

12 April 99

Subject: Thoughts on the peace process**Date: Mon, 12 Apr 1999 14:35:00 +0100**

Kate,

I'm just sending you some stuff I have been working on in relation to the decommissioning thing. These three pieces may (or may not) be of some use to you during this week's talks.

Regards,
John Hoey.

1) Pause for thought

The pause for thought after the Hillsborough declaration provides a welcome opportunity to consider the way forward. Just as it takes two sides to make war, so it takes two sides to make peace. Unionists must use this period to try to comprehend some of the blockages Republicans have in accepting a permanent end of political violence - which would be implied by a voluntary reconciliatory act of putting some weaponry beyond use.

At this stage in the peace process many Republicans are having to face up to and deal with a horrible paradoxical contradiction. On one hand, an implicit endorsement of violence through their long-term electoral support for Sinn Fein. On the other hand - for many - a personal aversion to warfare and its concomitant suffering.

To the Protestant/Unionist psyche the existence of such internal contradictions may be baffling - even incomprehensible. But it would be dangerous folly to dismiss or ignore them. Unionists need to help Republicans through this process. It is in their interest to do so.

They ought to realise they have a common cause. Not in terms of national or political identity - but rather a common desire to move on from this impasse. Sensitive choice of words and language will certainly assist. So too can a mature recognition and acknowledgement of the evolution Republicanism has made under its current leadership.

Ultimately political reality must prevail. Gerry Adams has to do that which he has always upbraided Unionists for not doing - assert his authority over his own heavy headers. David Trimble must be that which no Unionist leader has previously been - a statesman - and put people before party.

2) Defining moment

Full scale decommissioning is patently unrealisable. It would be utter folly – and recklessly destabilising - for Republicans, Loyalists, or state security forces to undertake strategic disarmament at this stage. Only those lacking a fundamental understanding of the tribal nature of our conflict could seriously suggest otherwise.

However, what is most certainly realisable and realistic is the notion of putting some weapons beyond use. There is no credible basis for any argument against passing control of some weaponry to the International decommissioning body. For example, removing a few pounds of Semtex from a horde of several thousand pounds doesn't alter strategic military capability. Nor does it destabilise the equilibrium between various armed groups. Also, weapons cached two hundred miles south in Tipperary are completely redundant when defending Belfast ghettos.

Neither Republicans nor Loyalists should dismiss the importance of participating in a voluntary act of reconciliation. Republicans in particular have most to lose by walking away. Quite simply the World in general, and the North American Irish Diaspora in particular, will just not comprehend how Republicans could even contemplate ignoring the expressed wishes of the Irish people. Is the Republican leadership seriously prepared to suffer electoral annihilation? Do they really want to become political pariahs in the Western World? Do they not realise that should they end their second cease-fire there will never be a third?

Even when viewed through the lens of Republican morality it is just not correct to describe an act of reconciliation as surrender. On the contrary, to freely proffer a token in the form of weapons is a sign of confidence and empowerment. It will be the most important gesture ever made in modern Irish politics – the defining moment which transforms the whole peace process from one formed between enemies to one sustained between nascent friends.

3) History lessons

Fearful Unionist people should take heart and strength from the IRA's Easter statement in which it asserted "IRA guns are silent." This should not be viewed as an implied threat to return to violence. On the contrary, it should be seen as an admission of the political realities stemming from the Good Friday Agreement.

Quite simply, the IRA cannot afford to break its second cease-fire. To do so would mean defiance of the expressed wishes of the Irish people in last year's referendum and thus would be a de facto declaration of war against the Irish State. History shows the consequences for Republicans of attacking the state in Ireland.

If good sense and good diplomacy characterise this week's talks then no body bags will have to be returned to Republican families before the IRA acknowledges its subservience to the Irish people.