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INTERVIEW WITH GERRY ADAMS AND JOHN HUME ON RADIO ULSTER.  
SATURDAY, 5 JANUARY 1991

Interviewer: .....Paisley saying that talks could be underway by next month, and then John Alderdice yesterday saying in effect that the whole show was over, that the talks about talks process had failed. The contradiction could not have been clearer. And it's one that is reflected in private as well as in public. While the Northern Ireland Office and the DUP remain determinedly optimistic, the other parties tend, at least in private, to pessimism. Meetings, both publicised and non-publicised, will continue to happen. Attempts will be made to find new formulae which might break the deadlock, as Ian Paisley's remarks showed, but, say the pessimists, any credibility has gone from the exercise. The priority now, they suggest, is presenting a good face to the electorate whenever the election comes, some time in the next year. But against that must be set that determined optimism by Mr. Brooke and his declaration that its process will take as long as it takes, because for the Northern Ireland Office it has been a process which has already brought considerable benefits. Simply by existing, it has in their view forced politicians to rethink long-held and unquestioned positions. No one will say it, but the implication is certainly there that for the Northern Ireland Office it is preferable that that process of re-evaluation should continue, rather than forcing the exercise to a head, particularly if it is feared the answer after a year will still be 'no'. So the process for the moment at least continues, but that wasn't the only thing occupying the minds of politicians here over the Christmas period. Because Christmas saw a development we last saw in the early 1970s, a three-day ceasefire by the IRA. Response differed. For Unionists, it was no more than a propaganda exercise, meaningless for the victims of terrorism. But the response of the Secretary of State was different. While he made the same point as Mr. Molyneux about this lack of relevance for the victims, he also said the

ceasefire was a welcome epilogue to an historic year, and it's best to hope that it could lead to a more prolonged cessation in the New Year. His comments are just the latest of what is seen to be an exercise in long-distance diplomacy between Sinn Fein and the Government in the last year or so. First, when Mr. Brooke remarked after his first 100 days as Secretary of State that if Sinn Fein renounced violence then the Government would be imaginative in its response. That provoked an outcry from Unionists, but this November Mr. Brooke repeated the essence of that message in another speech and he seemed to go a stage further, echoing the arguments John Hume used in his debate with Sinn Fein two years ago, when he said that Britain's position in Northern Ireland was essentially neutral. It was here, Mr. Brooke said, not because of any vested strategic, political or economic reason but because of the reality of one million Unionists. The aspiration to a United Ireland was legitimate, he said. The use of violence to pursue it was not. That was part at least of the context for the IRA ceasefire. But so too was its sustained level of violence last Autumn. Violence which included in December two highly controversial murders in mid-Ulster which led to suggestions that the IRA was becoming, even by its own standards, increasingly sectarian. Against that background, some see the ceasefire as being primarily aimed at improving the image of the IRA in the Nationalist community, as a way of showing that it can control the violence and stop it, if only for three days. So was the ceasefire just a stunt then, or was it a serious signal to the Government? I asked the President of Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams. Because of the Government's restrictions, his answers are read by an actor.

Gerry Adams: Well, I don't think it was a stunt. It was a suspension, as the IRA say, of offensive actions and I think it should have been welcomed by everybody, regardless even of what they thought of the motives and I welcomed it as such and of course all these things send signals to everyone.

Interviewer: I suppose some people looking at it might say that after an intense period of violence and after a month which saw

two murders which to many people seemed sectarian even by the IRA's own standards, it was all about image, it wasn't really about reality at all.

Gerry Adams: Well the reality is that for three days, and I know it was only three days, but for three days nobody was killed or injured as a result of any IRA activity and I think that is much more than imagery, that is a reality which I've said before should be welcomed by everyone involved.

Interviewer: But it was for only three days. Why not, as many people have said in the whole community, extend the period? If you can do it for three days, why not for more? Is there any question of principle involved in the length of time?

Gerry Adams: I don't know. I mean I wasn't privy to the decision. One of the things of course is that if the IRA can do it for three days because of its political will, for whatever reason, to do it for three days, then in other conditions it may well do it for longer periods. I am not suggesting that it is going to happen but rather than those politicians who engage in begrudgery, and I mean I began to wonder over the Christmas period who was for or who was against IRA suspensions ... The neo-Unionists and the Unionists were quite shameful in their attitudes to it, when in fact what political leaders should have been doing was trying to construct conditions where such a suspension could become in fact a cessation. As I pointed out the Sinn Fein's position is for one of a total demilitarisation and that's a challenge and not to be endlessly sort of dissecting why did the IRA do this and what did it mean and so on. But to deal with this situation cannot be done on a more permanent basis where all the forces engaged in military action can cease.

