



WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH GERRY ADAMS

November 7, 2019
Belfast, Northern Ireland

Participants

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Also Present

Richard McAuley, Sinn Féin

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Riley: This is the Gerry Adams interview, as a part of the [William J.] Clinton Project. We're in Belfast at the Roddy McCorley social club. We're grateful for the time. You've had an unfortunate morning; you had a funeral. I thought in honor of your friend I might ask you first to say a few words about the person you lost, and why this was important to you.

Adams: We actually have three funerals. We have the funeral of the man we have just buried, a man called Richard Glenholmes. He was 85 years of age, older than Richard [McAuley] and me. I met him first 50 years ago. He was interned in Long Kesh at the same time I was, and he also spent time in jail in Britain.

The other man is a cousin of mine, Gerard Begley, who is about seven years older than me. When I was 5, he was 12 and we lived in the same street. We went to the same school, and he used to bring us to football games—Gaelic football—and hurling, which is an Irish sport. He was a great Gael, a great sportsperson, a very, very fine hurler himself. He taught me hurling and football when I was young, and he went on to teach my son and his peer group. Gerard is being buried tomorrow.

The best known of the trio is a man called Des Wilson, Father Wilson, whom I'll mention in my remarks later. He was 94 years of age. I saw him maybe two to three weeks ago. He clearly was dying. He had been in declining health for maybe the last three years or so but remained very politically engaged, very alert and up-to-date with Brexit and all the machinations of politics, North and South, and in the States, and everywhere else. It's just very unfortunate that we buried Dickie today, we bury Gerry Begley tomorrow, and we'll bury Father Des Wilson on Saturday.

It's a reminder of friendship and history lived and lives lived, and also a wee reminder of our own mortality. We all got totally soaked—It was a typical Irish funeral; it rained incessantly—In Ireland they say, "Happy the corpse that it rains on."

Strong: That would make a majority of them happy.

Adams: [laughter] Yes, absolutely. So that's the day we've had. I'm very thankful to you for shifting from Dublin to Belfast. So, fire on.

Riley: Terrific. I guess the way to start is to ask you if you had any knowledge of Bill Clinton before the Presidential campaign in 1992.

Adams: Not in any detailed or definitive way, but let me contextualize, if I may, as briefly as I can. As part of Sinn Féin's peace strategy, and also as part of trying to reshape the republican struggle to a certain extent and to grow a Sinn Féin organization—The dominant organization in republicanism had been the IRA [Irish Republican Army]—a group of other activists and I

wanted to develop a popular political party. Sinn Féin existed, of course, but it was mainly a protest movement, which was a very good thing for it to be, but we wanted to develop it into something else. We had embraced electoralism, particularly following the hunger strikes of 1981.

So as part of looking at everything that we needed to do to get better at what we were trying to do—which was to end British rule in our country—we looked at other struggles, and clearly every other struggle had an international dimension to it. We were very influenced by South Africa, which was the big anti-apartheid movement throughout the world. I was a member of it, it was global and so on, and it influenced us.

When we looked then at our own ability or inability, the strong place that we had in the world was Irish America. We also had a number of organizations there, and other groups of people who were active on Irish issues, justice issues, calling for an end to British rule and so on.

As part of our engagement with Irish America, we met a man called Ciaran Staunton. He was from Mayo, had been heavily involved in the immigration reform movement, and we were talking to him about politics in the States and could we build popular support from where we were. Now remember, the peace process—my talks with John Hume, the Downing Street Declaration, these different developments—was happening here, and people in the States were watching this.

Another man I'd met years before, Niall O'Dowd, was the publisher of *Irish America* magazine and also of the *Irish Voice* newspaper. Niall picked up that there was something happening in Ireland; he was interested in the Hume-Adams talks, interested in other bits and pieces of what was going on here. He came to meet with me, and he met with some of our small group that were working on this. We were trying to build support in the States for the type of demands we were making for talks for Sinn Féin and our electorate to be given our rights, for an end to British militarism, and so on.

Niall was very taken by this and felt that things were shifting in the political landscape on the island of Ireland, and felt there was potential for what was happening in the States. He was one of the people telling us, "There's a Presidential election coming along; there's a guy here from Little Rock, he's a bit of an outsider, may be interesting."

Remember, before this, the administrations took the British line. The Irish government echoed the British line, so there was really no contest. In fact, the sections of Irish America were more advanced on these issues than the Irish government was. The Irish government at different times had campaigned against the MacBride Principles campaign, which was to end discrimination, and had campaigned against the people falsely jailed for the Birmingham bombings, and so on. The Irish government really had a very reprehensible role, generally speaking, in terms of all of this. The British, of course, had the position that this was an internal matter for the government of the United Kingdom, so butt out and stay out.

All of that was sort of bubbling along, back and forth. I became conscious that Jerry Brown and Bill Clinton were going to attend a Presidential candidates' meeting in New York. John Dearie was one of the organizers of that. I actually hadn't applied for a visa to go to the States, but we

were strongly advised that I should apply for a visa, in the certain knowledge, as was the practice, that I would be denied it.

I did that, and I was denied it, and that then made it an issue for the folks in New York to raise with the Presidential candidates, and they both came out. Bill Clinton, because he became President, came out and said in response to the questions that he would give me a visa, and he would support the MacBride Principles campaign.

Pat Finucane was a human rights lawyer who had been killed as a direct result of collusion between the people who'd killed him and the British state. All of the people who killed him were employed by, were agents of, were armed by, were directed by, were given intelligence by the British services.

So President Clinton made what was a very advanced statement on all of these matters and also said he would look at appointing a Special Envoy. The Brits railed against that; they sent their key people over to argue against this approach. The Irish government may also have come out against the type of approach. I can't say that for certain, but I'm almost certain that they also protested about that.

Niall O'Dowd, meantime, had put together a collection of people, and his notional view was to try to get some sort of representative coalition of corporate America, of the labor movement, the trade union movement, of people who were involved in politics. So he brought together a number of people—and I hope I don't leave out any of the names.

Bill Flynn was one of them. Bill was a very wealthy, very successful businessperson. I had met him, actually, in Belfast, and he had met Martin McGuinness in Derry. He was in Derry for a conference, and he met Martin, and he subsequently came along and met me. I was taken by Bill, and we were friends up until his death just a year ago.

Niall had thought Chuck Feeney would be an interesting person for me to meet. I like to think that Chuck was what's best about America. He was just modest, down-to-earth, very progressive, decent, and very wealthy. He gave away his wealth. He gave it away to good causes everywhere.

There were two people from the labor movement: Joe Jameson and Bill Lenihan.

Adams: Bill Lenihan, and Bruce Morrison, who had been very active in immigrants' rights issues—famous for Irish people, anyway, Morrison. Visas. I think that was the grouping.

Riley: Can I ask a question about your trust in Niall O'Dowd? It's not clear from the materials that I've looked at where—This is a man who, when you dig into the history, is absolutely crucial to what's going on. I'm not quite clear how you came to have such trust in him in an environment where there were people who were untrustworthy.

Adams: Well, I didn't know him that well. I had been interviewed by him maybe a decade before all of this. He was very close to Ciaran Staunton, and they actually became brothers-in-law. Niall married Ciaran's sister. No, sorry, the other way around. Ciaran married Niall's sister, Orlaith [Staunton]. So Ciaran I knew. They also had picked up quite a bit of political savvy and contacts through their work on immigration reform.

And he was delivering. He said, “Look, I want you to meet this man Chuck Feeney. He’s interested in Ireland.” We met for a couple of hours, and we still remain friends to this day. Chuck doesn’t enjoy good health now. Niall had also enlisted the support of Bill Flynn, whom I had already met. He was a guy who could deliver, and he was adding to the work that John Hume and I were doing by sounding out people in the political system in the States.

So fast-forward a moment—and I’ll come back to this question again. Influential in all of this is [Senator Edward M.] Teddy Kennedy. Teddy Kennedy and John Hume were best buddies and had known each other for a very long time. Jean Kennedy Smith was appointed by President Clinton as Ambassador to Ireland, which was seen as a very good thing, a very positive thing. And it was a very good thing.

Now bring in Father Alec Reid. He is the thread that binds all of this together, because he had been tick-tacking between me and John Hume. He’d been talking to anybody on the British side he could talk to. He was talking to the Irish government. He was talking to me and listening to all of us. He presented himself to Jean Kennedy Smith, and the two of them hit it off and developed a really close relationship.

