SESSION AT BRITISH IRISH INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY, BATH. 25 SEPTEMBER 1996

Question: Implications of killing of unarmed man in West London?

Sir Patrick: I think it is very important not to pre-judge matters. I don't know what the facts were and I think it a mistake to jump to conclusions from whatever facts are established. There is an investigation being conducted by the Independent Police Authority.

Question: Would you be disturbed if it emerged as appears to be the case that the man shot dead [indistinct].....?

Sir Patrick: I shall not comment on any hypothesis.

Question: What do you think are the implications of these finds and IRA and peace process generally?

Sir Patrick: I think the Prime Minister was right to say that there is a stark contrast between republican talk of peace and preparations for war. This was a massive arsenal of weapons. I read that an attack was very imminent. I think we need to reflect upon that contrast, to recognise that a restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994 has got to be, as Congressman Morrison said on the radio in Ireland a couple of days ago - "dependable". Equally, I think we have to press on with our efforts to help the people of NI through the talks process to come through to a political settlement based upon consent because I think without this we shall not have a true and reliable peace.

Question: That talks process seems at the moment not to be going very far, it seems to be deadlocked?

Sir Patrick: Oh no, that's not the case. Progress is slow but there is progress. I shall be saying a little about this. You've got to realise that having taken four years to get people to come round the table again, to address matters which have been building over centuries, it is going to be slow to start with. But I shall be pointing to progress that has been made, progress which is now being made. It is slow, some of it has to be out of the public eye. It is difficult but encouraging.

Question: Is there any time frame set on progress?

Sir Patrick: I think it would be unwise to set a time limit, equally I think it would be very harmful if people to behave as though it didn't matter how long it would continue. If the public were to get the idea that it is a talking shop and nothing else that would be very discouraging. The public need to be encouraged, they want to see their

politicians talking and that talking has got to be shown to be to some purpose. I think it is being, for all the difficulties, I think it is being shown.

Question: Pessimism has been expressed for progress for talks process. Either parties should be engaged or the two governments press ahead. Which?

Sir Patrick: Both governments made it clear looking for a political accommodation, a settlement based upon consent, achieved through the process of negotiations. That means of course engaging the parties but not limiting it to them, putting to the people of NI and the people of the Republic respectively the outcome of those negotiations in a referendum. I have never believed and I've never heard it seriously argued that any imposed settlement can possibly stick for reasons which you will understand.

Question: Anglo Irish Agreement not worked - other opposition politicians say something different should be put in place. Does Government think so?

Sir Patrick: The position of the two governments goes back to the joint declaration of Dec '93 when we said that as part of the overall negotiated accommodation that we were seeking the governments would look to see if they could achieve a new agreement between themselves that would have a better chance of attracting broad support. It is recognised that the Anglo Irish Agreement to which the British government remains entirely loyal does not attract as wide support as we would like. Both governments agree it is desirable to get a replacement agreement which will get broader support. We don't know whether we can be I think it is important that we should try.

Question: Can any real progress be made in talks without Sinn Fein?

Sir Patrick: Yes. I think it can but it won't be so good as if they do. The purpose of these talks is to have an inclusive process by which I mean the participation of all parties that have a democratic mandate and SF undoubtedly do. Equally of course, everybody understands that if you are to admit into the talks process people who have previously been inextricably linked to those using violence for political purposes and who have cancelled their ceasefire you will get a lot of other people walking out. So SF know what both governments require of them if they are to end their own self-imposed exclusion. I want to see SF in on proper terms and those terms have been published by the governments. But if they don't come in though we would regret it that talks process with nine out of the ten elected parties participating will of course go on and will have it in it to come to a valuable conclusion.

Question: [indistinct]

Sir Patrick: That has been clear in the communique of the two governments of 28 February this year. We said there had to be an unequivocal

restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994 which would permit them to enter the talks where they would have to do what every other participant, the two governments included, has had to do, namely to declare their absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence and thereafter at the same stage address the issue of decommissioning, exactly the same thing is being asked of them as of everybody else with the one addition that there has to be an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire and that's being asked because they are the only party that is associated with people who are using violence and have abrogated that...[indistinct].

Question: Mallon spoke yesterday of dangers posed to the political process by street politics in NI. Are you concerned about that?

Sir Patrick: Yes there is very great tension in the communities and across the community. Many of us believed that greater progress had been made in quenching, damping down ancient hostilities. I am afraid that the events surrounding Drumcree showed that the wish was father to the thought and exacerbated those hostilities and that is a very grave situation. Not one that cannot be retrieved but one that first has to be recognised.

Question: Do you accept British Government has a responsibility for the events surrounding Drumcree and the decisions made by the RUC which has been viewed by many as increasing tension?

Sir Patrick: If that is a question in which a criticism is contained, the answer to that is no. I shall be dealing with this at length in my speech. I consider that the Chief Constable who has operational responsibility was right in the first decision he made and I consider that the second decision made in very different circumstances five days later was also right.

Question: The Taoiseach said the end of the process is inevitable. Do you agree that the two governments will come to a deal in the absence of a deal by the parties?

Sir Patrick: I certainly don't think the later was implicit in anything the Taoiseach said for reasons I have given. An imposed solution cannot work however brilliant it may be, the record of government seeking to impose solutions on Irish people is not tremendously heartening. This has got to be achieved by democratic means and based upon consent if it's going to succeed. As to the first part of your question. I share the Taoiseach's belief that this will succeed I cannot say when nor of course can I guarantee I don't think that the Taoiseach was saying that it was guaranteed. For my own part I am very glad that the governments stand shoulder to shoulder in this great enterprise. I think we both believe that success will come. But it is so intractable, so long rooted a problem, series of problems that none of us can say when. I believe it could be much sooner than people suppose. I am not downhearted, that is not to say I'm a whistling amidst the encircling gloom.

