

**GERRY ADAMS AND MARTIN MCGUINNESS, PRESS CONFERENCE, CASTLE BUILDINGS 9 DECEMBER 1997**

**Gerry Adams**

Well the delegation for Thursday's meeting is myself, Martin McGuinness, our General Secretary, Lucilita Bhreatnach, Martin Ferris who is a member of our Ard Comhairle, Siobhan O'Hanlon who is also an Ard Comhairle member, Michele Gildernew who is head of our British Desk and the notorious Mr McAuley of A level fame. And I want to say first of all that we are looking forward to the meeting, we are looking forward to outlining to the British Prime Minister our view that it is essential for Britain to end its constitutional claim to a part of our country and why he must take a leadership role in helping to create the conditions for a united Ireland. We will also discuss with Mr Blair the need for his Government to begin the necessary and speedy process of tackling the symptoms of the conflict here and this means moving quickly to the issue of prisoners, of demilitarisation and the equality agenda. A number of media pundits and others I suppose have drawn attention to the fact that it's 75 years since the previous generation of Irish Republicans spoke to a British Prime Minister in Downing Street and the subsequent imposition of partition it's clear to everyone has failed to resolve the causes of conflict at that time and resulted in almost 8 decades of instability, injustice an absence of democracy, oppression and intermittent conflict. I think it is true to say also that this generation of Irish Republicans has played a pivotal role in building this current opportunity for peace, our



Media

party is determined to conclude the unfinished business of that period and Sinn Féin is committed to moving the peace process forward and securing a democratic peace settlement based on the right of the Irish people, based on the right of the people of this island to determine our own future and we see this meeting as an important part of that process. Any questions?

Media

On the question of prisoners is it your bottom line that there must be a release of prisoners before you would sign up to any agreement?

Gerry Adams

Well I made the point and I think it's an obvious one that there cannot be a settlement which does not include the release of prisoners how on earth could you have a lasting durable agreed settlement if there were still republican or loyalist prisoners incarcerated especially given the failure to bring to trial the vast vast majority of British soldiers and RUC officers who have been guilty of some of the most heinous offences so we are for a complete settlement, we see the prisoners as a symptom of the conflict. To resolve the conflict all of the symptoms have to be resolved, the causes of the conflict have to be resolved also and we are actually sensitive to the fact that some people may have been victims as they see it of the prisoners or certainly of the organisations to which the prisoners may have belonged. Well our party also and our friends also have been victims and we are quite prepared to see those who may have inflicted deaths and injury upon us that those people should be released as well as part of an overall settlement.

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Do you think you can fare better than your predecessor 75 years ago in what he got out of his meeting in Downing Street? .

Gerry Adams

Well we see this as part of a process I mean this isn't down to one meeting in Downing Street, this is part of a process as far as we are concerned where engaged in the search for a democratic peace settlement. We are also engaged in the search for a united Ireland and you know the fact that we will be as Irish republicans engaging with the British Prime Minister and that he will be hearing as he heard here a few short weeks ago at first hand our view as to why the link with Britain should end, our view as to the future of this island and as to the role of people in leadership about bringing that about.

Media

But will he just be hearing your view or do you think can you do business?

Gerry Adams

Oh we can do business and that's part of doing business of course is not just to state our view but also to listen to his views so we are talking about an engagement which is part of a process which is part of trying to, for example get the view of this British Prime Minister, the vision of this British Prime Minister about the situation on these islands in 10 years time, in 5 years time. His overview, his strategic view, his vision and to give him our vision and our strategic overview and our sense of the future at the same time.

Media

Gerry could I ask you something which is puzzling me, it's baffling me considerably at this point of time, not many things baffle me but this baffles me



wouldn't you be in a position to say to him tomorrow that you actually can sign up to a local administration conditional on a cross-border administration which would mean Frameworks plus, or even Frameworks alone, can you tell the Prime Minister at this point in time whether you would in fact. Because there seems to be a structure emerging within these Talks currently whereby there are three Strands. Can you sign up to a local administration?

Gerry Adams

Well first of all let me tell you that we see negotiations as an area of struggle for us and we see this period of negotiations as a phase of struggle and it would be very presumptuous to see any outcome at this point when clearly the rules and regulations say that there can be no pre-determined outcome. All I can tell you is that whatever Sinn Fein agrees to Sinn Fein will sign up to. But the big picture is more important at this point than the actual detail because the big picture is that for hundreds of years there has been a conflict and there has been a rupture in Anglo-Irish relationship and there is a division on this island of Ireland both in actual fact and there is a claim by the British to ownership to sovereignty in Ireland. And we have seen all of the efforts, historic efforts over the last hundreds of years to try in some way resolve or to rectify all of that and as we see it we are now about trying to finish all of that unfinished business. So our focus in what may well be a 40 minute meeting will not be necessarily into the nitty gritty of these issues which are for negotiation here but are to try and get them to give a sense of the historic



opportunity as we face into the millennium that is presented to the people of these islands.

## Media

But Monday is just over the hill over the horizon there and we are given to understand that by the 15th the participants and the Government want the structure more or less in place identifying the key areas for fleshing out after Christmas. What I am still not clear about is if for example in inviting sufficient consensus within those Talks tomorrow morning that they agree the headlines which could essentially mean the three Strands which recognises and it seems to me that they think it's going to be collectively in there a local administration. Does that cause a problem for you?

## Gerry Adams

Well first of all it would be entirely wrong for me even to respond or to give you any view of what's happening in there and I'm not going to do it. What we are talking about here is an engagement between the leadership of our party and the British Prime Minister. Separately from that there is a process going on here and of course the engagement with the British Prime Minister is part of this process and I think all of us have to persevere, keep pushing forward. Sinn Fein has engaged very positively in these Talks since we came into them, we are here to talk to people, we are here to listen, we're to put forward our proposals, we're here to listen to other people's proposals and when all of that comes to a conclusion, when the sum total of our efforts are agreed then it's time to start taking the decisions of what is or is not possible.



