

# FORUM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS HELD AT  
DUBLIN CASTLE ON FRIDAY, 7 JULY, 1995

Chairperson: Judge Catherine McGuinness

I hereby certify the following to be a true and accurate transcript of my shorthand notes of the above-named proceedings.

*Michelle Coffey*  
*Mark Mac Data*  
Doyle Court Reporters,  
2 Arran Quay,  
Dublin 7.

Telephone: 8722833  
2862097 (after hours)  
Fax: 8724486



MR. SEAMUS CLOSE: Thank you Chair. Can I join with everyone who



has welcomed you here and give you the welcome of the Alliance Party. The point that I would like to deal with initially is again the question of prisoners and arms decommissioning and I would like at the outset to say we don't have any problems what so ever with the release of prisoners on license by way of executive or quasi judicial decision, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that from our perspective. Where we do have an awful lot of difficulty and great problem is the inequality of treatment of prisoners, as it was represented through the patently unfair treatment and one might say overtly political content of the Clegg release, and I am particularly interested in your proposal in appendix two of the linkage between the prisoners and arms decommissioning, and I felt for some time there was an inextricable link between both, but my concern at the moment is that because and due to the mishandling of the Clegg affair, and I would pose this as a question directly to you - would you not share my fear or belief that that linkage has been somewhat broken by the mishandling of the Clegg affair, because now we have a situation, perfectly understandable, of where prisoners are seeking Parity of esteem - if I can use that particular phrase - where many prisoners who see themselves on prison charges for conspiracy, of having arms, not of murder and have served 10 or 15 years and yet they see the consequences of the political decision in relation to Clegg, and I fear and I would ask you to share that fear with me and respond as to whether this in turn destroys the linkage between decommissioning of arms and the release of prisoners on license, and therefore makes the whole negotiations much more difficult to achieve any sensible end to.

My other points would be drawing on the fact that your name would be the Conservative and Unionist Party with particular reference to the terminology Unionist, and bearing in mind that a lot of



your ideas that are in your paper are extremely useful and worthy of further discussion and further getting around the table about, how would you help us, how would you help us all in getting Unionists around the table to embark upon discussions on Framework Documents and other documents and the many worth while ideas that you have put forward in your paper? Could you use your influence to try to encourage them into dialogue, because without dialogue these ideas will remain just ideas. The only way in which we can get progress is through dialogue, but there are missing links in getting around table inclusive talks when people won't come to the table. Thank you.

MR. PARTASIDES: Thank you. We have spoken a bit already about the Lee Clegg release and as we have said already we do appreciate the sensitivity of the issue and the sadness and anger it has caused. I think that we are in danger of perhaps being side lined and letting this dominate our discussion. I think that it's clear from our presentation that we have set out areas, quite different areas that we have looked into and those are the areas we would like to be questioned on. I don't think there is anything positive to be gained from us considering that further that may not be satisfactory, I understand you want answers to these questions but I really think we don't be doing ourselves a service if we continued on that line.

MR. SEAMUS CLOSE: Do you feel your proposal on the direct linkage between arms and prisoners is jeopardised or damaged through the handling of that particular affair?

MR. PARTASIDES: I would hope not. I come to the second part of your question, you mentioned carrying the Unionists with us, what's clear is that trust is needed on both sides and the



Conservative Party leadership, and we are not representative of the Conservative and Unionist Party. We are the Bow group and we are independent. You mention the fact that the Conservative Party leadership would have to carry the Unionists with them and that's true, that is the limit and the restrictions within which the British government leadership is working. The challenge I suppose is to find ways of carrying different areas of opinion forward and we thought the linkage might be one way of doing that, we would hope it won't threaten it, certainly the next few weeks are going to be crucial, we think it is a time for all parties to act responsibly the British government as well as nationalist leaders, and I suspect that the next month could be make or break time and I would hope that everyone here, leaders of the nationalist community, would recognise that an not jeopardise what we have achieved so far.