The *saggart*, as we called him—It’s the word for priest—The *saggart*, Father Alec, nicknamed, or code-named, Jean Kennedy Smith an *spéirbhean*, which is the Irish word for “spirit woman.” She was wonderful; she was down-to-earth, very straight, and very prepared to push out the boundaries. She knew John Hume through her brother Teddy. They clearly didn’t know me, but they wanted to endorse the work that John was doing, and I presume if I was good enough for John, I was good enough for them. Of course, Father Reid was talking to her and meeting her quite often and giving her the twists and turns of all of this.

By now Niall O’Dowd was talking directly to the Clinton administration. The people who had come together around Niall O’Dowd—their main spokesperson being Bruce Morrison—had visited us here in Ireland. They did so on the general platform that they weren’t representing the White House, but they were going to report back to the White House.

They came to visit us here in Belfast, and we took them downtown to meet a very, very representative grouping of community people, of activists, of people working on the coalface trying to stop conflict, opposing sectarianism, opposing British militarism, working on behalf of victims, and so on. They were here for a very short period.

Our interest was to get an IRA cessation, and the interest, I presume, of the White House was to suss out, to ascertain, whether an IRA cessation was possible. But of course the IRA hadn’t any notion of having a cessation and had no grounds from their point of view to do so. What I was working on, what John Hume was working on, and what Father Reid, particularly, and Father Des Wilson—whom I mentioned earlier—had been working on, was an alternative to armed actions.

We were making the case—or I was making the case, and Father Reid made this the core part of his doctrine—that there’s no point denouncing. There’s no point condemning. These are serious people. They wouldn’t engage in armed actions if they thought there was some alternative, so get off your high horse. You have a responsibility as a clergyperson, as a church leader, as a

politician, as a member of civic society to pursue justice, to pursue peace, and to show that there's an alternative way of doing it. So that's what we were—which is more, of course, than simply having an IRA cessation, even if one had been possible, which it wasn't.

There was then quite intricate to-ing and fro-ing around a lot of these elements, and we coined the phrase within our own small management group of keeping all the balls in the air. We had dialogue indirectly through a back channel with the British and John Hume as well. We had dialogue with the Irish government through Father Alec, and John Hume as well. And we had this American dimension to it, with Jean Kennedy Smith in a very central position, with John Hume also—and, of course, with Niall O'Dowd and Ciaran Staunton directly dealing with us back home.

When President Clinton became President Clinton, that group went to see him again and said, "Look, you made these commitments. You have to deliver on them."

I've always admired Bill Flynn for this. Bill Flynn died when he was in his early 90s, so he came to all of this when he was in his very late 60s or early 70s. He would have been a conservative Catholic American, probably Republican in his politics. He was a wonderful human being, and he was very curious. He was very open to ideas, very open to thinking.

In the 20 or 30 years that I knew him, and Richard as well, we used to have all sorts of interesting—He discovered one time that there was such a thing as gay priests, which was something he [*laughter*—most of his friends were priests, remember—was really fascinated by, that there could be such a thing.

He discovered all sorts of other wonderful dimensions of human life, but he also became deeply engrossed in what we were doing. He also—and his friend Bill Barry—opened up connections into the unionist and loyalist community, which I think were very important, and which he kept. And Tom Moran—They're both dead now—both of them kept those connections open, which was important in trying to bring about a cessation, but also in trying to give people from that community a sense that they had a place in the scheme of things, which of course they have.

I'm compressing all of this. Our friends in the American group came back. Maybe there was only one visit, maybe there were two visits; I can't remember precisely at the moment. We had said to them, "Look, you can bring a part of the jigsaw to the table here. If the support of Irish America can be garnered, that's very powerful in persuading people they don't need armed actions. We have powerful allies in the USA [United States of America]."

Remember now, the connection between Irish republicanism and Irish radicalism and the Irish in America goes back to the Great Hunger, and there's a very stellar history. They funded the 1916 Rising; the Fenian movement was founded in the States. So there's a really progressive, connected, and knowledgeable thread between a section of Irish America and Ireland.

These folks started to think about what they could do. Of course, they wanted the President to keep to his commitments: to give me a visa, to come out against discrimination, to support MacBride, and so on. What I thought was really especially important from Bill Flynn's point of view and from his background—He agreed—He was chairperson of a group—He would ask them to host a conference in New York. What's the group called?

McAuley: The American Committee on Foreign Policy.

Riley: May I ask you? Before this group is convened in 1993, although the President had made commitments in the campaign, there were opportunities for him in '93 to make good on those commitments, and he didn't do so. Did you lose confidence in him at that time? Are there things you can tell us that are, to your knowledge, relevant for understanding why the President didn't grant the visa in '93 or didn't appoint a—

Adams: First of all, it wasn't a matter of me having confidence in the President. I didn't know the President from Adam. He didn't know me. But I had confidence in the people who had presented themselves and who clearly were well-intended, decent, good people who wanted to help, and I had increasing confidence in their seriousness.

That's why I was singling out Bill Flynn, because he then—and he may not put it like this, and the President may not even like it to be put like this—he put it up to the President. He hosted the conference. He said, "I'm inviting all the leaders including Adams, so let's get the visa."

He wouldn't have put it in those terms, but that was the reality. They also funded big full-page advertisements in the *New York Times*, which had a huge range of civic Irish America saying, "Mr. President." Why didn't Bill Clinton do it previously? He's only into the job; he's dealing with all sorts of other issues. From when he first made the commitment, I'm sure the Brits were beating down his door to say, "Hey, back off," and so on.

As we discovered afterward, most of his advisors were saying, "Don't do this." So here's this man just into the job. I wasn't at all annoyed, concerned, or disappointed. I've always said to Irish America, all the time—Our connection to the White House and to the USA is Irish America. It isn't President [George W.] Bush or President Clinton or President [Barack] Obama or President [Donald] Trump. It's the people in Irish America who put the issue of Ireland on the agenda.

In fairness to Bill Clinton, he became initially, in my opinion, intellectually involved in this issue. Niall O'Dowd said way back that this is an outsider, this is a guy who isn't part of the system, or part of the establishment, and what we were trying to get was some lateral action from outside the box.

So here we were on this little island, locked into conflict in perpetuity with our nearest neighbors unless someone came in to open it up and allow other options to be entertained or to take root.

On one of the visits of what we came to call the Connolly House Group, which was this group of individuals I have described who—on the back of the Presidential candidate's giving the commitments—had styled themselves as "Americans for a New Irish Agenda." They had actually been asked by some of the staff, or some of the senior people in the Clinton camp, to work for this new Irish agenda. We called them the Connolly House Group because that's where we met them.

On one of the times they came, they wanted, as an indication that they had clout, the IRA to call a cessation. Of course the IRA wouldn't do that, but what the IRA was persuaded to do was to have a period where there weren't any operations. So it wasn't that they called it cessation, or

indeed that they were even, from their point of view, trading anything off. There was an ebb and flow to what they did in their armed campaign, so coincidentally then there was an ebb.

What caused us considerable consternation then—because it was very high-profile and got an awful lot of publicity—was the claim that there was a cessation. That caused a lot of difficulties with IRA grass roots and republican grass roots. But all of that was, I suppose, managed in due course.

What I'm trying to do is to give you some sense that this was a shifting situation, and every phone call, every connection, every meeting between the *saggart* and the *spéirbhean* all presented other new elements, new challenges, or new positive things.

At the same time, we were now dealing directly with the Irish government, or at least with senior people in Fianna Fáil who happened to be in the Irish government. They would argue they weren't representing the government, they were representing the party. We were trying to develop what John Hume and I had put together as a paper. What's always been very interesting to me is that very few people know what Hume-Adams is. I can't even remember. *[laughter]* It was broad principles. There would be no internal settlement; in other words, partition doesn't work. The people of the island have the right to determine their own future and so on.

But even though most people didn't know—and we hadn't released this—it was very popular because of John's stature. It was very popular, I suppose, from the broadly republican point of view because I was involved. People who thought that John Hume was sound were saying, "Well, it must be OK," and people who thought that I was sound were thinking that it was OK.

Of course, the unionists and the British were giving off about it, which meant there must have been something decent in it. We were trying to work out a position that reflected those types of broad principles in Irish government approach and policy. Also, Sinn Féin was a banned organization. Sinn Féin was a censored organization. Sinn Féin was banned from the use of municipal halls and town halls and so on in the Southern state. Interviews couldn't be carried at all in the Southern state. Voices of Sinn Féin representatives couldn't be carried in the Northern state or in Britain itself.

So there was a whole plethora of reforms, but the main ones were around the broad principles of a peace strategy. How do you get peace? The key to that was talk, unconditional talk.

Strong: Can I ask one question that goes back just a little bit? After you did get to know President Bill Clinton, did you ever have occasion to ask him why he made that promise in '92?

Adams: No.

