

GOOD MORNING ULSTER - LORD ALDERDICE

29 NOVEMBER 1996

Interviewer: Joining us now the Alliance Party leader Lord Alderdice. Good morning. You say you're increasingly doubtful whether Sinn Fein actually wants to engage on an equal footing with the others parties - why?

Lord Alderdice: Well I haven't seen any evidence of it and as you know when there was the previous cessation I and my colleagues engaged with Sinn Fein in the Forum in Dublin week after week for 14 months or so. And apart from that met privately with Mr Adams and with various of his colleagues to try to explore things. In all of that time, and I say this with sadness, there was no evidence whatever that they were prepared to move. We've had a series of documents produced in order to clarify this for Sinn Fein - the Downing Street Declaration, the Framework Document, the Mitchell Report, which was produced by the international community, not by either Government in fact. We had the draft Forum report where Sinn Fein couldn't accept what other Nationalist parties and the Alliance Party was saying. It wasn't even a matter of British Government or Unionists being involved at all. And now we have a further statement. Any every time if it's not to the taste of Republicans then they re-erect their own preconditions and I think that has spelt out a very gloomy message for any preparedness on their part to do real business.

Interviewer: But they go to .. well the Hume/Adams proposals mark two say that we want a definite or immediate access to talks. The Government brings out a paper which says well we will give you access some time but we're not quite sure when. They're right to protest aren't they?

Lord Alderdice: We've made it clear that we're prepared to engage in talks with them, as before, if there is a cessation of violence. But what we've got are a series of Republican preconditions. It is surprising that people have a lack of trust in the bona fides of the Republican movement. After all they said that the ceasefire in the

past would hold in all circumstances. John Hume said with all the backing of his experience, with all the work that he had done, he was absolutely sure it was permanent. Anybody that did not believe it was permanent was just being mischievous. But the fact is that those people who did try to work with Sinn Fein were let down, were betrayed including John Hume. Now I think it is reasonable that people then beg the question say 'well look you persuade us and here are some possibilities'. If they can persuade people in other ways, then let them persuade them in other ways.

Interviewer: They have clearly persuaded John Hume. He's been saying that this ceasefire is within our grasp, millimetres away. Do you belong to the school now which believes John Hume is simply a dupe?

Lord Alderdice: I would like to believe that what John was basing his ideas on was well founded and well based but you see I heard all of those things before. And I can recall speaking with John and saying 'look I fear John you're being led along a road here' and he dismissed it. He said 'no I'm absolutely sure I've got it all sorted out and definitely this is permanent, this is real'. And it wasn't. He was mistaken on that occasion. No doubt about that, he was mistaken. Now what I find a bit distressing at times is how everybody can be criticised now by John except the Republican movement. There's no criticism of them in reality for what they're doing and that worries me because it does leave me wondering whether John's judgement on the bona fides of the Republican movement is really something that can be depended upon. I think the evidence suggests that one has to be doubtful of that.

Interviewer: That is of course consistently critical of violence ... that part of Republicanism.

Lord Alderdice: He's consistently critical of violence. But he doesn't seem to be critical of the fact that Republicans are saying 'we're going to use this tactically' and that's the thing to understand. They've discovered that thumping people over the head all the time is actually less effective than thumping them over the

head from time and leaving them uncertain as to where the next thump will come from. And I think that unfortunately we've got to accept there is no reason to trust the Republican movement now. They must persuade us otherwise.