Media

Gerry Adams when you put your point presumably to the Prime Minister and he is quite likely to come back either immediately or at some point in the conversation and reiterate what the British Government refers to as the principle of consent, that is unionist consent or a majority consent in Northern Ireland, what will be your response to that point?

Gerry Adams

Well we have no problem with consent we have made the point many times that consent is a two way street and we would make the point that any Prime Minister cannot allow the broad principle of consent to be changed into a veto and that any British Prime Minister has a responsibility to pursue consent, to negotiate consent, to be an encourager and a facilitator, a persuader of consent and especially a British Prime Minister with the capacity, with the mandate which this Prime Minister has. So my notion of it, and I could be wrong, but we did a good meeting here with Mr Blair in Government buildings and my notion of it is that he knows there has to be change. I do accept and acknowledge clearly that he has taken some risks for peace, I can even recognise that from his perspective that he may feel he is taking risks in us going to Downing Street, so I think if we translate that into his attitude on this issue of consent that our view will be to persuade him that he needs to be in pursuit of that. Encouraging it.

Media

You too are taking risks going to Downing Street I would imagine?

Gerry Adams

I didn't know U2 were going to Downing Street.



Media

You are taking risks as well do you ever worry that it will loose you support among your supporters?

Gerry Adams

Not at all I think that we are all in the business of taking risks and I think the prize of a lasting peace justifies the risks.

Media

How do you see the meeting with the Prime Minister and yourself in concluding what was called the unfinished business of that period when the last meeting was held with leaders of the republican movement.

Martin McGuinness

Well I mean as Gerry said we see the meeting at Downing Street as part of the ongoing negotiating process and I don't think Tony Blair will be under any illusions whatsoever about who is coming to Downing Street on Thursday but we will go there as Irish republicans who believe absolutely, we think we can prove it comprehensively, that British rule in Ireland has failed. That the partition of Ireland has failed and that the way forward has to be a recognition by the British Government that it must end its jurisdiction and respect the right of all the people of Ireland nationalist and unionist to national self determination. And of course we would want them to accept that the best solution is a united Ireland. That's what we are going to Downing Street to negotiate. I don't think Tony Blair is under any illusions about that because I actually think that if you look at what has developed over the course of recent years we have actually seen British Governments, certainly this British Government undermining the position of previous



British Governments because they at least to some extend acknowledge that disunity and division on the island of Ireland has failed absolutely. Failed not just the Irish people but the British people also and recognise that the way forward has to be, has to be through uniting the people of Ireland and there is only one way to do that and we think we have chosen the right road. It is to negotiate it, it is to negotiate it now, it is to prevent further loss of life on our island, it is to prevent the deaths of British soldiers or IRA volunteers, people going to prison, destruction and conflict and also to bring about, which is critically important for us as republicans, the removal and the ending of the inequality, the discrimination, the injustice and the domination with the people we represent have endured since the foundation of the Northern state. And it is very important for the media to understand that when we go to Downing Street we go there with the full support of republicans all over this island because I think they along with other constituencies in Ireland have got a sense that there could be something very very powerful and important coming out of all of this if the British Government can at last recognise fully that it has a major role to play in ending disunity and division on our island.

Gerry Adams

I just want maybe one or two questions.

Media

You say that you think all republicans, you have the full support of all republicans so that includes the 32 Counties Sovereignty Committee?

Martin McGuinness

Well I mean there is 32 County Sovereignty Committee I wish them well. I don't have a



problem with that. I support what aspirations and objectives they have outlined. I'm an Irish republican in these negotiations, I was an Irish republican before I came out of the negotiations and when the negotiations are over I will be an Irish republican. The people who elected me as their Member of Parliament for Mid Ulster are Irish republicans and Irish nationalists, they gave me their support, they gave Gerry Adams the support that he achieved in West Belfast and the widespread support that we now have throughout our island because they believed that our peace strategy was the way forward, that we were actually making gains but also in a very serious way trying to point out to the British Government, to the unionists and to everybody else involved in this equation that the way forward had to be through a recognition that there needed to be real and meaningful and sincere inclusive negotiations about the future of this island. People elected me to negotiate on their behalf and that is exactly what Gerry Adams and I are going to do on Thursday with Tony Blair.

#### Media

Do you see yourself having regular meetings now at Downing Street?

#### Gerry Adams

First of all the only journalist I ever met who has a spokesperson of your own. The British Government talks about regularising its relationship with Sinn Fein and treating Sinn Fein the same as all of the other parties, I think the imperative is on the Government not because of any idiosyncratic attitude it may have to its own sense of democracy but because we have a mandate and wherever meetings may take place the fact is that the mandate



which we have has to be upheld and the British Government has to recognise it and deal with our electorate on the same basis as all other electorates on this island.

## Media

Gerry Adams what is your own view just to get it on the record of the emergence of this Ginger Group that Bernadette Sands is now spokesperson for. Were you surprised that she was appointed, are you fearful that it might provide a focus for Republicans who wouldn't agree with your attitude towards the negotiations in the peace process?

## Gerry Adams

Well I think Martin has dealt with it at some length. I watched the news in a friend's house yesterday and he came in and he said to me isn't it a great pity that those who say they want a united Ireland are divided. But of course these people have the right to form any group and if they have concerns about where we are coming from we will arrange to meet them if that's what they want. We are mandated as Martin McGuinness has said as republicans to negotiate and to negotiate a democratic peace settlement on a republican agenda. It's transparent it's there for all to see.