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Interview with Martin McGuinness on BBC Lunchtime News, 30 December 1996

Interviewer: I can understand why you would want the Loyalists to stay at the talks but doesn't it make a mockery of the Mitchell Report and the Mitchell principles?

McGuinness: Well, I think that many of us who have observed other proceedings at the Belfast talks for some considerable time couldn't be anything other than of the impression that a mockery has been made, not just by the Loyalist parties but by the leaders of the Unionist parties.

Interviewer: Nevertheless the ceasefire is intact, is it not?

McGuinness: But we have all seen the antics of David Trimble at Drumcree, the killing of Michael McGoldrick and the hypocrisy and double standards which were applied by both the British Government and the Unionists at that time and great efforts were made to keep the Loyalists in the talks. If half the effort had been made to get Sinn Féin into the talks by the British Government and Mr Trimble then we would have been in a much more productive situation at the moment.

Interviewer: Do you not agree that the principle in which these talks are based, the Mitchell principles in which the parties are taking part in those talks, are important to be kept intact and, therefore, if violence does break out and a violence which has kept Sinn Féin out of the talks, if the Loyalist parties were allowed to stay on the conditions of a broken ceasefire those principles would be irrevocably broken?

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McGuinness: Well, I think what has to be done is that we have to use all of our energies to try and get back to a situation where we can have a credible process of peace negotiations against the background of a peaceful environment. And what we need to do is try and put that peaceful environment in place and we can only do that if we can get a ceasefire back again from the Loyalists, from the IRA and, most important of all, if we can get the British Government to call a ceasefire in this conflict with nationalists and republicans, a conflict that has existed since the foundation of the Northern State.

Interviewer: Would you agree that the Loyalist ceasefire would not have been broken had the IRA not broken theirs?

McGuinness: Well, the Loyalist ceasefire has been at all times a conditional ceasefire and the Loyalists have made it quite clear that it is conditional on there being no change to constitutional position of the North of Ireland and in recent weeks they have also added to that that if Sinn Féin were to be admitted to talks that that could bring about a collapse of the ceasefire. So, the Loyalist ceasefire has always been, and this needs to be clearly understood, a highly conditional ceasefire.

Interviewer: But wasn't the main condition that it would not carry out the first strike?

McGuinness: Well, in reality, the Loyalist ceasefire has been broken for some considerable time. Michael McGoldrick was killed at Lurgan, dozens of Catholic schools and chapels were burnt to the ground by Loyalists and we have seen a continuation of that conflict over the course of the summer months. What we need to do now is focus our attention, not on the fact that all of these incidents occurred, but on what we can do to try and arrest the situation. I believe that 1997 is going to be a defining year in the history of the politics of this island. There are two roads to travel, one is a road to the negotiating table and the other is a road to further conflict. We have already seen in the course of recent weeks a slide back into conflict, that needs to be arrested. The road that Sinn Féin wants to travel is the road to the negotiating table.

Interviewer: Would you say that it would be very much in the interests of the IRA to bring Loyalists back into the battle?

McGuinness: I don't think its in the interests of anyone to see a resumption of the type of hostilities which occurred on this island over the course of the last twenty-five years. I think that what we need to do is recognise that we are only going to have any hope whatsoever of resolving this conflict if we can get all of the parties through an inclusive process without preconditions with confidence-building measures on issues like the prisoners and equality of treatment for the nationalist community. Now, if we can put all of that in place and get all of the parties back to the negotiating table there then will be some hope. I have to add to that the fact that we are facing into a British general election and I think that the most positive contribution that John Major could make at this time, not just for the people of Ireland, but for the people of Britain themselves and, of course, in their case for their own domestic reasons, and that is to call an immediate British general election. I think that whatever Government comes in could not be much worse than this absolutely terrible Government and we've had who have been so detrimental to our attempts to construct a viable peace process over the last two years.

Interviewer: What about the reports of your election as a full voting member of the IRA Army Council, what is your comment on that?

McGuinness: Well, I think that all of us who have watched the performance of the Sunday Times over the course of recent years can be of no other opinion than they are part and parcel of a British propaganda dirty tricks operation.

Interviewer: So, you're denying it

McGuinness: I deny it absolutely.