Strong: He was advised not to, and the other candidates commonly promised a U.S. Envoy. But he was different in answering that question positively. I was just wondering if you ever—

Adams: Well, no, I never asked him, "Why did you do it?" I obviously thought he was right to do it. *[laughter]*

Strong: He came to think he was right to do it also.

Adams: No, no, he's always said—He and I would still meet occasionally, and we would still communicate occasionally. He would always say that any commitments that we made, we kept, that when he talked to me—or Martin McGuinness, for that matter—and we said we would do something, we did it. I was never, to tell you the God's honest truth, really that curious about why he did it. He did it. It was the right thing to do, and that was proven by subsequent events.

Now the other thing is this: he became more knowledgeable in the details, in the twists and turns and the nuances, of what was happening here, perhaps, than government ministers in Dublin.

Strong: And why did he—? How did he do that?

Adams: Well, first of all, he's very smart. That's first of all. He's very smart. It's not for me to say he was being told all these things about us, and then when we started to meet, maybe he was taken by some of what we were arguing for. Given his record on issues of importance to human beings, why wouldn't you talk to people? Why wouldn't you dialogue?

And then, you see—and this is of key importance—we started to become successful. How many successful U.S. foreign policy issues are there? Here was this one, which was being successful. And in fairness to Hillary Clinton, she also was very immersed in this process. We attended many meetings—and sometimes they were quite long meetings—and they were informal. There were formal meetings, of course, but there were also times when you would meet the President on the side of some other meeting, and it could take an hour, two hours. Hillary Clinton, the First Lady, was equally interested in all of what was going on.

So when you reflect on it, there was a change. Maybe John Major did his best, but John Major didn't do anything. From the Irish republican point of view, he was given the process on a plate by John Hume and me, and he didn't and couldn't, and maybe he just wasn't able to. I'm not saying he was bad or anything like that, just that he was a typical British Prime Minister.

Tony Blair came in, and then there was this, which I've always thought was very fortuitous, you had for a long number of years—you had two Clinton terms. You had Bertie Ahern, you had Tony Blair, and you had the continuity of a Sinn Féin leadership as well. I think Ahern and Blair were in government for three terms, or certainly for 10 years anyway. And they had a very, very small group of people dealing with this issue, and we in Sinn Féin had a very small group of people dealing with this issue, and it was the same group.

Unionist leaders changed, the SDLP [Social Democratic and Labour Party] leaders changed, different other people changed, but that Blair–Ahern–Sinn Féin axis remained, and for the time that President Clinton was in the White House, that was a very, very important dimension.

We then move forward to the point where we think we have all the parts of the jigsaw together. We have an agreement of sorts between ourselves and the Irish government, but it needs to be tied down. We have an agreement much more clearly between myself and John Hume.

The IRA cessation was not negotiated with the British. The British had very little involvement in it. Even though there were back channels to the British, and Father Alec was meeting with different people there, in fact, the development of the alternative to armed actions—which we

were almost on the cusp of launching—then needed the American element. That’s where Bill Clinton came up trumps.

A lot may have happened that I’ve missed in between, but essentially we wanted Joe Cahill to go to the States for two reasons: one, to talk to Irish republicans in Irish America, but also to indicate to Irish republicans in Ireland that there’s a change. Joe Cahill was a very well-known figure; he had been sentenced to death by the British for the killing of a police officer some time ago. He had been involved in importation of weapons. He’d actually been deported from the States at least once.

So we applied for a visa for him and a man called Pat Treanor. Pat happened to be one of the people who was working on our American desk, but also Joe wasn’t in good health. He needed somebody to accompany him. That’s where Jean Kennedy Smith came into her own, and where Father Alec came into his own.

Of course Father Alec knew Joe Cahill. I don’t know, I’m told all of this. Albert Reynolds told me, because Albert was by now the Taoiseach. By the way, Albert played a huge role in this. He had agreed to a Downing Street Declaration with John Major, which we thought was inadequate, and I think we were proved right. There would never have been a Good Friday Agreement if we had settled for a Downing Street Declaration. So we thought Albert was wrong to do that.

But in fairness, once he saw that we weren’t budging on the issue, he continued to engage, and he spoke personally to Bill Clinton about the importance of getting the visa. I had made a public statement, and John Hume had made a public statement. Albert himself as Taoiseach had said that there were potential developments, and so on.

So he tells the story that Clinton came back to him and said, “You want me to give this guy a visa?” [*laughter*] Albert said, “I never told you he was an altar boy, but he’s important in the scheme of things.”

So Joe got the visa, and he and Pat Treanor went off. Part of the choreography of these events was that they would happen without announcement. Of course, the media got the story quite quickly that the IRA would declare a cessation, and then within a clearly defined short time, John Hume and I would meet with the Taoiseach in government buildings, and this would be seen as a new era moving into an unarmed phase of struggle.

Now famously that broke down maybe a year later with the Canary Wharf bombings, and I would say that was the time that Bill Clinton was probably under the most pressure, because all of the naysayers and the begrudgers were saying, “Oops. We told you so.”

Riley: He had made the trip here by then?

Adams: Yes. And what happened when he made the trip—It was quite interesting, you see. The British insisted that we would go through a process of what they referred to as decontamination. John Major had said it would turn his stomach if he had to meet with me. It wasn’t actually a gracious response to what was, in our Anglo-Irish situation, quite momentous developments. But anyway, that’s the way it was.

Then of course the unionists were refusing to engage, and there were all sorts of restrictions, and none of the sensible things that could have been done were done with any grace. For example, when I got the visa to go to the States—and it was a very limited visa, I think it was for 36 hours.

Riley: This is the first one?

Adams: Yes. I was limited to New York. One of the things I found quite amazing was that the American broadcasters were absolutely in amazement that my voice couldn't be broadcast. They thought it was funny, they thought it was nuts, they thought it was—The British were almost embarrassed. It became a matter of ridicule. We don't broadcast the guy's voice? What sort of people are you?

Strong: By the way, was it always your words, just someone else's voice?

Riley: That they were hearing.

Adams: Well, insofar as I know.

Strong: They weren't editing your words?

Adams: No, I wouldn't think so, because it wasn't the British corporations, and they didn't all do it. It was some broadcasters who wanted to break the ban, but most broadcasters just didn't bother, because it would have been difficult. Say there's a breaking story. You have to go and get an actor; you have to go and get this, get that, and so on.

There was a nuisance element to it, and as there were obviously people in the British broadcasting system who supported censorship, there were remarkably good people who stood against it and were really robust critics of that sort of silly, stupid policy.

It goes back to what I think is the real essence of the entire peace process and the essence of any peace process anywhere. That is that dialogue is a must-have premise, and once you just take that concept, we have to talk. We have to listen. We can't decide who's going to talk for the other side. We can't say, "Oh, we'll talk to you, but we're not going to accept So-and-So."

This is what happens in some other conflict processes where they say, "Yes, we'll open up engagements, but we can't meet [Yasser] Arafat, or we can't meet whoever," and so on. Once you accept that concept, everything else flows.

If, however, you do what the British did here—They gave the management of the difficulties here over to the generals. They made it a military problem, but it was political, the residue of a colonial situation. Once you give it to the generals, they'll advocate, because you have to demonize. You have to dehumanize. You have to cut the oxygen of publicity. You can't have someone on television arguing the case, even if that someone is an elected official, when you're saying these people are criminals, they're terrorists, they're gangsters, or whatever it is.

Once you move in the direction of a military response to what is essentially a political situation, then all of these matters—like not being allowed to go to the States, or this is an internal matter

for the government, or special rules for prisoners, or special courts or special trials or discrimination, the withholding of funding from communities—all of this follows a pattern.

You take the other position, it also follows a pattern. What I would imagine President Clinton was doing to a certain degree was acting on his instincts, on his general instincts as an outsider. Like *These guys are making a bit of sense; let's give them a chance.*

Riley: You made several trips to the United States in '94. I don't know whether you have any specific recollections of that first trip you want to add, but I'm particularly interested in that second trip. Richard, you were on that one, if I recall correctly. That's where you were in country for maybe two weeks.

Adams: Four weeks.

Riley: What are you finding out on those trips that's useful to you?

Adams: The first trip—again, I may not have been as coherent as I should have in trying to describe the two opposite approaches to resolving a problem. Part of the problem was that it backfired on the British because I, by that time, had a certain notoriety, so the media paid attention. I go to the States now, nobody knows. You just go in and go about your business and come out again. But then it was a huge story. The British, or some of their organs, described it as the worst crisis since the Suez Crisis. Major refused to take phone calls from President Clinton for days afterward.

