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Extract of comments by Gerry Adams and Baroness Denton on Adam Boulton Hour, 2 February 1997

GERRY ADAMS

Interviewer: There are many people who say that too much attention is paid to Bloody Sunday by Nationalists and indeed by the media, given the hundreds of innocent bystanders who have been killed by the IRA for example, what do you say to them?

Adams: First of all, I think that Bloody Sunday is very unique because when the IRA - and they have killed many people and I regret that and I regret all of the hurt that Republicans have inflicted - but when the IRA have carried out actions or atrocities or have killed people, that has been acknowledged and recognised and people like myself have said that we regret and we're sorry for what has happened. On Bloody Sunday, those innocent people - and they weren't necessarily Republicans by the way - but those innocent people who were killed were seen as guilty.

Interviewer: John Major said that they should be regarded as innocent.

Adams: Well John Major has a responsibility then and if he has any commitment at all to democratic principles, to establish an independent inquiry into those deaths because no one has ever been brought to book. The British regiments or indeed the Paratroopers, the main regiment involved, its Commander was decorated, the entire British establishment was

involved in a cover-up, Widgery was a lie and Bloody Sunday remains pertinent today because it is an open wound. Bloody Sunday is a Sunday which has never ended.

Interviewer: So what you would seek from a new inquiry would effectively be an apology from the British Government, is that right?

Adams: Well, what I want to see is a healing process as part of all the necessary processes to bring about peace and justice into this situation in the North of Ireland and the British Government refusing to recognise or to show any contrition for anything that they have done; and this is pertinent also if you remember the whole business of Lee Clegg, Bloody Sunday keeps coming back in echoes.

Interviewer: OK, but if you want an inquiry, have you instigated your own inquiry, can you guarantee that the British troops didn't come under fire from Republicans because of course there's that new tape.

Adams: Whatever happened on Bloody Sunday, let that come out in a new inquiry.

Interviewer: No but can you give evidence saying whether or not they did come under fire from Republicans?

Adams: I think it's been clearly established that they didn't come under fire, it's clearly established that they tried to forensically set up the people who they killed.

Interviewer: I'll repeat the question. Have you, given your role as President of Sinn Féin, allegedly as a member of the IRA Army Council, have you instigated inquiries to find out what the Republicans were up to?

Adams: First of all, I think it has been clearly established that the British troops did not come under fire that day, and not by someone as partisan as myself or by others, but by independent persons. There's a new report for example, just commissioned and published

by the relatives this week which clearly establishes all of those facts; and can I say this - the evidence that we're hearing about this week, 25 years later, was available 25 years ago and was ignored by the British Government.

Interviewer: Would you accept, because I do want to look to the future as well, would you accept that - John Major this week in the House of Commons, he said Bloody Sunday was a terrible tragedy, that he wanted to ensure the lessons have never been forgotten - would you accept that the British Government that goes really as far as you - except the regret doesn't it, in apologising and perhaps we could just move forward.

Adams: First of all, I want us to move forward but what Mr Major is afraid to do is to face up to the British military and political establishment, the old boys' network which has been running this place and dictating his agenda over the last number of years. He's afraid to face up to them in initiating a proper independent inquiry and I think that puts a considerable onus upon the Taoiseach, Mr Bruton, to initiate or to work for an independent international inquiry into the deaths of Bloody Sunday.

Interviewer: Now, it has been reported in the British Sunday press, based on a Belfast magazine interview in Fortnight, Sean O'Callaghan, former member of the IRA, convicted terrorist, saying that he discussed whether or not to kill John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, with you, is that true?

Adams: No, it isn't true, it's rubbish. I don't want to give too much credence to any of these very bizarre claims that Mr Callaghan is making, the man is obviously a fruit and nut case.

Interviewer: He may be a fruit and nut case, but he was a member of the IRA, wasn't he?

Adams: Whether he was or not, I was never involved with him.

Interviewer: You never met him?

Adams: For a short while he was a representative of his area on the Ard Comhairle or National Executive of Sinn Féin. He left mysteriously when monies for prisoners were misappropriated in his home town. That was the length and the detail of my dealings with him. These stories are being given credence, it's quite remarkable that there's even any attention paid to him at all.

Interviewer: What is the nature of your relationship now with John Hume because it looks, doesn't it, as if Sinn Féin is going to be taking him head-on in the General Election, you're going to be running against him?

Adams: That's electoralism and I don't have any problem with that. I would have liked both our parties to have come to some sort of a pact. The SDLP found that that was impossible. Despite the fact that we're contesting elections, I am absolutely confident that John Hume and I will continue our efforts to restore the peace process. We haven't - and the election has been kicked off here - we haven't gone out of contact, we won't go out of contact and the search and the prize of peace here is much more important than inter-party rivalry. And can I say so even though John Major still appears to have ruled out any forward movement, it isn't too late for John Major to grasp this opportunity.

Interviewer: He would say you're the one who's ruling out forward movement by refusing to come to terms with the conditions for entry into the talks.

Adams: I'm sorry because myself and Mr Hume were able to put to the British Prime Minister certain propositions on the 10th of October last year, which I think would have empowered me to go forward to the IRA and to try and move the situation forward.

