

F. J. D.

LARGEST OF MORNING NEWSPAPERS: THURSDAY 16 DECEMBER 1993

Needless to say all the papers and broadcasting media lead with reaction to yesterday's joint declaration. Broadly speaking the local papers say the ball has now been firmly planted in the IRA's court while Radio Ulster carries in-depth analysis and interviews with figures from across the political spectrum.

Joint declaration

News Letter - "Last chance for Provos" is the front-page headline as it reports on last night's broadcast to the nation by the PM and his words that there is no excuse, no justification and no future for the use of violence. The paper carries the declaration in full, reports on yesterday's Commons statement and also the Dail debate. Mervyn Pauley says it remains to be seen whether the "historic blueprint for peace" can withstand the gathering political storm. Other reaction reported is the disappointment of Sinn Fein, Alliance's "balanced and fair", Molyneaux's guarded support and Paisley's fury at "sell-out".

Irish News - The banner headline here is "Peace blueprint challenge to IRA". It says the IRA has been challenged to end its campaign and join the search for a political settlement. The paper reports that republicans and loyalists are studying the fine print of the declaration. In addition to SF's disappointment, loyalists said they would give no guarantee of a cessation to their violence. The paper also carries details of reaction. It cites the Rev Martin Smyth as warning that misgivings could spark more violence; John Hume asking politicians to come to the table armed only with the 'strength of their conviction; and John Alderdice's comments that he was encouraged. It also carries news of American reaction with Bill Clinton backing the initiative and reaffirming the readiness of the US to contribute in any appropriate way.

Irish Times - The front page says prospects of an IRA ceasefire are in the balance and that Sinn Fein plans talks within the next few days. It says it is understood that plans are being made within SF to consult widely within the organisation and with the Army Council of the IRA. Dennis Coghlan says the balance aims to attract wide support and that the signatories have made the judgment that it is so

compelling that SF and PIRA will find it impossible to withstand public pressure for peace for any length of time. The Northern editor, Dick Grogan, writes that the loyalist paramilitaries will also have to face the question of ending violence.

In its reports on yesterday in the Dail John Bruton expressed the hope that Sinn Fein will renounce violence; Proinsias de Rossa said it offered a potential framework for progress and warned PIRA not to spurn the opportunity; Mary Harney said it was a historic step forward which would improve relations between the countries and urged Unionists to go the extra mile. In her column, Mary Holland poses the question have they gone far enough for SF to deliver the IRA. She says the statement has been crafted with enormous skill but that the thrust of the document is towards a nationalist agenda ("Humespeak"). SF must weigh up the cost of turning down this offer and it might take them some time to decide. It is unlikely we will get peace by Christmas but the declaration is a brave attempt to help us along that road and has brought peace closer.

Irish Press - The paper says hopes now lie with Sinn Fein under its lead headline "Give peace a chance". It says peace still hangs in the balance and reports Dick Spring telling the Dail that any justification for PIRA's struggle has now been removed. The Irish Government has been buoyed by the widespread positive response in the Dail and the guarded welcome from the Official Unionists. Emily O'Reilly writes that no British Government has ever gone so far in recognising the principle of national self-determination and that the declaration represents the greatest opportunity for peace in 25 years. The key question now is whether SF will accept what is on offer. If it wants to oppose it, it needs Hume's support and thus how John Hume now moves is critical. The paper notes elsewhere that an IRA ceasefire can only be endorsed by an "Army Convention". Under the heading "Little prospect of IRA downing guns", Anne Cadwallader says there is no prospect of such a Convention being held unless prior soundings indicate such a proposal would be supported.

Irish Independent - "It's up to the gunmen" is the front page headline. Like others, the paper says hopes for peace now hang in the balance as we await PIRA's reaction though it says these hopes have

been dented by SF's initial response. Reporting the Taoiseach's words last night, the paper says the dogs of war were waiting to be unleashed if the peace process failed, while Dick Spring said that PIRA will have to hand over weapons before they can be involved in the talks process. It also reports President Robinson's hopes that this Christmas will be a time of reconciliation between all the people of Ireland. John Hume has promised to discuss the declaration with Mr Adams. Connor Cruise O'Brien notes that the welcome for the declaration is similar to that extended to the Anglo-Irish agreement. He says the most ominous feature of this declaration is the extent to which its vocabulary reflects that of the Hume/Adams declaration in April. He goes on to say that in short both Governments have been dancing to the IRA's tune.

Editorials

News Letter - In a break with tradition the "Morning View" is on the front page. It says NI's majority may not have been sold out but the Province's position as an integral part of the UK seems less secure. It notes that the declaration has been framed to offer something worthwhile to PIRA and SF and that the ball is firmly in their court but that the first priority must always be to safeguard the peaceful aspirations and constitutional rights of the vast majority of people in this Province, both Protestant and Catholic.

Irish News - The Governments have created the environment for peace to flourish and sceptics must give it a chance. The document is a courageous leap of faith and imagination particularly for John Major and the message to SF, that the door is open, is clear. The Republican Movement will not be forgiven if it rejects the opportunity though it notes Unionists must also give it a chance.

Irish Times - The declaration is not an end but a beginning, a measured and subtle challenge to parties and paramilitaries of all shades. Its significance in the long run may well depend on not only whether the chance for peace is taken but on the even-handedness of its approach to the nationalist and unionist traditions. It is a document which calls for study, is complex and resonant, reasonable and fair. It might be worthwhile to publish as a leaflet for every house in the North.

Irish Press - Yesterday's declaration may deliver the great prize. It amounts to a clearing of the decks and the modified welcome from sane, mainline unionism will have been greatly welcomed. The chief question mark is over SF and PIRA. There is every reason to believe that peace may be possible.

Irish Independent - This historic document merits the heartfelt welcome it has received, but words of praise must be matched by caution. Previous hopes have been raised and dashed. There is no excuse for violence. A long hard road still remains but all difficulties are there to be overcome, not by rejection, obstruction and ostracism but only by honesty and plain dealing and recognition of individual and national rights.

RUC funeral

At the funeral of one of the RUC officers murdered in Fivemiletown the **News Letter** and **Irish News** report the Presbyterian Moderator, Dr Andrew Rodgers, appealing for people in NI to pay careful consideration to the Downing Street declaration.

Laganside

The **News Letter** reports that property company Ewarts is understood to be at the final stages of a contract for the Hilton Hotel Group to manage and run the hotel to be built at Laganbank.