So I think our entry, and my personage entering the States, couldn't have been managed better if we had complete control of—because for the time that I was there I did nonstop media, coast to coast, nonstop. Here you have this big Irish American diaspora, probably most of it dormant, worried about peace in Ireland, I suppose, saddened, disappointed by the ongoing conflict. Then here's somebody talking what they think is a bit of sense about partition, an end to British rule, make peace, the unionists are part of us, let's embrace each other, let's have self-government for the island, let's end discrimination, and so on.

Riley: It's interesting. You perceive your audience on that first trip mainly not to be the President of the United States or people in Washington but the diaspora.

Adams: Oh, absolutely, yes, and also those other progressive elements across the USA who would relate to these issues. Obviously, it was an honor to represent Sinn Féin, and I've always said we have no special entitlement to go to the USA, but people in the USA do have an entitlement. If they want to hear an argument, their government should have the maturity and confidence in them to hear that argument as opposed to bringing the opposite argument and giving them a platform all the time.

We met African Americans. We met Hispanic Americans. We met Native Americans. Never to this day do we take any position on domestic politics in the States. We would be very careful not to get caught up in any of that. In the big trip we took, which was a month long, we didn't do quite a city a day, but we did near enough a city a day. We went from coast to coast, and we covered a huge amount of ground. The exposure that had been created by the first visa meant that

wherever we went there were huge crowds, and clearly the vast majority of them were Irish Americans. But there was also huge media attention.

Then remember, there were things happening back here which fed into this, so it wasn't like a rock group going on concert. It isn't just what I'm saying or somebody else is saying that's part of our outreach to the people we're meeting. It's also that they're watching what's happening back home. Are the peace talks going to start? Oh, Tony Blair is coming, so that looks more interesting. Will the cessation be put together again? Will Blair open up talks? Will the unionists respond? All of those were being watched.

Remember also that while it may have been the days before social media, there were still lots more electronic and other connections from Ireland into the USA, so people were very conversant with what was happening, people who were interested, and more were interested, because here was the possibility of getting peace in Ireland. So those who maybe went to a rally where I was speaking got on the phone back home, or got on to some news agency or television or some means of keeping up to date. So it was a developing and a very, very live story.

When President Clinton came, it was at a time when the Brits weren't engaging, and at that time I realized the strength and the power of a Presidential visit, because of course the White House were bringing, in a very focused way, all of their muscle to bear on Downing Street. Things weren't going well, and if my memory serves me right, just on the eve of that visit there was a commitment from Downing Street to start peace talks within a few months.

President Clinton was seen like the cavalry coming in, and there started, I think, a love affair between him and Ireland, because what had been an intellectual embrace—dealing with the politics of it and all the rest of it—now became emotional. When he came, people were genuinely glad to see him. This is a small island with huge links to the States but has always had an independent mind around U.S. foreign policy issues. We'd be against the blockade of Cuba, would have been against the Iraq War, would be pro-Palestinian and so on—most people, anyway.

So here they were with their Stars and Stripes, saluting a U.S. President. I remember a friend of ours in Derry, Martha, writing this really [*laughter*] brilliant piece—and she's an American woman, isn't she?

McAuley: Yes.

Adams: She's lived in Derry for 40 years. And it's because he did something. He was seen to do something. He was there. I think that was the visit where he went from—I forget in what sequence, but he went Belfast, Derry, Dublin, or Dublin, Derry, Belfast. The crowds got bigger, and it was almost as if they were vying with each other. The people were trying to find the space to say, "Well done, thank you. You played a role in this."

Riley: Did that dynamic reach also into the IRA?

Adams: There were elements in the IRA that were hostile to all of this, and some subsequently left the IRA and formed these other small groups. But what I would describe as the thinking IRA

people had signed on for this proposition now. They might have been uncomfortable and distrustful about different aspects of it.

Going back to the beginning of this discussion and me telling you about the funerals we're attending at this time, two of those people—well, three of them, I'm sure, but only two of them are what you would call activists, Father Des Wilson and Dickie Glenholmes—they embraced this process. They were thinking people who wanted peace, wanted their children to be freed from the shackles of war and imprisonment and all the rest of it, and just wanted to live in harmony with their neighbors with a sense of equality for everyone.

The thinking people, despite concerns, would clearly have seen that Ireland now was an international issue, that the Brits weren't engaging, but they were being forced to engage because those who were part of the process that had been put together were pushing them to do so. It's hard to generalize about this. If you put 10 republicans in this room, they may all have different views of it, and views of how it was done, but I would say to a man and a woman that those who had embraced it then would still be glad they had done so.

Strong: I want to go back and ask about something you said earlier that is very intriguing. You said Clinton had command of detail. He was smart. Everyone agrees to that. He has command of detail, lots of different issues.

But you also said he had nuance. You can't really brief someone and give them nuance. That has to come from some other ability or some level of interest. I had really two questions. Do you know how he got that? And secondly, was he ever in error? Was there ever something about Irish history he didn't fully understand or something going on in Irish politics that surprised him that he had to be corrected on? Or was he just surprisingly in tune with what was going on almost always?

Adams: Well, it's hard to know. When I say that he had a micro knowledge of a lot of the detail—and you're quite right to single out my use of the word nuance—that's probably more of me criticizing those who should have had those. *[laughter]*

Strong: No, that's rare. I think you're right.

Adams: He also retained an interest, and you would expect somebody to do this anyway. Say the DUP [Democratic Unionist Party] aren't talking. If he went and met the DUP, he would come back and say to you, "Look"—and he was right about this—"I think Peter Robinson will do a deal."

Now it might have taken Peter Robinson five years to get round to do it, *[laughter]* but he was right about that. He had worked out the trajectory of the thing. He obviously wouldn't say things to us. He would be more relaxed now with what he might say, but in the course of all of this, he wouldn't have said, "John Major should have done more," or "the Brits don't get it," or "the unionists have got their heads in the sand." But one could presume that those might be the little judgments he was making in his own head around this.

I also think if you're President Clinton and you're looking back and you're recognized universally as being a primary part of the Irish peace process, that's good. That's good for you

just as an achievement, that's good for you. Particularly as Ireland is only a small island. It's not there with these big conflicts. When you see so many catastrophes happening throughout the world, to be part of something which is at least—It's not finished yet, and it's still a journey, and we still have to complete it.

His interest is retained to this day. If I got in touch with him now and asked him to do something, if it were humanly possible for him to do it, he would do it. He would offer to reach out or to try and use whatever influence he may have. That's why I use these terms of an intellectual, but an emotional connection as well.

I also have to say that we get on well. I never went out with him for a beer, never went golfing, but I met the man many, many times, lots of times accompanied by Martin McGuinness, lots of times on my own. He made a wonderful eulogy to Martin McGuinness when Martin died. I think he liked what we were trying to do, and he knew that we weren't in it for the graft, that we weren't in it to be messers, that we were serious activists trying to deal with a very bad situation and trying to straighten it out, or to make it better than it had been previously.

When you consider that he flew from the States to Ireland—and I asked him to do so—to speak at Martin's funeral, that shows a commitment. That wasn't for Bill Clinton. That was for us; that was for Martin McGuinness, for his family. That was him saying thank you. I can't put it better than that. That's where the personal connectedness comes into all of this.

Riley: How quickly did that develop? I can't remember the year you first met him, '95?

Adams: It was in Belfast.

McAuley: Ninety-five.

Riley: That was the street meeting.

Adams: Oh yes, yes.

Riley: Was that orchestrated?

Adams: Oh yes, that was—

McAuley: The Shankill and Falls Road and then the queen's thing was that night.

Adams: Yes, that was some negotiation. [*laughter*] The President's coming, and I asked that he come to West Belfast. I was told, "No, that's not possible, he can't come to West Belfast." And we said, "Well, look, it's really important that he comes to West Belfast, and comes to the Falls Road, because things are still difficult."

We were very open about him going to the Shankill Road and to unionist communities and so on. We would always encourage that type of approach. I forget the detail of this. They then came back and said yes. This was on the eve of the trip or very close to it, when he was actually going to land in Belfast.

They said, “Yes, can you identify a place?” We made a number of suggestions to them, and it ended up that he would go and visit a bakery shop and—

Strong: You would happen to be there.

McAuley: Gerry had already met Bill Clinton. This wasn’t the first time they met. This was November, December ’95. We had done meetings in the White House; we went through a gradual approach of initial officials: Anthony Lake and Nancy Soderberg, then Ron Brown, and then eventually Bill Clinton.

Adams: That’s right.

Riley: So in the White House you had met before?

Adams: Yes. I forget a lot of the detail as well. But just to finish this little story, I had to meet I forget who it was. We met in the Culturllann, a cultural center on the Falls Road. I forget the guy’s name.