Interviewer: What it comes down to, isn't it, is that Sinn Féin is not yet prepared to commit itself wholeheartedly to the peace process?

Adams: With respect, Sinn Féin has been committed totally to peaceful and democratic methods and there wouldn't even have been a peace process if it wasn't for the risks which we took.

Interviewer: Do you think there's any chance of a renewed IRA ceasefire this side of the General Election?

Adams: I think that is clearly a matter for all of us. I'm prepared to go the extra mile. Is John Major, even in the face of an election, is he prepared to go the extra mile, let him look over again, the propositions which he rejected earlier, let him come back to us. Why doesn't John Major put his officials into a room with Sinn Féin officials to work out the minutiae of what is required if he isn't happy with what's available.

Interviewer: What is the principle of what is required?

Adams: As far as I'm concerned - and let me state this just as a matter for the record - Sinn Féin is a party in our own right which represents a sizeable section of people here who should be treated the same as all other sections of the electorate. Secondly, John Major said in February and he made this part of legislation, that if the IRA unequivocally restored its cessation and Sinn Féin signed up to the Mitchell principles, then we would be involved in All-Party Talks on the substantive issues. In November of this year he changed that and put blockages and obstacles in the way of Sinn Féin's entry into the talks.

Interviewer: Let me get this straight. Are you saying that Sinn Féin is on the verge, and the IRA is on the verge, of signing up to the Mitchell principles and giving a new ceasefire if you think that will get you back into the talks?

Adams: First of all, I was one of the people along with my close colleagues, who met Senator Mitchell and I made it quite clear, before John Major rubbished the Mitchell principles, that I was quite prepared to sign up for them. If all the other parties are prepared

to sign up for them, then Sinn Féin certainly will do so also. That is a matter of public record. Trying to get the IRA, and remember the Loyalist have not cease-fired and the British have not cease-fired, but trying to get the IRA to cease-fire means bringing about a creditable entry into proper talks. The key to that is in Mr Major's hands. Now, if he doesn't like what John Hume and I put to him on October 10, why on earth do we have to dialogue with each other through the public media? If he doesn't like what has been suggested, why doesn't he put officials into a room with Sinn Féin officials to work out the minutiae of what is required?

Interviewer: I do want to put one final point to you. Do you think, if there is a change of Government, if there is a Blair/Labour Government, that British Government policy will change?

Adams: We will deal with whatever Government is returned by the people of Britain. It isn't our business which Government is elected. I would like to think and hope that it would be a stable Government because then at least the excuse of dependency on Right-wing elements or on the Unionists would be removed. I would like to think that the issue of peace in Ireland would be dealt with before the election, it shouldn't have to wait until after the election. Why doesn't John Major grasp the opportunity now?

Interviewer: You are a Belfast man, would you say now to any foreign investor thinking of creating jobs in Northern Ireland, that they should go ahead and do so?

Adams: Absolutely, and let me say that the silliness of a British Government thinking that it was going to show footage which depicted in some way, and in a disgraceful way, this conflict here as being in any way reflective of what happened in Nazi Germany wasn't any sort of an incentive for investors to come.

Interviewer: You can't guarantee those businesses wouldn't be blown up or their members shot by the IRA at the moment though?

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Interviewer: You can't guarantee those businesses wouldn't be blown up or their members shot by the IRA at the moment though?

Adams: We can't guarantee that I won't be shot. We can't guarantee that the people going into those work places won't be harassed by British troops, we can't guarantee anything other than the people of this island have the right to peace and that includes economic equality, social equality and freedom with justice.

BARONESS DENTON

Interviewer: Do you think Gerry Adams is sincere in his beliefs when he says he wants an end to violence?

Denton: I believe that the messages they send out are not the same as the words.

Interviewer: He said that he felt that there was a new hurdle put in his place back in November, that prior to that it had been a commitment to Mitchell, a commitment to a new ceasefire and then the Prime Minister started making new claims.

Denton: I believe that what you have is no difficulty, nobody else has in stopping bombing and shooting, so why do you need to wait? What we have always said is that a genuine, permanent ceasefire will put Sinn Féin at the table.

Interviewer: And a commitment to the Mitchell principles?

Denton: And a commitment to the Mitchell principles, that's required of everybody.

Interviewer: Do you feel that it would help to take some of the tension out of the situation, to look again at Bloody Sunday because there does appear to be some new evidence on both sides emerging and Widgery, I think with historical hindsight, was probably unsatisfactory.

Denton: Well, of course hindsight is a wonderful thing. The Prime Minister said very loud and clearly on Thursday in the House: new evidence should be given to the authorities. you cannot look at evidence that is hearsay or written in books.

Interviewer: But you see, you've got the Irish Government saying they think there should be an inquiry, now they've been allies of yours in the peace process. Surely, it would just take some of the tension out of today if the British Government were to say 'let's look at the evidence again'.

Denton: We said any new evidence, bring it to the authorities and of course we will examine it.

Interviewer: Do you believe yourself that the Paratroopers did come under fire?

Denton: I believe that there was a great tragedy that day but I have no detail of it and I also believe that if you look backwards the past becomes the future.

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