Interviewer: So what are the conditions under which the IRA might have a longer cessation?

Gerry Adams: Well, I mean the IRA has made it quite clear, I have to tell you that I don't speak for the IRA or wish to speak for

them, but the IRA has made it quite clear that it fights for a British declaration of withdrawal, of disengagement from Ireland. I think that the challenge that that presents to the rest of us is that we should try and construct the conditions, and remember it isn't just the IRA who needs to be part of this equation, there are a number of forces engaged in killings, and that's why I stated the Sinn Fein position of a total demilitarisation is a challenge for us and for those who purport to be political leaders, to try to construct conditions and to try and work out conditions, to try and create conditions where we can have real peace.

Interviewer: But is it not a burden on you, is it not a duty on you to spell out those conditions?

Gerry Adams: Well, I have spelt out, we have spelt out, in some detail, one, the republican and democratic belief in the right to national self-determination, that the core of the problem here being a British presence and partition, obviously the solution must lie in an end to British presence and an end to partition. That's our basic political position. The burden then for us is to try and work out how that can be brought about. Mindful of all the various fashions and interests involved, I would argue that a British Government can within the lifetime of a Government decide to leave and, in fact, I believe it will decide to leave when conditions so dictate. We have argued numerous times that the signing aside of the Government of Ireland Act brings about a totally new situation. I find Mr. Brooke's statements interesting when he talks about no self-interests, no self strategic or economic interests. On one hand the Secretary of State says the IRA cannot be militarily defeated. You know all those indicate to me that if they have no self-interest as they say and as they cannot militarily defeat the IRA as they say, well why don't they have talks to work out exactly what way this whole terrible problem can be brought to an end.

Interviewer: But in those statements Mr. Brooke also said that it was not self-interest that was keeping Britain here, it was

the wishes, in effect, of one million Unionists. Now, how do you overcome that problem? Surely you have got to recognise those Unionists' wishes as well.

Gerry Adams: Well, I don't believe that Mr. Brooke's Government is here just to satisfy the concerns of the Unionists. That's undemocratic both in the Irish context and also in the British context where a very, very small minority of the whole population of the United Kingdom is going to dictate the pace.

Interviewer: Well then, why is he here? Because as you said he has no strategic reason for being here, he has no political reason, he has no economic reason. He said he'd no vested interest in keeping a high military profile. What other reason could it be?

Gerry Adams: Well, if this is the case, and this is something which I ask Republicans in fact to consider, and to question and to query and to discuss Mr. Brooke's statement, if his assertion is correct then why doesn't he take up the position of examining. Now he doesn't have to adopt it, but examine a situation whereby Irish independence can be brought about. Just examine it, because if he has all these unselfish motives for being here, well surely the Government should be open and to ponder and to look at other scenarios, at new relationships between the people of Britain and the people of Ireland. That's what Mr. Brooke should be addressing. The other things, of course.... and he never used the word neutrality, I know you have not used it but other commentators have used this word neutrality and in the very first paragraph of his statement he said he was going to support the Unionist position and that's not a new proposition.

Interviewer: But if you want Mr. Brooke to examine your position, the republican position, isn't violence, therefore, counter-productive asking for that examination to happen. Because Mr. Brooke has made it clear that you can become a full part of the political process if you renounce violence.



Gerry Adams: Well you see I haven't heard Mr. Brooke renouncing the killing of Fergal Caraher just this week. I haven't heard any words of admonishment for the British soldiers who killed and wounded Fergal and his brother Micheal. Several of my constituents have been killed here by the British Army. The soldiers weren't even suspended. They are not even going to be charged and I think if we get into all the excuses, you know, we are going to look for some sanitised passivistic formula, we are not going to get it. There is no party in the island of Ireland which is guiltless, not one. Every party has a position in support of force by some element involved. Now, what Mr. Brooke is doing is trotting excuses because he doesn't want to talk to Sinn Fein at the moment. Now talking to the IRA, maybe that's a different proposition but take it, are people who elected me, are 11.4% of the people of this State in elections, have they less rights than the people who elect Alliance or DUP or OUP? I mean who is Peter Brooke? Who elected Peter Brooke in Ireland?

Interviewer: I then put it to Gerry Adams that Mr. Brooke had also said that he recognised the aspiration for a united Ireland was legitimate but what he didn't recognise was the use of force, and that he had said why pursue the aspiration for a united Ireland by a way that is only going to divide people, not unite them. Again, his answers are read by an actor.