McAuley: It was an official out of the American Embassy.

Adams: He turned up in a trench coat, a very—*[laughter]*

McAuley: He was wearing an earpiece, so he was in constant touch to make sure that we were in position.

Adams: We had said we wanted this to be photographed, and they said that couldn’t happen. But eventually they said, “Oh, that’s OK.” But Richard McAuley, being quite a cynical person, went and got a cameraman, if I can use that term, and put him upstairs in the bakery.

McAuley: We didn’t get the cameraman, but I got his camera. *[laughter]* OK. So when eventually they met and security came around, the press weren’t allowed around.

Adams: They blocked the press.

McAuley: So the press couldn’t get a photograph, because the security van was in front of it. But I was beside Gerry.

Riley: And you had the camera?

Adams: Yes, he had the camera.

McAuley: I had the camera.

Riley: So you get the credit?

Adams: He gets the credit.

McAuley: Now other photographs subsequently emerged from other people who were close by and took photographs. But the photograph that turned up in the media that night was mine.

Adams: They blocked the press corps. So the press corps that was accompanying the President—

Riley: The White House did?

Adams: Well, whoever did. Yes. A lot of the security would have been, obviously, British security. Richard was one step ahead of them and, as he says, got the photograph.

Riley: Are we OK to continue?

Adams: Yes, we need to maybe finish in the next 20 minutes or so.

Riley: To return to the core question, it was about your relationship with the President himself. How did this emerge? I would guess that it must have been a fairly formal relationship to begin with. Did warmth develop over time?

Adams: He's a very informal person, and the First Lady is also very informal and quite direct, because they ask questions. Obviously, there are times when they're making suggestions or propositions or giving advice, but a lot of times they just ask questions. They're just curious about what's happening and how things can be straightened out.

And even though these were very small things, at different times we would bring a small gift. Chelsea [Clinton] was only a youngster at the time, so we'd bring some little Irish artifact. I think they were genuinely touched by that. It was just a natural thing you would do.

The same thing had happened significantly with John Hume. What allowed the process that John and I had developed to endure despite all the difficulties was that we trusted each other. Obviously, we were each guilty of some of the political tactics, but we knew that we were each serious about this process, that we wanted this process to work. So the President, in my opinion, knew, as a consequence of both developments on the ground, and also from his engagement with us, that we were serious about the process.

As I was going to say earlier, when the first cessation broke down, that must have been the time when it was most difficult for him in terms of this gamble that he had taken. But despite all those difficulties, because in comes Tony Blair and we again are—

Riley: And Bertie Ahern shows up about the same time.

Adams: Yes. So we get the process back in place and strengthened, and the President played a pivotal role in the Good Friday Agreement negotiations. First of all—just to reverse a wee bit—the British had been saying that these matters—whatever the issue happened to be, no matter how controversial it was—were internal matters for the government of the United Kingdom, so nobody was allowed to get into it.

The President then appoints an Envoy, and in comes George Mitchell. Then the British position starts to change, and we have over the course of the process all sorts of international players coming in, whether it's people overseeing arms being put beyond use, whether it's people

coming in to look at policing, whether it's people coming in to look at other aspects of it, people from Norway, from Canada, from South Africa, from the States.

You have the internationalization in a real way of what the British had kept as a grubby little secret that nobody could interfere with; now it was open for best practice to at least be tried, and for these highly skilled and highly qualified practitioners, whether it was in jobs discrimination, whether it was in conflict resolution, whether it was in some other issue, coming in and being part of a commission or being part of some other committee or some endeavor to straighten out whatever the sectoral issue may have been.

That was, from our point of view, a way back to where we had been when we first started to look at internationalizing the Irish struggle. We now had different players coming in to assist the process.

So in the Good Friday Agreement negotiations, the UUP [Ulster Unionist Party] wouldn't talk to us. Some of the UUP, including its current leaders, walked out of the negotiations, and the DUP didn't walk in, so the DUP weren't there. We had a Good Friday Agreement made, and we were prepared to talk to anybody that would talk to us.

I often joke that my best conversations at that time with unionists were in the men's room, [*laughter*] because when you're on your own they would have the crack with you, they'd have a yarn with you and so on. The loyalists, for that matter, were very down-to-earth and immediately—These are working-class people who had been involved in UDA [Ulster Defence Association] or UVF [Ulster Volunteer Force] and the Progressive Unionist Party and whatever, one of the other small groups. They had no pretensions about this. They'd come in, David Ervine on the one hand, Gary McMichael, shook hands, and get down to trying to do business.

That isn't to say that they abandoned their principles or anything else, but they were prepared to talk and chat and be friendly. I often think that Bill Flynn was an influence and Tom Moran in breaking down some of those little barriers as well.

Riley: Can you tell us exactly what President Clinton's role was in helping to get that accomplished?

Adams: His role, one can surmise—and he would have been obviously informed by his own officials—was to try to get the British, from the Irish government and from our perspective, to do more on certain issues, and obviously also to try to get us and others to do more on certain issues. But if you want to sum it up in one sentence, what President Clinton actually signed up for at the end of it was that the USA would be a guarantor for the Good Friday Agreement. That's what he signed up for, in my late-night conversations with him.

If you go back to the Connolly House Group or the Americans for a New Irish Agenda, if you go back to Bill Flynn and Chuck Feeney and Bruce Morrison and so on, that's what they had set out to do, to use the influence of the USA to bring about progress and change of a positive kind on the island of Ireland. It's my certain view—We're doing this interview on the 6th of November; we're in the middle of the catastrophe of Brexit, of all the ramifications of that, and that'll be rolling out for another few years yet, and I still think that the USA has a strategic role to play,

because the peace process is exactly that. It is a process. So it isn't over. Peace isn't made in one single action.

An end of conflict doesn't necessarily mean peace. It's obviously positive and good that it would happen, but you have to build in justice. You have to go back to the notion of respecting each other, of having tolerance, of building harmonious societies in which people have legislative rights and all the rest of that.

And from the Irish republican and from the democratic perspective, while our laws are made in London, they're not going to be the type of laws that perhaps we require. Why can't we make our own laws? Why can't we govern ourselves with the wit and the intelligence and the right to do so?

I'm just back from Washington two weeks ago. Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker, made a very forthright statement which she had previously made here, that if the Brexit—or if there's any damage done because of Brexit to the Good Friday Agreement, there'd be no trade agreement between the USA and Britain. That again is a strength of Irish America. She made that statement in London, Dublin, and in Derry, and in our presence in Washington two weeks ago she made the same statement.

Richie Neal, who's now chair of one of the most powerful committees on the Hill, echoed that and made the same statement. So not only is there a need for continued involvement of Irish America and of the USA and of their politicians, that's the trend that was started by Bill Clinton.

If you look at it, JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] didn't do anything. In fairness, he probably wasn't *asked* to do anything. Ronnie Reagan didn't do anything. George Bush the elder didn't do anything. His son actually was quite good on the issues when he came into it. But the man who broke the mold, who turned the policy upside down, was Bill Clinton. The continuation 20 years later in the middle of another phase of our relationship with England shows the strength and the correctness of the position that Bill Clinton brought up.

I just want to mention another thing. I read your question about whether I had raised other issues with him. I consistently raised the blockade of Cuba with him. I consistently raised the Palestinian issue with him. I raised the war in Iraq with President Bush, which he didn't take very well, but that's no matter.

I also raised—and I always regret I didn't push it—Leonard Peltier with President Clinton. To this day I regret that I didn't push him harder on the issue, because our focus was on our own issues. I was just taken by this guy being out there. I raised it, but I didn't push it as hard maybe as I should have, and I'm sorry that I didn't.

Strong: Did he ever talk to you about other peace processes? Did he ever talk to you about the Middle East?

Adams: Regularly, yes. Who was the Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright?

Strong: Albright.

Adams: She, too. They used Ireland as an example in other conflicts.

Strong: He said that on multiple occasions, that the rest of the world should look at what happened here.

Adams: He did, yes. I can't remember, there were that many. There were the big difficulties in parts of Africa. There was Iraq, there was Iran.

McAuley: Balkans.

Adams: The Balkans. There was the ongoing Middle East crisis. So, yes, he did raise these things. And in our small way, we also have tried to help in other conflict resolution processes, and we've always kept the White House briefed on what we were doing. We did it in terms of Colombia. Martin McGuinness did it in terms of Sri Lanka.

McAuley: Philippines.

Adams: Philippines. The Basques. Bill Clinton, at my request, tweeted a message of welcome to the ETA [Euskadi Ta Askatasuna] ending their campaign. We briefed him on that on an ongoing basis. If we're doing anything anywhere, we always make sure that the President is briefed—that President Clinton is briefed.

