

DRAFT ARTICLE FOR PRIME MINISTER

Mr Gerry Adams has been at pains recently to emphasize his commitment to peace and his belief that 'we are in the final phase of the conflict'. I sincerely hope that is true. At the same time, however, he tried to cast doubt on the Government's own commitment to securing peace. He said that we were unreasonably refusing clarification of the Downing Street Declaration.

I want to leave no doubt as to where the truth lies. Mr Reynolds and I have gone to great lengths to ensure that the Declaration is fully understood. I believe - and the Taoiseach shares my view - that the Declaration is clear. Nevertheless, if there is genuine doubt about anything it says then the Government will point to the text itself to dispel it. What I will not do is open a back door to negotiations by glossing or shading the language and meaning of the Declaration.

Let me repeat what it says about self determination, because this too has been misrepresented.

First, the British Government has 'no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland'. That doesn't mean that we don't care about it, nor that we don't share the interest of its people in a secure, prosperous and peaceful future.

It does mean that we would have no reason to wish to frustrate the democratically expressed wishes of the people.

Second, our 'primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island'. We will work with the Irish Government to achieve such an agreement, which 'may, as of right, take the form of agreed structures for the island as a whole, including a united Ireland achieved by peaceful means'.

We agree that 'it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish'.

Third, we will 'introduce the necessary legislation to give effect to this, or equally to any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people living in Ireland may themselves freely so determine without external impediment'.

In short, democracy will prevail.

In his Joint Statement with John Hume in April last year Mr Adams said 'the exercise of self-determination is a matter for agreement between the people of Ireland'. He said that 'such a new agreement is only achievable and viable if it can earn and enjoy

the allegiance of the different traditions on this island, by accommodating diversity and providing for national reconciliation'.

John Hume believes that this principle is accepted in the Declaration and that 'past reasons given by the republican movement for armed struggle no longer exist'.

Does Mr Adams? If not, why not? The people have the right to know.

Let me be plain on another point. The British Government will, as I said in the Declaration, 'encourage, facilitate and enable the achievement of such agreement'. We will, however, not try to persuade people to go for Irish unity, any more than for any other solution.

Agreement - any agreement - is what we shall try to persuade them to achieve. As the Taoiseach said to the Irish Association on 10 January, 'the Irish people today do not want the British Government to coerce a deeply unwilling Northern majority into a united Ireland against their will'. Leaving this matter to the people living in Ireland to decide is not compatible with seemingly trying to convince them.

Before the Declaration was published there was a lot of speculation about what it would say. Many confident predictions were made, most of them wrong.

So I pointed out, once it was published, all those things it did not say which people had been led to expect. It did not set out or require any particular outcome: after all, it is not a solution. But nor does the Declaration rule anything out, providing only it is achieved peacefully, by agreement and consent.

What matters now is what is in the Declaration, and that it provides a foundation for progress towards a lasting settlement. We are talking about political representatives of Irish people sitting down without outside interference and deciding what kind of society suits all our interests. Mr Adams might recognise that last sentence. He wrote it in his book 'The Politics of Irish Freedom'. This amounts to a substantial exploratory agenda.

Sinn Fein claims not to understand the place of the Declaration in a 'peace process'. There is nothing obscure about this either. The Declaration is not a peace plan. It certainly isn't a solution on its own. It is simply the view of the two governments about the principles involved in a process leading to an agreed outcome.

Those central principles are democracy, and an absence of coercion - in other words consent, no outside interference and an end to violence.

As a first step those principles have to be publicly accepted and acted upon.

After that the Taoiseach, for his part, intends to establish a Forum for Peace and Reconciliation which would be open to Sinn Fein.

For ours, we intend that within three months Sinn Fein and the Government could begin an exploratory dialogue. Its aims would be to discuss how Sinn Fein would become involved in the three-stranded political talks, how they could be brought fully into normal political life in Northern Ireland, and what the consequences of ending violence would be. They know this is our intention: we told them of it last November.

I believe this amounts to a substantial exploratory agenda.

Those exploratory discussions would in themselves be part of the process of bringing Sinn Fein back into normal political life, in a developing dialogue between the Government and other parties, on matters like education, housing, healthcare, crime, and fair employment.

They would take place against a background where violence had no place. As confidence returned, the practical consequences of that would be felt across Northern Ireland.

The question of continuing violence is the key. I heartily endorse the idea that the gun should be taken out of Irish politics. But who has kept it there? Last year terrorists (not all of them republican by any means) killed 86 people. The

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security forces killed none. If the terrorists discard the gun for good, there will be no need for British soldiers on the streets, nor for emergency legislation.

Now as to the political talks. It would be wrong of me to predict their outcome, but certain things are plain.

First, there will not be, to use the shorthand, a return to Stormont. There is no going back in Northern Ireland. The position against which those first civil rights protests in 1969 were aimed was unacceptable, and has long since been reformed.

Second, I expect to see institutions reflecting the common interests in the island, as it faces the challenges of a competitive world and the opportunities of political agreement. The character and depth of these is very much for discussion.

Third the two Governments will be building on the close partnership we already have as members of the European Union and as good neighbours in these islands.

Whatever the shape is of final agreement in the talks, it will not be imposed on anyone. It will be the people who will have decided.

There is no purpose in living in the past, in raking over an often miserable history. Dreadful deeds have been done by all sides in past centuries. We should all regret that, but those of us alive today are not responsible for them. The Taoiseach has said that

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'no one should fall into the trap of repeating the tragic history that led to the Civil War that marred the birth of this State'. As an Englishman accepting my country's part in that history, I agree.

Our generation must look to the future. We want to give to the people the power to take the decisions affecting their own lives. Will Sinn Fein take the opportunity? Will they now renounce violence, and trust the people?

cc MS/MS (LAB) - B  
PS/Mr Pell - B  
Mr Thomas - B  
Mr Williams - B  
Mr Quinn - B  
Mr Macrae - B  
Mr Rickard - B  
Mr Seston - B

MR BELL - B

POSSIBLE SINN FEIN RESPONSES TO THE JOINT DECLARATION

Jonathan Stephens, in his minute of 7 February, asked for advice on the various responses we might get from the Provisionals (other than straight acceptance, rejection or continued prevarication) and how we might handle them. A draft reply is attached, and I should be grateful for comments from addressees by noon tomorrow.

2. I should particularly value advice from Mr Rickard on whether there are other scenarios which might be considered.

(signed)

J. A. DAVIES

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