Gerry Adams: With respect to Mr. Brooke, I don't need Mr. Brooke to tell me what is legitimate in my own country. I wouldn't deign for one moment to tell him what is legitimate in pursuance of whatever sort of society he wanted in his country. I think it is most arrogant of him even to suggest that he has the right to lecture Irish people on what is or what isn't legitimate. I think if the man is genuine and sincere in trying to bring about a settlement, in trying to bring about a solution, he has to take the public positions which he has outlined and he has to start putting some real substance on them, and now, for example, he should be talking to Sinn Fein. There is no question at all, no reason, no possible reason, based on any principle at all except one of expediency, why he should not be talking to Sinn Fein.

He wants peace, maybe peace between him and us, maybe peace between him and us and the other parties involved, we should start to shape together something that will bring it. Now, I can't guarantee that.

Interviewer: But is it not arrogant on the part of Sinn Fein to reserve the right to kill people if it doesn't get what it wishes by democratic means?

Gerry Adams: Well, you see, Sinn Fein doesn't either take it upon ourselves or educate to kill people. This is a term which has been misrepresented for so long in a very censored media.

Interviewer: But you do support an organisation which does kill people?

Gerry Adams: No, our position is one of defending the right of people, of Irish people, in the context of the British occupation of six Irish counties. The right of people to resort to armed struggle, now whether they want to exercise that right, that's up to them. I mean, what I am stating is a political opinion. I have a political opinion. Now, maybe I am wrong.

Interviewer: Is it, therefore, in your view likely that that political opinion is going to change, short of some sort of declaration by the British Government that it is going to withdraw from Ireland?

Gerry Adams: Well, I have also said quite publicly and persistently that those who engage in the politics of the last atrocity, the denunciation of armed struggle, that they have a responsibility to develop some effective alternative means of struggle. Some non-armed method of struggle. I mean Sinn Fein is about unarmed methods of struggle and, therefore, I am open. I have said this persistently, I am open to look at whatever alternative can be found if there be one at this moment in time. I'm still waiting.



Interviewer: But the end for you, British withdrawal, seems to be non-negotiable.

Gerry Adams: The right of our people to live in peace and harmony together in this country in whatever shape, form, structure of society they wish, free from outside interference, is a matter of principle and I think it's the same principle which exists in every other country in the world, that we have the right to national self-determination. The British presence denies us that right. The British presence needs to be removed. I wish it to be done peacefully. I wish that Mr. Brooke and myself or whoever else can get together and work out some way of doing it. I'm not dogmatic. I obviously have very firm views and Sinn Fein have very firm views about what type of society we are going to have, it isn't up to us to dictate, we can't dictate to Irish people what kind of society we are going to have. Certainly Mr. Brooke can't dictate to us that he is going to retain a union with his country that the vast majority of people in this country and his country don't want. So we are starting 1991, I would like to see 1991 a year where we eventually all grasp the nettle to develop dialogue towards peace and justice and freedom in this country.

Interviewer: Gerry Adams, reiterating that whatever the ceasefire meant, it did not mean any less (?) of his demand for British withdrawal. His words were read by an actor because of the government's restrictions. Given Gerry Adams' position, how did John Hume, Mr. Adams' main opponent in the Nationalist community, view the ceasefire?

John Hume: The only people who really know the full meaning of the ceasefire are those who declared it. I took a positive view of it, I think there's positive and negative views of everything in life, but I think the situation we are in, in Northern Ireland, we should always take positive views in order to try to move forward, and my hope obviously is that there would be a permanent cessation, I have just heard Gerry Adams say that he wants to see a demilitarisation of the total situation here, an

end of all violence. I would agree totally with that and I think the entire community would agree totally with that, and now as we go into 1991, I would like to appeal to the IRA and to Mr. Adams, who has influence with them I think, to begin the process of demilitarisation by themselves laying down their guns and their arms, because they know that if they do that, within a matter of weeks there will be no soldiers in our streets and there will be no armed policemen on our streets, because Mr. Brooke, apart from the fact that that would happen naturally anyway I think, Mr. Brooke has already made it clear that it would happen. And also because everybody knows that the opportunities for real dialogue about all aspects of our problem are now there, and that everybody can be involved in that dialogue in the context of a totally non-violent situation. And in a totally non-violent situation in my view, the chances for reaching agreement are much greater than reaching agreement against a background of violence. So why don't the IRA and Sinn Fein give the lead in the process of demilitarisation, Mr. Adams? And why don't they also of course, by so doing, show that they have real self-confidence in their own views as to what the future should be, because if you have real self-confidence that your own view of the future relationships with people is the correct one, then you should be able to persuade people without using guns and bombs to do so.