McAuley: Even now.

Adams: Even now.

McAuley: We have a good relationship with the people around him, so—

Riley: I'm deeply aware of that from our earlier communications. One of the things that scholars are always interested in is the ability of one person to affect history. It seems like this is an ideal example of instances where you as an important figure here and Bill Clinton as an important figure in the United States—I can't imagine this happening if President Bush the elder had been reelected.

Adams: Oh, no, no, you're right. I would think not. No harm to President Bush. It was the quirkiness of it, and Bill Clinton being who Bill Clinton is, and that he comes from where he comes from, and that he's outside. I've read all of Hillary's books, and I've read a number of books about Bill Clinton. He told me once that he came to Dublin, and this is when he was in Oxford, and he was conscious of the civil rights struggle.

So as I was saying earlier, we were just blessed with this coincidence of having three, four, five elements. I go back to what I started off with to a certain degree. Des Wilson and Alec Reid in the streets of Belfast saying, "You have to treat people with respect, you have to listen to people, you have to talk to people. Stop the messing and get down to trying to sort out these problems."

Then Father Reid making his way around, knocking on all the doors diligently, persistently, like a little terrier dog, never giving up, all the time going back and going back. These things matter. Personal relationships matter. What was it that inspired Father Reid to go and talk to Jean

Kennedy Smith? They got on, and she's talking to her brother, and her brother is talking to the President. These personal relationships do matter.

Strong: Did you worry when Clinton was under investigation and then threatened by impeachment that those other issues would have consequences for this process?

Adams: Yes, I did, yes, of course, because he was very important to the process. As time went on, he became less important, which I'm sure he would accept, because once we got Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley and the government together, it took on a certain velocity of its own, to the good.

And here we are, that's ended. The power-sharing government hasn't been in place now in almost three years, so it's proof again you can never take anything for granted. What's the big achievement? The big achievement is that our problem now is only a political problem. You have your own political problems.

Riley: Yes, we do. *[laughter]*

Adams: We have plenty of problems. But 20 years ago the political problem here would have, on the one hand, been administered—if that's the right word—by armed groups, from the British, from the republican, from the loyalist, where now that isn't happening. Thank God that isn't happening, and isn't, in my opinion, likely to happen, if we all keep pushing away at what we need to do.

Riley: Thank you.

Adams: Thank you.

Riley: You've been very generous with your time, and it's a privilege to come talk with you again. This will be quite an addition to our collection.

Adams: OK. And you're going to send us a copy?

Riley: I'm going to send you the transcript. It goes no place until you've had a chance to review it, and at that point you can make stipulations concerning release. If you want to hold on to this for a period of time, you may do so. If there are pieces of it that are sensitive to you, then you may do that. We're entirely at your disposal in terms of the treatment of it.

Adams: One of the things I want to check, because I may have got a bit confused on the meeting we did in Connolly House. I think that might have been the first meeting by that big group. We can check that once you send it back to us.

Riley: Either you can fix it in the text or if you want to append.

McAuley: Part of the difficulty inevitably when you're doing this is, you're going from Hume-Adams, it starts in '86, through to Clinton in '92. Then you're in the peace process, and it's years, and with all the twists and turns, it's easy to get the timeline mixed up.

Riley: Exactly. What we didn't want to do is come in and, in an hour and a half or so, try to replicate the timeline. It's much more valuable for us to get your assessment of people and the overall process, because that timeline we can get into and find. It's been a privilege visiting with you again, listening to you.

Adams: Thank you. I might, if you want, give you this. Richard photocopied it. It's a book I did. There's a piece, "President Clinton on the Falls Road."

Riley: Yes. Please. We'd be delighted to have this. With your permission, we would append it to the transcript so that people could look at it. [See Addendum]

McAuley: Yes, sure. What I did was some years ago Gerry did a book, which was called *Hope and History* here. But in the United States it was called *A Farther Shore*. It deals with that period, and it's quite comprehensive from our perspective. Other people have different perspectives, but from ours it's quite comprehensive in the twists and the turns, as it could be.

Adams: This is a piece I wrote on request. Nancy Soderberg was putting together for the 25th anniversary of the cessation, and she asked me to do a piece.

McAuley: That was the one this summer.

Adams: This summer. And then there's a wee piece here. We have a family home up in Donegal, and the guy whose land we're on is a man called Paddy McGeady. He's a native Irish speaker—He's dead; he just died about five or six years ago—he's a bachelor, and a countryman, and a very sort of quaint and interesting person.

I said to him one time when I was up, "I have to go into Belfast here to meet President Clinton and Hillary Clinton. Would you like to come?" [laughter] And he said, "I'd love to come."

So away we went, and I did the meeting, and then I brought Paddy in and introduced him to the Clintons, and they were very gracious and got photographs taken with him. And that was Paddy's—He was back up in Donegal. [laughter].

Riley: I bet the Clintons loved that. I bet President Clinton—This would be so reminiscent of his people in Arkansas. This is a man who doesn't come from much himself.

Strong: Can I quickly ask one more question?

Riley: We'll stay here for hours if you'll let us.

Strong: Your book is very good. Is there a scholar or journalist you would recommend people should consult for accurate accounts of the Easter Peace or other aspects of—

Adams: Conor O'Clery's *The Greening of the White House* is a good piece. Deaglan de Breadun's piece is good. Niall O'Dowd's stuff is good. My books tell it from our perspective or my perspective.

The other interesting thing was that I was writing a fairly regular blog or article for the *Irish Voice*, and then I subsequently published those in book form. We found it really instructive; it's almost a diary of events because you're writing about being in Washington.

McAuley: There's an article every week, and every week you were writing about whatever was going on that particular week.

Adams: Yes, those are available.

Riley: Those were contemporaneous?

Adams: Yes, more or less. Obviously, they weren't talking about usually sensitive things.

McAuley: You were trying to give people a sense of what was going on at that particular moment.

Adams: The other thing where I was always a bit gratified, because it was important for us—President Clinton invited me and Richard to the CGI [Clinton Global Initiative], which met annually in New York. He didn't have to do that. I was the only Irish politician. Albert went once or twice. But we went.

McAuley: Albert went once or twice, but unlike others, Gerry didn't have to pay for his membership every year.

Adams: That was important. It's important. It was a learning process, and we always learned stuff just listening to the different very skilled presenters and met people from all over the world.

But also it was important just in terms of our own sense of ourselves, that people knew that Bill Clinton was inviting us in. You were seen as having some traction in whatever was going on. That was an act of generosity.

McAuley: I thought it was always interesting that CGI in New York was for three days. It was held every year when the UN [United Nations] was meeting at the General Assembly, and he would have these Presidents, Prime Ministers, political leaders from all around the world taking part in this event. He always made time to do a private meeting. Every year.

Adams: Yes, that's right.

Riley: I'm telling you something you already know, but this is for him, I think, the pinnacle of his accomplishments as President, when he's thinking about the holes in the public's knowledge of his Presidency, and he's dealing with us. We've spent now four complete days with him doing this same thing, talking with him about his childhood and so forth.

But Ireland was immediately the thing he said, "This is what we need to do." And that's why his staff was in touch with you and some others. It was important for him that we make sure this isn't lost, so having your voice is really important.

Adams: There may be lots of issues I haven't covered. So if there are supplementaries, I don't mind hooking up again and doing that.

Riley: OK.

Adams: OK. Thanks a million for traveling so far.

[See Addenda]

Addenda Contents

Writings contributed by Gerry Adams during interview

- A. Selected chapters from Mr. Adams's book *A Farther Shore: Ireland's Long Road to Peace* (published in Northern Ireland in 2003 as *Hope and History*)
- B. November 13, 2004, essay Mr. Adams wrote on the 2004 U.S. Presidential election: "Amid Changes, US Parties Have Ireland in Common"
- C. Léargas blog piece published October 2, 2009, "At the Clinton Global Initiative"
- D. 2019 essay Mr. Adams wrote at the request of Nancy Soderberg for the 25th anniversary of the cessation of hostilities
- E. Short vignette of a meeting between the Clintons and an Irish countryman

- * Irish America -
- * SF strategy -
- * The Presidential Forum - Deavie,
- * Clinton committee Chapter 15
- * Visa Americans for a New Irish Agenda

The British Tory attitude to international, and especially US involvement, in efforts to find a resolution to the conflict were best summed up by the late Lord Hailsham. *Irish Times* journalist Conor O Clery recalled: 'I once asked the former British Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham, back in the 1970s, if the intervention by Irish-Americans such as Senator Edward Kennedy on Irish issues made any impression on the British government. His face reddened and he slapped an open palm on his polished desk. 'Those bawstards', he cried. 'Those Roman Catholic bawstards! How dare they interfere!'

