

Ms. Nolan
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- familiar stuff.
FOR: MARY BROWNE/EMBASSY, LONDON *hmk*

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Extract of comments by Martin McGuinness on UTV's Jonathan Dimbleby
interview, 26 January 1997

Interviewer: It is accepted by all the other nationalists who are democratically, in their terms, involved in this project that you have to bring about the circumstances - they say the first requirement is for the IRA - they demand an IRA ceasefire. You say it's not constructive for you to say that. Is it also not constructive for you to say, as the Irish Government Mr Bruton says, that the IRA in their behaviour are like fascists, the strategy they use of the ballot box in one hand and the gun in the other, it would be unhelpful for you to acknowledge that that is true?

McGuinness: Well, obviously there are many aspects of Mr Bruton's attitude to the situation in the North which I don't accept. Many of his descriptions, I think, are widely inaccurate but let's get back to reality here. The reality is that I along with others, including the leader of my party, Gerry Adams, working closely with John Hume and Albert Reynolds, as Taoiseach in Dublin, did bring about an IRA ceasefire in August 1994. Mr Major's position to John Hume and to Albert Reynolds was that after three months, and he stated this publicly, that negotiations would begin. Yet we didn't have that, we saw the British Prime Minister impose obstacle after obstacle after obstacle. It became clear to many of us in Sinn Féin that we were actually seeing a British Prime Minister at work absolutely determined to stall and delay the process to the negotiating table and I think also in many ways this happened in South Africa.....

Interviewer: We come to the central point, those parties, those nationalist parties, the SDLP, the entire elected representatives of their people in the Republic, your island, many

of them shared the sense of frustration as the ceasefire went on. Nonetheless, their representatives are prepared to say unequivocally, unequivocally, put down your weapons, for the IRA to lay down their weapons as a pre-condition. Why can't you say, I call on the IRA to do it, you don't do that, why don't you do that?

McGuinness: Because I have to work in the real world. I have to work with the situation that has existed over the course of

Interviewer: Aren't they in the real world?

McGuinness: Yes, they are in the real world, of course they are. But what we are involved in here is the very difficult process of how you resolve conflict in Ireland. Irish Governments have been calling on the IRA for twenty-five years, indeed, for over seventy years to lay down their weapons. But we still have conflict in Ireland. So, what we have to do is try and understand what is required to work our way through all of the difficulties that we have faced. The time has come for all of us to try to move past all of that, understand the forces of history, once you're out there, work with the reality and deal sensibly with how we move forward....

Interviewer: In these terms it is clear that every other party, to the democratic process, to these talks, are going on to find a political solution from which you are at the moment excluded, says that a ceasefire, when it comes, would have to be unequivocal and in the words of the Taoiseach, irrevocable. Do you accept that such a ceasefire would have to have those characteristics?

McGuinness: What we need to bring about, hopefully, is an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. I am working to bring about a credible process of peace negotiations. I am also hopeful that the British Government will call a halt to its war with the nationalist community which has existed since the foundation of the Northern State. Again, you mention the word democratic in the context of the talks which are taking place in Belfast.

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Interviewer: Well won't you accept they're democratic, that's what I'm suggesting to you?

McGuinness: There are six parties currently in those talks, in fact there are nine parties there at the moment, apart from the two Governments, nine political parties. Combine the votes of six of those parties and Sinn Féin has more votes than those six put together, yet, we're excluded. What is democratic about that? Before Mr Major called the election, which was another stalling mechanism, apart from decommissioning and the debate about permanency, whenever he called the election this was all about providing a straight entry into dialogue; in fact it provided a straight entry into dialogue for everybody except Sinn Féin.

Interviewer: Everyone else in those talks, however, accepts that however inadequate the structure, the constitutional structure, of Northern Ireland, is the process is democratic as indeed it was defined as being by Senator Mitchell which is why he was urging those to take part. So, you have just said that you're looking for an unequivocal ceasefire, just, which was clear. When you say unequivocal are you also saying, for the ceasefire to be a proper framework for effective negotiations it would have to be unequivocal and irrevocable?

McGuinness: Well, what I'm saying is that it would have to be unequivocal, it would have to be a clear ceasefire.

Interviewer: What does unequivocal mean, what does it mean to you?

McGuinness: I believe that the IRA ceasefire of 1994 was an unequivocal ceasefire. I believe that that ceasefire which lasted eighteen months was a genuine ceasefire. I believe that the result of all of that had to be a situation where all of the parties and the two Governments would grasp that opportunity and move forward to bring about a permanent peace in Ireland.