Question: Why do you think it will be sooner than many people think?

Sir Patrick: I think it may be, it may be sooner than many people think because many people seem to think that it is really an unrealistic aspiration. I don't think it is. When you talk to everyday folk across NI right across the community you are made aware of their yearning for what they describe as peace. By which they mean really this uniquely divided community living in greater tranquillity with itself. There's a yearning for it. They tasted what it might be like for something like 20 months and the thought of having it snatched away again is despairing for them. So I believe that that is going to be a very strong force impelling those who will be negotiating through to making accommodations, compromising

Question: But you say yourself the situation is worse now?

Sir Patrick: There will be setbacks indeed you get setbacks and very grave ones. But it is there and you always get conflicts and you'll get inconsistencies. It is perfectly true, as everybody who has looked at this knows that there were people supporting the marchers at Drumcree, of a surprising character which indicates the depth of feeling in the pro union community. I don't underestimate these conflicts but you can feel these conflicts and experience these conflicts and at the same time desire to see a means by which they can be accommodated and that is what I believe is the underlying mood of people of NI.

Question: Is getting over the decommissioning barrier one of the main obstacles to progress?

Sir Patrick: Yes it is and it's worthwhile just stating the reason behind this - it's not some piece of pig headedness. It is because if people are going to sit down and negotiate the future of part of the democratic country they're not going to do so if sitting opposite are people who are inextricably linked with friends with the kind of arsenal we've uncovered in London three days ago. Why not? Because the threat is implicit - if those people that unless they get the kind of deal from others that they want, the kind of settlement from others that they want their mates outside the door will have something to say about it. It needs restating that. That is the rationale behind the insistence that decommissioning shall take place. And we put our position fair and square on the Mitchell Report recommendations that some decommissioning taking place mutually to build up confidence in parallel with the political negotiations. It is still an obstacle but useful discussion took place, even as recently as yesterday.

Question: In your speech you mention speaking of peace and preparing for war. How does that leave you disposed towards Sinn Fein? Do you mistrust them?

Sir Patrick: I would rather not talk in terms of whether I trust one party or another. If you are associated inextricably with a terrorist organisation you've got a very long way to go before you can end your self-

imposed exclusion. There has to be a dependable unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire and it doesn't need spelling out in terms of some formula other than that. People won't sit down and negotiate with those who imply that they will use violence if they don't get what they want.

Question: Delegates yesterday argued that the British government moved too slowly during the 17 months of the cessation.

Sir Patrick: I think this is an argument that could go on for a long time but what is the point of taking a line on the admission of SF which would have had the result of Unionist parties not being present. I believe the line was right in itself for reasons I have just tried to give. The undisputable consequences of a weaker line would have been SF come in and the Unionists would not. The Unionists represent most people who live in NI. We showed our flexibility by more than one adjustment of our position. The most recently of course commissioning with our Irish friends the Mitchell body and then committing ourselves to the recommendations in the report.

Question: Could you outline the progress made on talks yesterday?

Sir Patrick: I said that there were useful talks yesterday and they've been on going. I've said this remains an obstacle but useful talking has been taking place, not in the main plenary but more privately.

Question: Are you referring there to the talks between the UUP and SDLP?

Sir Patrick: Yes a lot goes on in bilateral discussions, nothing secret about that, people acknowledge that they are and chair adjourns so that bilaterals and discussions can take place. That's of course where most of the progress was made in 91/92 and a lot was.

Question: There has been a suggestion decommissioning would be resolved by September. No sign of it - not seen any progress. Where is it precisely now?

Sir Patrick: You can't see precisely all that you can see that it is recognised as a serious problem. No body is critical or censorious about people who do see it as a serious problem and useful and constructive work is taking place.

Question: The progress that was hoped for hasn't been achieved. Is that something you are disappointed about?

Sir Patrick: One always hopes things will go faster than they do. But I'm not downcast about this. I should say this that both governments have prepped Bills to provide for a scheme for decommissioning and have said that they will publish those and that is something I don't think had been anticipated by the public. Both governments are taking this for real.

Question: Dick Spring suggested it wasn't difficult to see the parameters

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in overall settlement.

Patrick: I agree with what I've seen reported on Dick Spring in
hington he said as I recall it that both governments are confident that
re is the makings of an overall accommodation that will receive wide
port across the community. I agree with him. I think the makings of it
there but it is an awfully difficult process. So many people are
ghtened by so many other people. So many people have got anxieties.
many people need to show that they are not forgetful of the sufferings
their constituencies. So of course you must be patient, dull and dogged
tience. It is not very exhilarating but it is the one quality that is
ing to see us through.

Question: In response to the stalemate of the talks will the two governments
between themselves - is that an imposed settlement?

Sir Patrick: I think I have to reiterate my view. An imposed solution
on't work. I do think that it is important the government should hold to
their policy of putting to referenda north and south the outcome of these
negotiations and I certainly wouldn't want to look beyond that. I'm not
looking beyond that, there's been no discussion on that basis, it's not on
the agenda at all.

Question: Framework document might be the parameters?

Sir Patrick: The Framework document as you know was put forward at the
request of the parties by the two governments, not as a blueprint but as
their idea at the time of what might be the kind of settlement that would
attract the most support. You have to test that supposition against
subsequent comments and opinions that are expressed. It was never more
than that. It was put down in some quarters as a great scheme that was
going to be imposed, it never was made that clear.

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