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Comments by Mitchel McLoughlin and John Hume on BBC Northern Ireland, 28 November 1996

McLoughlin: Well, obviously we will study very carefully the documents that were released today by Mr Major but our initial impression is that John Major has in fact accepted the arguments of David Trimble over the proposals that had been developed by Gerry Adams and John Hume.

Interviewer: There we had Mr Trimble welcoming what John Major had to say, you seem to think that it was all unnecessary, but nevertheless, are we kidding ourselves do you think that we have some sort of a breakthrough here, or is it just the same as it was before the statement was made in the House of Commons today?

Hume: Mr Trimble was interpreting the Prime Minister there in a manner that I would have thought unhelpful because he was more or less saying that if there is a ceasefire, it'll take a long time before people get involved, before Sinn Féin get into talks.

Interviewer: You'd like to see them involved in January then?

Hume: Well, you see the last time that I got involved.... the present talks wouldn't have happened by the way had there not been a ceasefire, people forget that and we're sitting

talking to the Loyalists all the time and we have no difficulty talking to them. We want to talk to them. We want to bring to an end all the terrible things that have been happening in our streets and the way to do it is to talk directly in a totally peaceful atmosphere and that can be done and parties shouldn't be playing politics about the past because if we do that, we have a lot to say about certain parties but we're not doing it.

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Richard Crowley:

Coming now from Derry is Sinn Féin's Chairman Mitchel McLaughlin, who stated at the weekend that a British rejection of the latest proposals would be "a total miscalculation". Mr. McLaughlin is this a rejection, an outright rejection in your view?

Mitchel McLaughlin:

Well I think people should be very very concerned, but I am encouraged to hear Dick Spring indicating that at least for the Irish Government they have not shifted their position and I think the key question, given that there is studied ambiguity in the statement from Downing Street. The key question is have the British Government under pressure from David Trimble shifted the goal posts yet again.

Richard Crowley:

So you don't see it as outright, as a definitive rejection. It's hardly an acceptance, but it's not the former either?

Mitchel McLaughlin:

It's certainly not an acceptance, but I do think that people are rightly concerned that in fact John Major intends to raise a barrier to Sinn Féin's entry into negotiations and that would have the most profound implications for all of us in this island.

Richard Crowley:

But as you say there is a glimmer of hope, certainly in what Dick Spring was saying about. He spoke of gaps to be bridged, how do you bridge that gap in your view?

Mitchel McLaughlin:

Yes, and I think that in developing the proposals John Hume and Gerry Adams have put out, taken at face value the position that both governments stated