

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NI - TODAY PROGRAMME - THURSDAY 16 DECEMBER 1993

Q: You cannot come to the conference table unless and until you lay down your arms and give them up - hand them over to the authorities.

SOFS: We are saying this, that you have got to bring violence to an end permanently - not a ceasefire, not temporarily - and you have got to satisfy people that that is for real. So, we have said already that within three months you will come to exploratory discussions to explore the consequences of bringing violence to an end. Obviously what you are doing with your arms if you have arms..we are talking about the people in Sinn Fein, who we would wish to see at the negotiating table if they had given up justifying the use of violence, we shall be saying to them "come to exploratory discussions and high on the list of what will be relevant there is what you are going to do with your arms".

Q: Right, so they don't have to give up their before those exploratory discussions?

SOFS: We shall uphold the criminal law. Anybody who holds weapons and munitions against the law will be proceeded against in the ordinary way and that is something which is very relevant to the whole question that we are discussing. If, on the other hand, somebody comes along and says, "very well violence is at an end, I declare violence is at an end, I wish to come and explore with you the practical consequences of that as a preliminary to coming into the main political talks then that is the stage at which that would be discussed.

Q: So, it is a quite clear two-stage process. There is the three month period during which they must qualify to enter these exploratory talks..

SOFS: That's right.

Q: ..and during that period you are not saying the IRA must divest itself of all its weapons?

SOFS: We are saying, of course, we wish everybody in our country to comply with the criminal law and the criminal law remains, it'll be enforced in the ordinary way. But there is, you are quite right, nobody is saying you can within three months enter the main political talks which have been going on last year and again this year. What we are saying is that within three months you will be invited to exploratory talks to examine the mechanics, the way, the means in which you can demonstrate that you have brought violence to an end. So that at some later stage and it'll be for all the participants to agree - not just for us - so that you can enter the main political talks.

Q: And it is at those exploratory talks that you will examine ways under which the means under which the IRA disarms itself?

SOFS: That is correct. But, of course, the sooner they do it the greater the credibility that will attach to their assertion which I very much hope that they