

FOR: BRIGID BYRNE/EMBASSY, LONDON

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DATE: 1 DECEMBER 1996

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Comments of John Hume on Breakfast with Frost, Sunday, 1 December 1996

Hume: Following the receipt of the Prime Minister's letter and his proposed statement I met with Gerry Adams to discuss the proposed statement and we had agreed the areas that I would want clarification on and go back to the Prime Minister and unfortunately, and I say this very strongly, the whole matter was published because, in my view, when you're dealing with as sensitive a matter as peace, you know, confidentiality is supremely important.

Interviewer: In addition, there was the letter that was published and which you regret was published. You're saying there was a second, a covering letter, and if there was a second letter, was it more gloomy about the prospects than the published letter?

Hume: No, the covering letter was a letter to me, a normal explanatory letter and it thanked me for my determined efforts. It expressed what has been expressed in public by the Secretary of State and his doubts about whether the whole issue is serious but, if it is serious, he was setting out the Government's position. Now, we're getting once again, you see there's something going on here behind the scenes, David. There's somebody who doesn't want peace who's leaking stuff to the press and there's no doubt about that and it proves my point that all of this publicity, while you're dealing with a sensitive issue like peace, is not at all helpful. Let me say again, let me say again what I said to John Major - and I say it from more experience and I don't like saying these things but it's the truth - I have more experience of this than any politician on the other side of the water in Britain because I and my colleagues and all the politicians in Northern Ireland have been here in

the front line for 25 years. And when I say after that, after having been the main opponent of Sinn Féin and the IRA, that I believe there is now a very serious chance of getting an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire given that when I said in the first place there could be a ceasefire everybody pored scorn on me. My job is to build on that and to ask everybody, particularly in Government, to work to build it too. And I'm saying again in spite of last week that my experience tells me there is a major opportunity to bring about a complete end to violence and I will be going back to the Prime Minister and giving him the response I got to his proposed statement.

Interviewer: Therefore do you think there could be an IRA ceasefire before Christmas?

Hume: I think that if minds are applied to it I have no doubt there could be, if we apply our minds to it because what this is about, David, and I've said this to the Prime Minister and everyone else, this is about the misunderstanding that arose. When you consider the last ceasefire; 18 months after the cessation of violence the talks still hadn't started, the Government had talked about a decontamination period for Sinn Féin, then they talked about decommissioning, then the Prime Minister announced an election and this gave the impression to these people who are outside of politics, of course, that they were being conned and they dropped the ceasefire. Therefore, I am saying, that if there is reassurance that the talks process is serious - and I gave the Prime Minister a document in which I said, if you say that I am guaranteeing you from what I've been told that there will be an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire and there was nothing in the document which could give offence to any section of the people. But what it did was set out the conditions in which the Government would admit Sinn Féin to talks and the whole Government attitude to the talks process, and that was based on the Government's own legislative process which set out that there had to be an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire and there had to be a total commitment from Sinn Féin to the Mitchell principles.

Interviewer: Do you think, in fact, that the IRA will come through on that front. You used the word conned there, that they felt conned, but you're sure you're not being conned

and they're not planning behind the scenes more violence and so on, are you sure you're not being conned?

Hume: Since the breakdown of the ceasefire there has only been one major incident in Northern Ireland and there's been two tragic ones in Britain - and they shouldn't have happened - but, given that we're facing a problem, that's a massive improvement and it's a clear indication that we can achieve peace if we apply our minds to it without making political concessions and that's important because people are quoting the Prime Minister as saying that he wasn't going to bargain for peace. Nobody asked him to bargain for peace because I didn't ask for a single political concession. The politics will take place at the talks and the talks have to produce agreement which threatens no section of our people.

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