Interviewer: But Mr. Adams also said in the interview that Mr. Brooke should have the confidence to talk to Sinn Fein and should do so even if it continues its support for the IRA and violence.

John Hume: Well I think that it's been made clear to him out of (?) that the prospect of dialogue in the absence of violence with Sinn Fein is there. And I think that Sinn Fein, and indeed the IRA, are listening to what is going on and I'm quite certain that they are, that they are analysing their own position, that they're both listening and the analysis that I'm talking about should lead them to the situation of giving the lead on demilitarisation. What I mean by that is this, let them analyse their own military campaign. On the first of January 1990, I

pointed out to them the pattern of that campaign over 20 years has meant that 55% of all people killed were civilians and that if they continued in 1990 they knew from military analysis that more than one out of two people who would die would be civilians. The facts are that in 1990, 76 people died, 49 of them were civilians. How can anybody militarily, leaving aside the rights and wrongs, justify such a campaign. Politically speaking, leaving aside before Mr. Brooke made his speech, anybody looking at the political situation would know that relationships between Britain and Ireland have changed in the context of the whole European Community. And issues like sovereignty and independence have changed their meaning. We are all now uniting in Europe, both parts of Ireland are uniting with the rest of Europe, therefore it is common sense that we should, if we are going to have great relationships with the rest of Europe, that we should have great relationships with each other and that the only way we can do that is by talking together about it, not by shooting and bombing. Now that whole approach was of course totally reinforced by the speech by Mr. Brooke, which seems to be getting attention in the Republican movement, and I certainly hope it is, and in that speech he made clear what he did, and I think for the first time, and I congratulated him very warmly for doing so in my Party Conference speech, he addressed the political reasons for the IRA campaign, which was that the political reasons for their use of violence, or armed struggle as they call it, was that the British are here defending their own interests, both economic and strategic, by force. Mr. Brooke specifically said that they had no such interest in this day and age, which I think is obvious to an observer anyway, but he has declared that as his Government's approach and in such circumstances therefore, the legacy of the past and of British involvement in Ireland in the past, and our own involvement, because I think that everybody is responsible for the state that we are in, is that we have a deeply divided people and that that deep division, which is the real problem that now faces us, can only be resolved by dialogue and by discussion and not by force, and my appeal to them is lay down your guns and bombs and have the self-confidence and join with the rest of us in the process,

which I think could be a long one, but it's the only way, dialogue, in the process of breaking down the barriers between us and of creating institutions which respect our differences, which allow us to work our common ground and therefore to grow together at our own speed into a new Ireland, because I think that's the only way that it is going to happen.

Interviewer: But at the same time, Mr. Adams also made it clear that the IRA, Sinn Fein's long term objective remains the same - a united Ireland, and that it believes that peace will only come if that objective is achieved. Is therefore any dialogue between Mr. Brooka and the Republican movement actually leading anywhere or is it simply a dialogue of the deaf? The two sides are saying different things which are mutually incompatible.

John Hume: Well of course Mr. Adams has to realise that there are more people in Ireland, North and South, than Sinn Fein and their supporters and the IRA and their supporters, and indeed, in one part of the interview he admits that. That means of course that if they believe in self-determination they cannot dictate to the rest of Ireland how the people of Ireland will decide to live together and neither of course if he really believes in self-determination should they dictate the message, should one tiny minority dictate the message. His response to that was that Irish people have the right to use armed struggle. I would have thought it was the Irish people who have those rights, not a section of them, or a minority of them. And if you really believe in self-determination, then you should believe that people have the right to self-determine the methods. And I don't think anybody should be in any doubt today that the Irish people as a whole, North and South, would not use what is called armed struggle to settle the major problems that face us now, all of which are based on a deep division and suspicions arising from those divisions that face us.

Interviewer: But Unionists might say to you that this is a totally unrealistic dialogue, that you are trying to divert people who have shown that they are not democrats and that

therefore you should in effect not allow them to have a veto on political progress.

John Hume: I'm not allowing it, I'm not allowing anyone to have a veto, again, there's positive and negative ways of looking at it. The facts are that we face a problem, and we either face the problem or we don't. It's very easy to do as most Unionists seem to do, is to simply seek what suits themselves. I mean ourselves alone is a much, is a very clear description of the Unionist political approach as well, you know. Because they seem to think that the only answer to problems is all power in their own hands. And only what suits the Unionist community. Unfortunately for them they live in a society in which there are other people and we would all like to have a society where everybody thinks the same way. But in fact we don't. We have many different strands of opinion and the only way we are going to get agreement is to have those strands of opinion involved in dialogue with one another, but what we cannot allow, is any one strand to dictate the terms by guns and bombs. And therefore I am strongly of the view that dialogue can only take place in the context of a situation where nobody has a gun under the table or in his hip pocket. I resent anybody coming to the table to talk to me and reserving the right to pull a gun if I don't agree to what they're proposing.

