



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/97/1

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*✓ Mr Ware*

Meeting with Mr. Gerry Adams

Monday, 7th August 1995

1. After clearance with the Tanaiste, I met Mr. Gerry Adams at the latter's request in Belfast on Monday 7th August. Fr. Alex Reid was also present.
2. I began by repeating for Adams the analysis which we had of the present situation. Decommissioning was a goal of the Irish, British and US Governments. It had the automatic support of the vast majority of the public opposed to violence. Whether we liked it or not it was now a road-block in the way of comprehensive negotiations.
3. I sketched out for him in fairly detailed terms the approach now under consideration by the two Governments, i.e. the idea of parallel progress involving intensive preparatory talks aimed at comprehensive dialogue and, symmetrically, an international Commission to deal in the first instance with modalities of decommissioning only.
4. I underlined that the cooperation of the paramilitaries would in our view be a sine qua non for the effective operation of any such Commission. We hoped that Martin McGuinness could have a fully operational conversation about this dimension when he met the Tanaiste next week. There could be no argument that something was essential to clear the way to the negotiating table.
5. Adams took a guarded and downbeat view of the situation. He felt it would have been wiser to have sounded out the Republican movement before going to the British on the issue. He saw a number of key difficulties:

- There were tactical doubts on the wisdom of the proposed operation, which could be "a British proposal in Irish dress" and would keep the focus on decommissioning rather than on politics. He invoked the precedent of South Africa where, he said, decommissioning had been dropped.
  
  - There were huge "emotional difficulties" among the Republican rank and file. One year after the ceasefires there was growing doubt whether the British in fact wanted a deal. Various public and private statements by the Taoiseach, starting with his "solo run" on decommissioning, were sowing serious doubts whether the Irish Government remained committed to the understandings which underlay the ceasefire. If things did not change it was "a matter of countdown" before something gave.
6. Adams spoke at length of the psychology of the physical force movement, which would not hesitate to return to violence if they felt the present initiative was spurned. He expected there would be statement from the IRA on the anniversary of the ceasefire. (The implication I took was that the statement might link the continuation of the ceasefire in some way to political progress). He did not however challenge my analysis that any implied threat or ultimatum could be deeply counter-productive, and used by Sinn Fein's enemies. He agreed readily that the result of any breakdown in the ceasefire would be a truly calamitous return by all concerned to the trenches of 25 years ago, with little prospect of emerging from them for years to come.

7. On the issue of decommissioning, Adams stressed the familiar argument that this was a new agenda item, that of itself, "the IRA at present had no interest in looking at decommissioning". If it was a question of reassurance, the envisaged IRA statement could address the decommissioning issue in a positive way. (He stressed this was his own idea only). I said any positive statement on decommissioning would be helpful.
8. On the international Commission, Adams said that to have any hope of a positive response, it would be need to be clear that the proposal did not validate the third Washington precondition and did not enable the British to procrastinate still further on the question of political progress. If it was a way of putting the problem in the context where it could be resolved i.e. the context of an overall settlement, that might be another matter. (He acknowledged that the word "park" was anathema). However the proposal as defined, (i.e. concrete and specific on decommissioning, but vague and aspirational on the crucial question of political negotiations) was "a no-no". I also had the clear impression that Martin McGuinness would be unable to go much beyond this point in his discussion with the Tanaiste.
9. Mr. Adams (and Fr. Reid subsequently) developed in the most emphatic terms the importance they attached to progress towards comprehensive negotiations. He gave me the text of a letter he was sending to Sir Patrick Mayhew (attached). That set out the position that he was committed to and he could not go beyond it at present. (I understand there is a proposal for a further meeting from Sir Patrick, but due to holiday schedules it is unclear when it can go ahead).
10. It was noticeable throughout our conversation that both Mr. Adams and Fr. Reid seemed to attach enormous importance to the outcome of the forthcoming Summit. Adams expressed

dismay that it was coming so soon, giving a clear impression that he would have liked more time to prepare for it in his own constituency. There was an unmistakeable impression that it is viewed in Republican circles as an extremely significant and perhaps even decisive test of the willingness of one or both Governments to abide by the commitment to political dialogue which was crucial for the ceasefire.

11. At the end of our meeting I gave Fr. Reid a lift to another point in Belfast. He was extraordinarily vehement that the IRA had agreed a complete cessation on certain specific conditions. His own role and, he said, "the Church's" was causing him great concern. If the terms of that understanding changed drastically the IRA would walk away. They would suggest that if the British did not like the terms of the existing ceasefire, they should re-negotiate a new one. The cessation was based on agreement on a political alternative. If there was no political alternative they would fight. They were fully capable of doing so.
  
12. He took mild issue with one earlier statement by Gerry Adams, on the importance of both Governments responding to the ceasefires. Fr. Reid's understanding of the IRA position was that it was the role of the Irish Government that was crucial, it being accepted that difficulties were inevitable on the British side. He spoke passionately about the "dignity" of the Northern nationalist community. They had a sense that Dublin would always tend to betray them. He instanced various statements by the Taoiseach which he said had fuelled these worries.

13. While allowances must be made for his personal emotions, I found it deeply worrying that someone who apparently has some kind of recording or arbitration role in relation to the IRA should have such a vehement sense of things going wrong.

*SO*

Sean O hUiginn  
8 August, 1995

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