MR. SEAMUS CLOSE: Mention was made that the next month might be make or break time, would you care to expand on exactly what you mean by that?



obstacle to get over so far, that we use our influence in the most positive way we can. And that's what we have been trying to do and I think people need to appreciate that there is, that it is legitimate to engage in peaceful protests, quite legitimate, but that other people and in particular the R.U.C., and you heard about that incident today in Belfast city centre where a group of peaceful protesters standing outside the City hall were attacked by the R.U.C., in an unprovoked manner.

Now, because I do think that, the people that we represent and the people who support the prisoners are not the sort of people who stay at home, they are not the sort of people who express themselves other than coming out onto the streets; the streets have played a very important part in the culture of change in the Six Counties over the last 25 years, and I think that instead of this Forum- and I accept why John and the two Seamus' are giving the views the way they are giving them as they see them, but I also think that we have got to try and ensure that the power that this Forum has is used positively, that the power that this Forum has is used to create a situation where the British government responds to the urgency of the situation.

Sinn Fein didn't release Clegg; that was the British Government did that; they created the crisis long before Clegg's release. Now, I accept all that's been said in relation to the South Armagh situation and elsewhere. We are doing our level best to calm it down. We don't want to see cars burning in the streets, people inconvenienced. So what we, it's not us who is responsible for what is happening on the streets of the Six Counties at the moment.

MR. CLOSE: Madam Chairperson, just two very quick points to Jim?

THE CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

MR. CLOSE: First of all, does he accept then or is it the case



then, that there is people both in membership of Sinn Fein and the I.R.A.? That's the first question. And the second question is from your your ceasefire the Republican Movement have been responsible for the beating of 76 people; now, do you accept that there is personnel- because I am from the same kind of areas as you Jim, I am not looking up in the sky and I know who is doing them, I can see who is doing them, if you are saying that Sinn Fein is not responsible, then there is people wearing different hats on different nights and I think that you should accept here and now that there is personnel have a dual role within your organisation.

THE CHAIRPERSON: Yes. Well, I don't want to-

MS. BREATHNACH: Can I just say, Madam- a Chathaoirleach, I think Seamus Lynch is being deliberately provocative in his, this discussion this afternoon and it is trying to-

THE CHAIRPERSON: - yes, yes.

MR. ALLEN: - you know, take advantage of the a situation which is a very deteriorating situation and as Jim said, the fault very much lies at the behest of the British government, Seamus, and you are well aware of that- well aware of it.

THE CHAIRPERSON: Yes, well I, you don't, there are quite a lot of other speakers, but just I would have to say I myself was in Liganeel Ardoyne Ballysillane a few weeks ago, a few weeks before the release of Clegg and I talked to people there who had nothing to do with either Loyalist or Republican paramilitary organizations but were involved in sort of progressive and peaceful community development organizations and every last one of those groups said to me if Clegg is released it's going to create enormous problems; and that was said to me on both the Loyalist and on the Republican- on the Catholic and Protestant side if you want to put it that way. And goodness knows there was enough warning; there was warning from the S.D.L.P., there was warning



the the line and the depth of which we are thinking. But I believe that those signals, will eventually be successful and I look forward to continuing the work of this Forum.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

THE CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much indeed. I now go on to the Alliance Party. I think it's Seamus Close, thank you.

MR. CLOSE: Thank you, Chair.

By way of addressing the set of questions that are before us, and starting with the first one; ' How do we assess the progress over this past three months? ' I have, I certainly feel that initially, as far as the Forum and the progress that we have made, the most beneficial contribution that we have made to the whole, not only of the Peace Process, but to society in general, is the advantage of being able to glean from dialogue. The fact that we are established around this table, I think, is the greatest progress that we could possibly make. But it is a demonstration that Dialogue is the only way, the only way in which progress can be made.

And therefore I am particularly saddened that so much of the progress that appeared to have been made by way of our out-reaching and the demonstration of the importance of dialogue can, through a crassly insensitive decision, be apparently blown away, thrown away, for whatever reasons. And I am not going to make a judgement on those particular reasons, and of course I am referring to the Clegg case.