But dare they did – as historically they had done so often; perhaps that was why Hailsham was so outraged.

For over 200 years the Irish diaspora in the USA – Irish America – played an important role in support of the Irish nationalist and republican cause in key periods of the Anglo-Irish conflict. Many Irish – some Presbyterians at the end of the 18th century, but mainly Catholics in the 19th and 20th centuries – had fled to the United States in their millions to escape poverty and hunger, discrimination and oppression. Like many other nationalities fleeing to the 'new world' – or in Irish *an oilean ur*, the new island – they brought with them their language and music, their dance and literature and their politics. Those who fled the great hunger in the 1840s helped to found, then fund, arm and train the Fenian Movement. A few short years later they were giving money to ex-Fenian Michael Davitt's Land League which successfully demanded fundamental changes to the ownership and distribution of land.

Later their children helped Ireland achieve a measure of independence in the period from the Rising of 1916 to the Civil War 6 years later. Irish Americans always lobbied to win US government support for the Irish position as against that of Britain. After the partition of Ireland Irish America split, as did republican Ireland, along civil war lines. The civil war itself saw yet more Irish republican exiles fleeing to the USA. In some cases these were disillusioned, embittered and disappointed activists. But others continued solidarity work, though in an isolated way. Irish America itself was fighting its own struggle for recognition and rights in America.

Irish American politics on the national question reflected the situation back home. While support for an end to British rule was strong it was not well organised. The main political connection from Ireland to the USA was from the Irish government, particularly Fianna Fáil. This was the case when the current phase of conflict erupted in 1969. By that time the lot of Irish America had improved. The election in 1960 of John F. Kennedy ushered in a new era. But the failure of the Irish government to defend Irish national interests in the USA gave the British a largely free hand in promoting its propaganda. One consequence of this was that successive US governments followed a British agenda and banned senior republicans from travelling into the United States.

After the civil rights struggle of the late 1960s and the start of the war, senior US politicians like Ted Kennedy, Daniel Moynihan, Tip O'Neill and Hugh Carey, tended to support the approach favoured by the Irish government and John Hume. But in the absence of a clear strategy to advance Irish nationalist and republican goals their engagement was often presented by the Irish and British governments and perceived by republicans, as simply anti-republican.

Other Irish/American figures, like Paul O'Dwyer a leading New York lawyer, and Congress members including Peter King, Richard Neal, Ben Gilman, Tom Manton lobbied and campaigned and challenged British propaganda. Organisations like Irish Northern Aid and Clann na Gael highlighted justice issues and raised funds for political prisoners and their families. And there were those who followed the timeworn path of sending weapons to Ireland. A myriad of campaigning groups also mushroomed during this period. Some campaigned on single issues like the Birmingham Six or the strip-searching of women republican prisoners, while others tackled issues like discrimination.

The Sinn Féin leadership knew that the Irish cause needed to be internationalised. This lesson was already very apparent in the developing peace process in South Africa. Our leadership had long appreciated the importance of international opinion but when we came to explore the potential for engagement with the international community we didn't really understand how to lobby this opinion in a strategic way. As a number of us applied ourselves to figuring this out we realised very quickly the enormous challenge involved.

Sinn Féin was a small party, under resourced, under developed and with no significant financial backing. True we did have an international section, then called the Foreign Affairs Bureau but this was essentially a one man or one woman show with good people doing their best to get information out of Ireland and to build up contacts. How could we build an international dimension, especially when the British had the resources of their Foreign Office and Embassies to promote their analysis and their national interests? The countries of the European Union saw the conflict in Ireland as an internal matter for the British government. The United States, under President Reagan and then President Bush, had seen its role as one of working with its oldest European ally. This was nothing new and is well documented in Sean Cronin's fine book on the matter, *Washington's Irish Policy*.

The Irish government had no independent strategy to defend or promote Irish national interests. But the USA was the one region in which there was a natural hinterland for the Irish cause.

Despite the obvious hurdles, it was our view that the Irish-American community presented us with our best chance of internationalising the issue of peace in Ireland. It had the most developed of our support groups, and within the Irish-American community there was a deep interest in Ireland and a genuine desire to see peace achieved. Unlike the Irish anywhere else Irish America had considerable influence, not just in politics but in the business world as well.

The US government's visa ban on senior Sinn Féin members entering the USA required that the bulk of the party's discussions, reviews and analysis of its involvement with organisations in the USA took place in Ireland. Successive leaderships of Irish Northern Aid were involved in these discussions and less publicly prominent Sinn Féin members continued to visit the USA to brief supporters and encourage them in their work. But this was no effective substitute for the consultation and debate that was required. It often gave rise to mistakes in the political handling and management of the effort to build a wider support base. Inevitable tensions and misunderstandings arose from all of this both in the USA and between some activists in the USA and the Sinn Féin leadership. There was also some political disagreement. Old loyalties and friendships with longstanding members of Sinn Féin who had left the party after the 1986 Ard Fheis debate on abstentionism had an effect.

But new people came forward and the majority of the activists, including solid people in the Noraid leadership stayed the course. One of the new wave of activists who emerged in the 1980s was **Ciaran Staunton**. A Mayo man, he was a resident in Boston, an immigration reform activist and a Noraid member. His work with the immigration reform movement had put him in contact with a wide range of Irish and Irish American political opinion. One of these was **Niall O'Dowd**, originally from Thurles in County Tipperary but raised in Drogheda, and now owner of the Irish Voice and Irish America Magazine. (They were later to become brothers-in-law when Ciaran married O'Dowd's sister Orlaith). I first met Niall O'Dowd in 1983 in Belfast, when he interviewed me for one of his earlier publications, an Irish newspaper in San Francisco.

In April 1992 a well-known Irish American John Dearie organised a forum on Irish issues in the Sheraton Hotel in Manhattan for the democratic Presidential hopefuls, Jerry Brown and Bill Clinton. Asked by one of the panellists if he would appoint a peace envoy for the north Clinton said he would. Martin Galvin of Noraid asked the presidential candidate if he would authorise a visa for me and other Sinn Féiners to visit the USA. Clinton replied; 'I would support a visa for Gerry Adams'. Clinton then went further and endorsed the MacBride principles. His response received loud applause from the audience of around 100 people.

Out of this Chris Hyland, Clinton's Deputy national political director with responsibility for engaging with ethnic groups, approached Niall O'Dowd about creating a committee to win support for Clinton within the Irish/America community. **The first Chairperson of 'Irish Americans for Clinton' was former US Congressman and Connecticut lawyer Bruce Morrison**. As a member of Congress Morrison had steered legislation through that secured thousands of new visas for Irish people. He was consequently well known and respected within the Irish America community.

When Clinton returned to New York in October he met O'Dowd, Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn and Paul O'Dwyer. All of them were impressed by him and by his commitments. **Several days later one of Clinton's aides Nancy Soderberg, who had formally worked for Ted Kennedy, drafted a letter to Bruce Morrison that was effectively**

Clinton's manifesto position on Ireland. In it he went further than any previous presidential candidate. He committed himself to a more active role in working 'with the leaders in those nations to achieve a just and lasting settlement of the conflict.'

He acknowledged that; 'A permanent and peaceful solution to the crisis in Northern Ireland can only be achieved if the underlying cause of the strife and instability is dealt with vigorously, fairly and within a time frame that guarantees genuine, substantial and steady progress...I believe the appointment of a special US envoy to Northern Ireland could be a catalyst in the effort to secure a lasting peace.' And he again spelt out his endorsement of the MacBride principles. But for many Irish/Americans and those of us watching this in Ireland his comments on collusion broke new ground. He said 'We also believe that the British government should establish more effective safeguards against the wanton use of lethal force and against further collusion between the security forces and Protestant paramilitary groups.'

The letter was viewed as a major breakthrough although those who had formed 'Irish Americans for Clinton' knew that campaign promises don't always translate into policy. After Clinton was elected 'Irish Americans for Clinton' became 'Americans for a New Irish Agenda.' Within weeks they travelled to Little Rock, Clinton's home and campaign headquarters to talk to his aides about putting promises into action. It was the first time that any grassroots Irish/American lobby ever engaged with an incoming administration. Included in the group were Chuck Feeney and Trade Union Executive Joe Jameson. Jameson had been involved in Irish issues since the early 1970s when he was active with the National Association for Irish Freedom, the US support group for the Civil Rights Association here. After Clinton's installation as President 'Americans for a New Irish Agenda' continued to press the White House for implementation of the election promises. They also argued that a new US Ambassador to Ireland should be someone with clout and an understanding of the situation.