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Interviewer: Does that mean that you could have an unequivocal ceasefire in your terms when the IRA is still purchasing weapons, training troops, moving weapons, is that an unequivocal one?

McGuinness: Well now you're coming into the new pre-condition which John Major....

Interviewer: No, I'm not asking about pre-conditions. I'm asking you as a matter of fact in your view.

McGuinness: The reality is that we have a situation at the moment, where if the IRA called a ceasefire tomorrow morning, no one knows when Sinn Féin would gain entry to those talks. I actually believe under this British Government it wouldn't happen. I believe now, as a result of all that I have learned over the last couple of years, that this British Government was in no way interested in bringing Sinn Féin to the talks that in fact what the British Government were interested in was having a weakened Irish delegation at those talks. In other words that Sinn Féin would be absent and that they would deal then with the Irish Government under John Bruton and with the SDLP. And, I believe, that that was a very flawed project and I think that there is considerable evidence that the actual agenda that the British have adopted in Ireland is a security agenda, as opposed to a political agenda, to deal with all those very difficult issues at the heart of the conflict.

You don't like me drawing references to it, I think that in the world of conflict resolution of which we have learned a lot in recent years, we can see that the same problem and difficulties did happen in South Africa where for many years the South African Government believed that the problem they were trying to resolve was a security problem and not the very deeply rooted political problem.

Interviewer: Would you be on your knees if the IRA were not to be continuing to purchase weapons?

McGuinness: Well, I actually think there's a fixation with the IRA.

Interviewer: They're not totally unimportant, are they?

McGuinness: Tomorrow morning the Combined Loyalist Military Command will walk into the talks in Stormont. In the course of the last couple of weeks they have injured people in the North of Ireland, they have put booby-traps under peoples' cars, they have been involved in all sorts of shenanigans in the course of last year. After Drumcree dozens of Catholic churches were burnt to the ground, dozens of Catholic schools were burnt to the ground, a man was killed in Lurgan by the Loyalist death-squads, Protestants have been killed by the Loyalist death-squads, yet those political representatives of those grouping will walk in tomorrow morning to the talks.

Interviewer: Mr McGuinness, are you seriously suggesting that a Labour Government, led by Tony Blair, is going to be, relatively speaking, from your point of view, a soft touch?

McGuinness: Absolutely not, absolutely not.

Interviewer: That's what you seem to be suggesting. If we get a Labour Government we'll get peace on our terms, that's what you're talking about?

McGuinness: No, the result of that election could be a Conservative Government with a stronger mandate than what we have at the moment and we all know the effect that, the nine Ulster Unionist votes, have had on the Conservative Party over the course of recent years. And there has been much, you know, debate in Ireland about why did John Major not move forward and the debate swings from one of the value of the nine Ulster Unionist vote. But, I mean, there's another aspect of it as well which needs to be investigated. I listened with considerable interest in the course of the last couple of weeks to a number of interviews which John Major did and it is clear that the issue of devolution for Scotland is going to be a major debating point between Labour and the Conservatives over the course of the next while and the run into and the election and Labour is obviously stating that they want to see a devolved assembly with tax raising powers.

Interviewer: John Major has expressed his opposition to this?

McGuinness: Why he has expressed his opposition is because the argument that he will be putting to the British people is, I think, there should be no break-up to the United Kingdom. And I think that John Major viewed the process in Ireland as being one of, if he goes to the negotiating table with the Sinn Féiners and with nationalist Ireland, that the inevitable consequence of that would be that the British and the Unionists will have to give on very serious fundamental constitutional and political issues which would effect the United Kingdom, as they describe it.

Interviewer: What you said about the IRA ceasefire, given what some people detect as ambiguities about what should happen during a ceasefire.....

McGuinness: Sometimes ambiguity is valuable.

Interviewer: OK. People will be inclined to draw the conclusion that you have a twin-track policy, that while you do the talking, your partners in the IRA carry the semtex and the weapons?

McGuinness: No, absolutely not. My project, along with the leader of my party, Gerry Adams, and John Hume and I think many others in Ireland because let's not just dismiss what we've done as something that hasn't been a positive move forward in relation to resolving this conflict. I think that what we have done is we have shown that there is a way forward. In fact, I believe that John Hume and Gerry Adams have laid down a template of how the conflict can be resolved in Ireland.

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