But, you know, the immediate future, whilst we have made progress, I believe that the immediate future is fraught with difficulties and fraught with dangers, and therefore we have an added responsibility, each and every one of us, and here I would agree with Gerry Adams who said that all of us have an influence on progress, an influence on the future, and it's how we use that influence, it's how we demonstrate our use of that influence by



which we will be judged, particularly, I feel, over the next few days, or week. Because there are areas where, whilst we all have influence, some might have more influence than others. And whilst I will condemn the decision that has recently been taken for its insensitivity and for its lack of understanding of the political temperature at this particular point in time and the insult which it has afforded to other prisoners and their families, I also feel that I must point to other areas where some sitting around this table like, for example, Sinn Fein, would have an awful lot more influence than I would have, or any member of the Alliance party would have. And I would urge them to use their influence in a positive and constructive way in, for example, the area of the disappeared, the area of punishment beatings and these actions which are still going on, which are still a cause of hurt and dismay within our society.

And I believe if we are going to move forward at all, it demands our, a requirement on all of us to take courage in our hands in dealing with those areas where we have a direct and important influence. And we cannot just criticize one side without looking to the other.

And if I could suggest a little step that all of us perhaps could take, even if we were only to take it for the next seven or eight days, if in everything that we say, everything that we do and in all actions that we take, we attempt to put ourselves in the other person's shoes, whoever that other person might be, and to try to see things from their perspective. We are moving into what is regarded in Northern Ireland as the silly season, with marches, if only both sides, those who feel aggravated by marches and those who feel that it is their inherent and fundamental right to march in areas, could attempt to try to see it from the other person's perspective; and to point out to them all that certainly we all have rights, but rights also infer and demand responsibility and



the responsibility as to how you react to your fellow man. And I feel that often that is not taken proper account of.

This Forum for peace and Reconciliation should be just that, and if there is any message that comes out from the Forum today or this evening, it should be that of calling on the community, all of the community, to have a united community against violence.

Surely to goodness, if we have learnt anything over this past 25 years, we should have learned that any violence achieves absolutely nothing. All it does is leave a legacy of hatred, a legacy of bitterness for a future generation to pick up and involves more hatred, more violence on our successors.

So I think that is the key issue and I welcome this Forum because it gives us all the opportunity, in frankness and in openness, to address our views to those whom a couple of months ago we might very well have considered to be our enemies, political and otherwise. But as I said last week in reference to the late Senator Wilson;

' Surely I defeat my enemy if I make him my friend? '

And I think the one tremendous benefit of this Forum in getting us around this table is that we are able to establish friendship; we are able to establish dialogue and through dialogue to build on our friendships and I hope and trust and pray that that goes on. But I think that to demonstrate that that friendship is really working, it requires us all to take courage in our hands and it requires us all to do things and perhaps to say things publicly in which there are inherent risks. And those risks are, must always be directed toward bringing the people together rather than building on existing divisions. And that's why I would exhort everyone here today to use the opportunity provided in this Forum to get the message of anti- violence, of non- violence across to the community and to make pleas wherever at all possible. And I do believe that, for example if Gerry or Martin or some other



members of Sinn Fein were to say today;

' Please stop the violence'

I think that would have a dramatic impact and it would also add to their credibility and it would also add to their stature within society. Because people in the North, Unionists in particular, and if there are weaknesses to this Forum I think that we have got to recognise that the greatest weakness is the absence of the Unionist population. And therefore we have got to do all in our power, all of us collectively, to do what we can to encourage them to come along here.

So I think, yes, we have made tremendous progress over this past three months. I think there is an awful lot more progress that can be made. I have tried to highlight some of the difficulties. Those difficulties can only be overcome through dialogue and through meaningful dialogue and a desire by all of us to move forward.