Interviewer: So, if necessary, are you prepared to reach a (political?) settlement that does not include the Republican movement?

John Hume: Well, I'm naturally going to get involved in dialogue with anyone who is willing to get involved in dialogue on the terms that I have stated. And if the Republican movement continues to use physical force and violence, then obviously they are excluding themselves, what they are declaring is that they are seeking to impose their will on the rest of the people of Ireland and I cannot accept that and I don't think any government will. And I think that also they must know by now, that there is no government in the Western World today, because of the



implications for international terrorism, that can be seen to surrender to methods of violence and to paramilitaries.

Interviewer: Turning now to the talks about talks process, this week we've had two very conflicting views, Ian Paisley on Thursday saying he was optimistic and then on Friday Dr. Alderdice saying effectively the process is at an end.

John Hume: Well I wish somebody would tell me all of these things. What I have done is accept the method of discussion that is underway, which is that the Secretary of State is consulting with the different parties. That is not the approach that we wanted. The approach that we wanted was direct talks across the table but the Unionist parties chose to talk to us through the Government ... but that's their choice, and they understand that logic, I don't. And therefore what I am doing is that I have been part of that process, as has my party from the beginning, we are still part of that process. We have been informed by Mr. Brooke that he will be seeking a meeting with us within the next few weeks, and we are awaiting that meeting to hear whether there has been any development since the last time we spoke. Our position, I am not going to repeat it again, throughout has been very, very clear and very clearly stated.

Interviewer: How much do you need certainty about when the second strand of talks ... is going to begin? How much is that a key central part of your stance?

John Hume: Well it's much more fundamental than that. It's that we want to discuss the problem, and we have said, and I have said repeatedly and I've challenged other parties to tell me if it's wrong, and I'm prepared to discuss their analysis across the table if they disagree with mine, but my analysis is this, is that this problem, let me repeat myself, ad nauseam, is about conflicting relationships which have not been resolved to everyone's satisfaction, three sets of them. I have said that we believe the central relationship is the Unionist distrust of the rest of the island. That is the reason they were against Home



Rule, that is the reason they brought down the power-sharing executive, that's the reason they're still opposed to power-sharing. Now until that relationship is sorted out to their satisfaction, as well as to everyone else's, now I underline "to their satisfaction" and to prove that I made my referendum proposals, until that happens, my view is that nothing is going to work, so there's no point in reaching minor agreements about anything else if in fact we're not going to have peace and stability in this society, and our view and our approach is based on that. Therefore, if that is to happen, all parties involved in the problem and all aspects of the problem must be discussed and within a reasonable timetable.

Interviewer: But the Paisley view on the other hand, is that it's nonsense to talk to Dublin before you've made substantial progress, reached heads of agreement, he says it's not nuts and bolts, its heads of agreement, in talks between the parties here. That's a different view from the one you're expressing.

John Hume: Well he's basing that on his analysis of what the problem is, and he seems to think the problem is purely an internal Northern Ireland problem. I don't think any objective observer looking at this problem will agree that it is that, because I mean all you have to do is to listen to Mr. Paisley talking about the South to realise that his attitude to the South is very much part of the problem. But what I say to him is OK, that is your view of the problem, put that on the table when we meet, there's no point in negotiating in public if you're serious, I'm presuming that you recognise that since you are sharing a piece of earth with people, that you agree on how you do it, and the way you agree on how you do it, which we have never done up to now either inside Northern Ireland or indeed inside this island, that we should sit down if we are genuine, if we're genuine, and you'll note I'm repeating that, we should sit down and work out that agreement, and everybody should be free to express any view they wish at that table, and put on the table any proposals or any analysis that they feel is accurate.

Interviewer: Are you genuine however, when talking about devolution?

John Hume: I am absolutely genuine in talking about all of our relationships including the relationships within Northern Ireland and if we settle those relationships we must give some form of expression to them which obviously would be an institutional form. And what shape and form that takes must be a matter for discussion. I would point out to people that the only solution applied to Northern Ireland in this century was in fact what is called devolution and we've had different forms of it, all of which have failed up to now. What we have done is moved beyond that and analysed why it has failed, because of the failure to settle the underlying relationships, in other words, we're approaching the problem very seriously.

Interviewer: John Hume and no doubt his voice, along with all the other politicians, will be heard often throughout the year.