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FROM: S A MARSH, PAB
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- 1. Mr McNeill [1]
- 2. PS/PUS (B&L) - B [2&3]

My 17/1

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- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)-B [4&5]
- PS/Paymaster General (B&L)-B [6&7]
- PS/Minister of State (B&L)-B [8&9]
- Mr Ledlie - B [10]
- Mr Pilling - B [11]
- Mr Deverell - B [12]
- Mr Alston - B [13]
- Mr Thomas - B [14]
- Mr Petch - B [15]

BBC RADIO INTERVIEW WITH GERRY ADAMS

~~IRA SINN FEIN~~

POLITICAL MOVEMENTS
23699 A PROVO

On Saturday 5 January, Gerry Adams (speaking through an actor) was interviewed for the BBC Radio Ulster programme "Inside Politics". It was a fairly wide-ranging interview; and a transcript, which also includes John Hume's comments on what Adams had to say, is available in PAB. But the essence of what he said is as follows:-

(i) Ceasefire.

Adams said that the Christmas ceasefire had not been a stunt and that it should have been welcomed by everybody. He made the point that if PIRA could call off the campaign for three days, in other conditions it might well do it for longer periods. It was now for political leaders to construct conditions where such a suspension in future could in fact become a cessation.

(ii) Conditions for a cessation of violence.

Adams said that the IRA had made it clear that its aim was a British withdrawal from NI and an end to partition. The challenge was for those who purported to be political leaders to try to construct conditions in which the IRA,

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and other "forces engaged in killings", would cease violence. He felt that HMG, given that it had no self-interest in Northern Ireland, and that it could not militarily defeat the IRA, could assist the situation by deciding to leave. Adams went on to say, in what appears to be a critical passage, that HMG should examine (not necessarily adopt) a situation whereby Irish independence could be brought about; it should be open to fresh scenarios and to new relationships between the people of Britain and the people of Ireland. Any other course would carry the implication that HMG was in NI simply to satisfy the concerns of the unionists.

(iii) Dialogue with Sinn Fein.

Adams felt that if HMG were genuine in trying to bring about a settlement, and in order to put substance on the Whitbread speech, one of the next moves should be to start talking to Sinn Fein. He claimed that HMG was looking for excuses not to talk to a party for which 11.4% of the population had voted. (Note: this is the 1987 General Election figure - subsequent elections have seen a tailing off in Sinn Fein support.) He said that talking to PIRA would be a different proposition altogether; but the implication was that bringing Sinn Fein in from the cold might be the start of a process leading to peace.

(iv) The Sinn Fein/PIRA relationship.

Throughout the interview Adams was at pains to distance Sinn Fein from PIRA. He said that Sinn Fein had no wish to speak for PIRA and that as a party it was about unarmed methods of struggle. Its position was one of simply defending the right of people to resort to armed struggle; whether they wished to exercise that right (as did PIRA) was up to them. He himself was open to look at any alternatives to the armed struggle.

(7)

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Comment

This interview seems to mark an important stage in the evolution of Adams' public position. While it includes the usual rhetoric about a need to end partition and remove the British presence it also contains a fairly clear hint that, at least in the first instance, HMG need do no more than agree to consider the possibility of an eventual united Ireland. In short, the strict "Scenario for Peace" line is being softened. The interview also marks a further stage in the process of Sinn Fein attempting to position itself as a respectable political party with a political agenda and an electorate, and willing to be flexible on the means towards achieving its primary aim. Whether this implies a divorce with PIRA, (which is unlikely) or whether PIRA would give up the armed struggle to allow Sinn Fein to pursue the republican objective by political means, is still unclear.

[Signed]

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3. But it is nonetheless possible, and useful, to establish the outlines of what we might say to justify our participation in talks without a cessation of violence. The attached draft attempts to do this. It covers two scenarios: participation in abortive discussions, and the opening of a process which did ultimately lead to a cessation of violence. I have also had a go at playing Adams at his own game by providing wording which emphasises the distinction between Sinn Fein and PIRA; but this is not, I think, essential to the main thrust of what we would have to say.

[Signed]

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