We are asked are we satisfied with how the mechanics of the debate have settled down and I would answer that, also in relation to question five, I think there is not enough, and I have made this point before, there is not enough of this type of interchange that we are this having this afternoon. Because I think what we are doing this afternoon is healthy, where we can speak our mind clearly and unequivocally get an interchange of views, rather than as has happened for too often over this past number of months of where we have some presentation made by very worthy people, but it denudes the rest of us of this interchange, which is vital if we are going to get to the depths of how each person thinks and how they are thinking and how they react to particular points.

So I think the sooner, and I think Seamus touched on this, the sooner we get down to the nitty-gritty, the sooner we get down to the hard issues, the hard issues that require these vital exchanges, the better for all of us and the more productive will



be the Forum.

MR. MALLON: Seamus, could I put it in a different way? 'Less dialogue and more communication'

MR. CLOSE: I couldn't have put it better, Seamus.

MR. MALLON: Thank you.

MR. CLOSE: I hope that's not a polite way of him telling me to shut up. There are a few more points on the specific questions that I think require a response; 'What are the views of delegations now to a possible visit of the Forum to Belfast in the autumn to to hear submissions?' The members of the Forum are aware of my view, my party's view on this particular question when it was first raised. Now I put it to you and I accept that we are referring to the autumn. We don't know what is around the corner. But what I have tried to establish is that the immediate future is fraught with difficulties and dangers and any thing that this Forum does should not in any way add to frictions or potential frictions. I don't know what the situation is going to be like in the autumn, I would love to think that by the autumn that it would be in, we would be in round table talks but I don't think that that is going to happen. Because I can recognise the requirements that are put forward by each side of our unfortunate divide; there are those who believe that we should, it should happen immediately but equally there are those who are frightened and say that we cannot have negotiations whilst there are arms under the table or outside the door. That is a legitimate view that is held strongly and people ought to recognise that and try to take the necessary necessary steps to remove those fears rather than building on those fears and aggravating those fears. Oh, that this could happen by the autumn; I believe it could. What it requires is a little bit of goodwill, a demonstration of goodwill across the board and it could happen; we could get around the table. But whilst people are prepared and continually are looking over their



shoulders then unfortunately, it will not happen. Lets look straight ahead, lets face ahead and lets deal with the necessary issues to make that happen to get us all around the table.

' Do we endorse the intentions in regard to publication of Commission studies? ' Certainly; I think that adds to the credibility and the strength of this particular Forum.

Paragraph five I have already referred to in passing; ' can delegations accept the proposal as to frequency of plenary sessions in the autumn?' Broadly, yes. But I think again we have got to be able to demonstrate flexibility. And again we are looking to the autumn, we don't- you know, how long is a piece of string? But broadly, yes I think we have got to deal with the subcommittee reports, we have got to give them due consideration with regard to their presentation and how we follow up on that and that would fall into the bi-weekly plenary sessions-

' Should commence in the autumn on the basis set out here?'- yes.

' Do delegations share the assessment that work on core political issues will require the period up to Christmas to complete?'

On the assumption that Christmas falls this year on the 25th of December, the answer to that is yes- and I am not aware of any changes that might be brought about to that date.

The internal Forum work on out- reach with regard to education and that, yes, obviously I think that there were a lot of people who were demonstrating an interest in getting involved in the whole educational process. We know that that had to be postponed. I think it is important that that is brought on stream as quickly as possible.

The commissioning an expert study on North- South cooperation; yes, whilst this, there have been a number of studies and reports done on North- South cooperation I think there have been an awful lot of disjointed reports done on North-South cooperation and I would like to think that it would be possible, and indeed it



should be possible, that we could have a form of all- embracing report on North-South cooperation. I think that has been lacking up to the moment. I know it is a massive exercise, but we are embarked upon very, very difficult problems and I think that we half go half cock on this one but really be prepared to produce a meaningful all- embracing North-South cooperation report.

' What is the view of our delegation as to the duration of a Forum?' How long is a piece of string?

Thank you.

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