

15 November 1996

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW ADDRESSES MANCHESTER LUNCHEON CLUB

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP, was today in Manchester where he was speaking to an audience of business and professional people at the Manchester Luncheon Club.

Sir Patrick said that the terrorist bombing was not just an attack on Manchester, or even on Britain. "It was an assault on democracy and the rule of law".

Just as the people of Manchester would not be deflected by terrorism from carrying on their daily lives, so the Government would not be deflected from its goal of helping the politicians and people of NI achieve a just and enduring settlement, Sir Patrick said.

He continued:

"What is the British Government's objective in Northern Ireland, knowing as we do that the Republican ceasefire was wantonly and willfully abrogated in February of this year? Is it, as some claim, to achieve victory? Is it to support one tradition over the other? Is it deliberately to stall any prospect of progress in the hope of permanently excluding Sinn Fein?"

"The answer is an emphatic "No".

"Our objective is to find the means by which violence and conflict can be permanently ended. We believe that the only basis for this, and the only way forward, is real negotiations, conducted on the basis of exclusively peaceful methods and an abiding commitment to the democratic process.

"Our objective therefore is not to impose a particular outcome. Our objective is that the people of Northern Ireland, with our help, shall reach a comprehensive agreement through democratic and peaceful methods.

"We now have at last in place a process of negotiations which can deliver just such an outcome. History will show that the IRA made a tragic, fundamental and wicked mistake, when they abandoned their ceasefire just when it became possible to see that negotiations, with Sinn Fein included, could be put in place.

"Throughout the ceasefire, we tried to find a basis for negotiations. Throughout the ceasefire we showed real flexibility and took many political risks. Those risks were justified: but they were not reciprocated. Now we have such a basis - and the negotiations have started.

"Sinn Fein say they believe that real negotiations are the only way forward. I agree. The basis for real negotiations is already there. What is required for Sinn Fein to join them is an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. They must establish their commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and show that they abide by the democratic process. Deeds as well as words will be needed. It is for them to find them. People of goodwill all over the world trust they will.

"In a speech last night Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness, after some stale and predictable criticism of the Government, set out his party's approach to the Talks process.

"Martin McGuinness says the Talks must be inclusive. We agree that they should be inclusive of all parties which make the necessary commitment to rely on peaceful and democratic procedures alone.

"Martin McGuinness says that decommissioning must, without blocking progress, be dealt with to the satisfaction of all the participants in the process of negotiations. We say the way forward is for decommissioning to take place in accordance with the recommendations of the Mitchell Report.

"Martin McGuinness says that if the conflict is to be ended permanently, and I note his use of that word, all should embrace the process in good faith, facing the challenges with imagination, honesty and flexibility. That is our approach, building on the rocks of democracy and consent.

"He invites the two Governments, British and Irish, to take the lead in providing the dynamic in pursuit of an accommodation between the people of these islands. He points to a wide ranging agenda including the development of arrangements and structures which must afford to all, as the Taoiseach said, secure and satisfactory expression and protection in all spheres of public life. That is what we have been doing in all the steps I have described: including the Joint Declaration, the Frameworks for the Future and the painstaking laying of the foundations for the Talks process now under way.

"Finally Martin McGuinness said that real negotiations are the only way forward. We agree wholeheartedly. And that must mean dependably repudiating the bomb and the bullet and establishing a definitive commitment to peaceful methods".