



THE PEACE PROCESS
IN
NORTHERN IRELAND

POSITION
OF THE
PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS

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The Peace Process in Northern Ireland

The position of the Progressive Democrats

After 25 years of civil strife and terrorist attacks, on 1st September 1994, a cease-fire of hostilities in Northern Ireland was declared by Sinn Féin speaking on behalf of the Provisional IRA who have been in pursuit of obtaining by force of arms the independence of Northern Ireland from Great Britain and its incorporation into a new Republic of Ireland.

Since September 1994, a **Peace Process** and talks have been in progress between

- ◇ the Irish Government,
- ◇ the British Government,
- ◇ Sinn Féin who wants a separation from the United Kingdom
- ◇ the Unionists Parties of the province of Ulster who wish to remain part of the United Kingdom.

The cease-fire came to an end of Friday, 9th February 1996 with the explosion of a bomb at Canary Wharf in London's docklands in which two civilians died and scores of people injured.

The Provisional IRA

- * were unhappy with the lack of progress in the talks and blamed particularly the British side for going too slow.
- * had not agreed to decommission arms during the peace talks.
- * did not accept the report of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.
- * did not inform Sinn Féin of their intention to resume violence.

Sinn Féin, the Provisional IRA spokespersons,

- * had not accepted in full the Downing Street declaration agreed between the Irish and British Governments as to the method of securing a peaceful settlement of Northern Ireland's problems.
- * were not willing to see elections held in Northern Ireland before the conclusion of the peace talks;
- * had not spoken in talks during the 18 month period of peace with the Unionist Parties.
- * regretted the deaths, injuries and damage, the bombing of Canary Wharf, but would not condemn either the Provisional IRA or the bombing itself.

The Progressive Democrats re-stated their policy on Northern Ireland in May 1995 in Galway at our National Conference, holding that a permanent solution to the Northern Ireland troubles can only be achieved :

- I. By a commitment to peace means by all Parties as an essential starting point.
- II. By recognising that Northern Ireland is not a politically homogenous society.
- III. By accepting the current constitutional status of Northern Ireland until the freely given consent of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland decides otherwise.
- IV. By a political settlement which will guarantee real equality for the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland.
- V. By the creation of constitution guarantees for all the citizens of Northern Ireland by means of a written Constitution.
- VI. By devolving Government to Northern Ireland .
- VII. By the removal of claims by the Republic of Ireland to enforce the Irish Constitution and Government on the peoples of Northern Ireland.
- VIII. By developing a new relationship between the peoples of the Republic of Ireland and those of Northern Ireland in political, economic, social and cultural terms.

Mary Harney TD, Leader of the Progressive Democrats speaking in Dáil Éireann on Tuesday, 13th February 1996, called for

"the resumption of talks involving all Parties who reject violence, possibly of a round-table or proximity variety. Sinn Féin have isolated themselves. They have not been isolated by anyone else.

It is important that links be maintained with the Party and those who could influence the IRA.

It is important that the (Irish) Government not change its strategy on elections in the North because of the bomb attack. There were obvious problems in relation to elections. They tend to make people more inflexible and less open to the views of others and had a polarising tendency. Elections are concerned about making choices between political Parties and not building bridges between them.

It is important to consider everything including Mr. John Hume's proposal for referendums North and South. I believe that other options could be put to voters in a referendum. The people could decide the fundamental rules under which talks

should take place and give a direction to their political representatives.

It is important to understand the consent principle, and the recent refusal the consent principle and the recent refusal of Sinn Féin to endorse the report it in the report of the Forum on Peace and Reconciliation was worrying. But equally it was important that nationalists knew there would be no internal settlement.

No Party which varied its tactics at will between murder and argument should have open access to Government. It would be wrong for the Government and everybody else not to differentiate between those who fully rejected violence and those who could not. Violence cannot be coupled with politics.

It needed to be repeated in the House over and over again, that killing and maiming were profoundly evil. Peace is not the gift of the gunman. Peace is the birthright of us all."

Des O'Malley TD, PD Party spokesman on Northern Ireland, stated on Wednesday, 14th February 1996, in Dáil Éireann :

T here is a great dilemma here for us all. The vast majority of people on this island so frantically want peace, and permanent peace, that we are all in danger of succumbing to seeing this as an issue between the IRA and the British Government, in other words of seeing it in Sinn Féin's terms or accepting their agenda.

T he reality is different. The kernel of the problem is the inability of the two traditions in Northern Ireland to live together in a normal democratic society without bitter and fundamental mutual distrust.

I am not convinced of the value of an election, but I think that John Hume's suggestion of a referendum be seriously considered. I am alarmed by the role of the IRA and how it is dominating the debate. It has become noticeable since Friday's bomb that many people like to view the Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin as two separate entities, one of which is full of 'militant baddies' and the other consisting of 'peace-loving goodies'. The reality is that there is a high degree of cross-membership between the two organisations, so the suggest that Sinn Féin is a peace-loving organisation that exists primarily to tone down the violent excesses of the IRA is erroneous.

Mary Harney TD making a statement on Monday 19th February 1996 called on Sinn Féin to get back to non-violent politics and said that an agenda would have to be pursued with or without Sinn Féin.

A political and constitutional settlement in Northern Ireland can be achieved in present circumstances if it incorporates :

1. No internal settlement.
2. The principle of consent.
3. Both Governments having a legitimate interest in creating a genuine partnership society in Northern Ireland.
4. The inclusion of a real North-South dimension to the settlement.
5. Three strands to receive their strength and shape by reference to each other.
6. The basis of settlement to emerge primarily from those who were politically at the centre.

A new political order

- with genuine equality of esteem and recognition and
 - a written constitution for Northern Ireland to outlast some possible realignment of the North out of the United Kingdom into an all-Ireland context;
 - with the external constitutional status of Northern Ireland decided by the majority of its people ;
 - with a maximum degree of self-government and
 - new policing structures
- should be called for and accepted.

The Progressive Democrats recognise and acknowledge

- ∅ the sterling contribution made to the Peace Process by the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, the only political Party to draw its electoral support from all strands of the Northern Ireland communities;
- ∅ its leader Dr. John Alderdice for his enlightened and even handed approach towards a lasting and just peace on the island of Ireland.

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