But already the British were on the attack. The day after Clinton was sworn in as President the British government told journalists in London that its priority would be to have the envoy idea scrapped.

The first evidence that the 'Americans for a New Irish Agenda' were having some success came over the St. Patrick's Day period with the appointment as Irish Ambassador of Jean Kennedy Smith, Ted Kennedy's sister. A widow she had founded the Very Special Arts programme for the mentally disabled and had overseen its growth across the USA and into 55 countries. However, hopes of an early appointment of a peace envoy were dashed when the Taoiseach Albert Reynolds on his St. Patrick's Day visit to the White House told Clinton that he was against the idea.

Not long after Clinton took up residence in the White House Niall O'Dowd travelled to Dublin where he met with Ted Howell. Ciaran Staunton arranged for the Dublin meeting at which O'Dowd asked for an IRA to halt to operations to facilitate him bringing a delegation of senior Irish American figures, all of whom were members of 'Americans for a New Irish Agenda'. Niall travelled to Belfast for his first meeting with me in 20 years and we

discussed at length the problems and the possibilities open to us in the USA. We also gave him some sense of what we were trying to do without telling him about the secret discussions then taking place separately between us and the Irish and British governments.

Niall felt that there were now opportunities of bringing a new dimension of Irish America into the frame. The Clinton election and his commitments on Ireland had shown the possibilities. It was now time to get delivery on these commitments. Niall thought a section of Corporate America in particular could be persuaded to play a role. The idea of the delegation was part of that. Americans for a New Irish Agenda would come to Ireland to meet with a wide range of opinion. On its return to the USA from this fact-finding mission the group would report to the White House. In order to enhance the visit but in particular to send a message to the delegation and the White House Niall was advocating that the IRA have an operation-free period.

There was initial resistance in the Army leadership to another request for an undeclared short halt to operations. Following the British bad faith response to the earlier IRA offer there was a distinct concern that its willingness to contemplate these departures would be misread by its enemies. When the IRA eventually agreed to facilitate the visit it was on the clear understanding that this was to be no more than a gap in operations timed to coincide with the visit. Its purpose was to empower the delegation.

Bill Flynn was one of those. He was chairman of the board of Mutual of America Life Insurance Company. He is also, among a host of other commitments, Chairman of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy. He had helped organise and fund a peace conference in Derry in 1992 called 'Beyond Hate'. He met and was impressed by Martin McGuinness at that time. Later he travelled to Belfast where he and I had tea in the dilapidated Sinn Fein offices at Sevastopol Street on the Falls Road. Bill came to the Irish cause through the Peace People but quickly realised that there were huge issues of injustice underpinning the conflict. From then on it was a learning curve for him and his associates. He came to visit many times, accompanied by his friend Bill Barry who told me later that they had big security concerns at that time about Bill wandering around Belfast. They established contact with the loyalists and began important and largely unrecognised work reaching out and supporting political developments in that constituency. I brought Bill to Clonard Monastery to meet the Sagart. His interest and involvement grew and continues to this day. Tom Moran, who now runs Mutual of America has also played a key role.

When O'Dowd asked Bill Flynn to take part in the delegation he readily agreed. Chuck Feeney was another businessman. He owned Duty Free Shoppers Ltd, the biggest duty-free shopping company in the world. Chuck was a billionaire. He is also one of the most remarkable men I have ever met. A private man who always shunned the spotlight, he was totally committed to our efforts to build a peace process. He cared little for the personal aspects of wealth. Some time after we first met he gave over three and a half billion dollars away to worthy causes. We got to know each other when Chuck contacted Niall O Dowd to find out what was happening in Ireland. Niall arranged for us to meet. In Chuck I found all the things that are good about America. He was humanitarian, down to earth, concerned about the world and

deeply interested in Ireland. Again when O'Dowd asked him to get involved in the delegation he immediately agreed.

Bruce Morrison was the main spokesperson for the group. Joe Jameson and another labour official Bill Lenihan made up the labour section and Niall O Dowd was the facilitator for the group. The Irish Americans met a range of groups and individuals, including the two governments but eventually they made it to Connolly House for their first ever meeting with us. Within Sinn Fein circles the group forever became labelled the 'Connolly House group'. They also met with a range of community groups in Conway Mill and heard the personal accounts of discrimination in jobs, lack of investment, poor housing, bad health and deprivation, faced by nationalists each day.

Martin McGuinness, Lucilita Bhreatnach, and Mairead Keane, who was to become our first US representative, were all present at that first meeting. We spoke about our efforts, about the work we were doing and about our hopes. They gave us some sense of what they could do. In essence this was that our peace strategy could be empowered by Irish America particularly under the new President. We agreed that the issue of a visa for me being denied would be the short term focus of their efforts. They thought that this issue had the potential to unite many of the Irish American organisations and groups. From our point of view this campaign would provide tangible evidence of the ability of Irish America to positively influence the administration.

On their return to the US Niall O'Dowd arranged for a meeting between Ciaran Staunton and Bill Flynn to plan their next move. The three went to 'Famous Original Ray's Pizza' at 688 Third Avenue. They decided that Bill Flynn would ask the National Committee on Foreign Policy, a non profit making organisation of which he was Chair, to hold a peace conference on the north of Ireland. They would invite all of the party leaders from the six counties, including me. The three then left the pizza parlour to get on with the business of making peace in Ireland.

Several weeks after the meeting it emerged that the pizza parlour was being used by the Mafia as a centre for a major drugs operation. The organisation running the drugs was run by Aniello Ambrosio who owned the pizza parlour. He arranged drugs shipments and stored drugs in his basement. And for some time his parlour had been under surveillance by the Federal authorities. In fact the pizza parlour where the three conspirators had gone to have their quiet meeting was at that time probably the most heavily bugged place in the country!

Meanwhile Tony Lake and Nancy Soderberg met the Congressional Ad Hoc Committee on Irish Affairs in the Capitol, including Ben Gilman, Peter King, Tom Manton, Richard Neal and others. This was a first and Lake told the group that the White House intended to give the issue more attention. Not long after this President Clinton, asked by Irish times reporter Conor O'Clery about a visa for me said that he would keep the issue under review, especially in the light of events flowing from the 15 December Joint Declaration by Prime Minister Reynolds and Prime Minister Major.

In Dublin Jean Kennedy Smith asked the Taoiseach what he thought of the US giving me a visa. Reynolds said he had no objections. The new Ambassador also asked John Hume who also said he had no objections. She

herself expressed her support to her brother Ted Kennedy and to the White House.

On January 14th 1994 I applied for a visa to attend the conference organised for February 1st. Jean Kennedy Smith sent a cable to the State Department endorsing the visa application. Some members of her staff sent a dissenting cable to express their opposition. The battle over this visa had begun in earnest. The British government began an intense private and public campaign to keep me out. The British Embassy and its ambassador Sir Robin Renwick worked round the clock arguing that a visa for me would be a diplomatic catastrophe. They sought and received the support of the House Speaker Tom Foley. The Secretary of State Warren Christopher opposed granting a visa, as did the Attorney General Janet Reno and the Head of the FBI Louis Freeh. On the other side Ted Kennedy and three Democratic Senate colleagues, Chris Dodd, John Kerry and Daniel Moynihan wrote to President Clinton backing the visa. Others in Irish America rallied to the issue. In addition full-page advertisements appeared in the New York Times calling for US support for efforts to find peace. The advertisement was signed by the Chairs or CEOs of 85 leading American corporations and over 100 other prominent Irish Americans.

On January 28th I visited the US Consulate in the centre of Belfast and met the Consul General Val Martinez. He had been instructed by the White House to ask me two specific questions about my attitude to violence and the political process. I arrived around 9am and spent over an hour talking to Martinez. As I walked from Queen Street where the consul office is sited I was stopped by the RUC. The officer who stopped me ordered me to assume the search position. I told him to give my head peace. We had a little stand off at the street corner watched by a growing crowd of interested citizens before someone more sensible or senior instructed my officious officer by radio to do something more productive.

Later we issued a statement to the media about the engagement with the Consulate. I was mindful that the State Department questions had already been published that morning in the Irish Times. I faxed the statement to Niall O'Dowd who passed it on to Trina Vargo, who then passed it on to Nancy Soderberg in the White House. Later the following evening a news report emerged out of San Diego in California claiming that the 'Southern California IRA' had placed hoax bombs at British stores in that city. No one in Ireland would have taken the story seriously even if they had been aware of it but with a decision imminent from the White House Nancy Soderberg directly rang Niall O'Dowd to contact me to condemn this threat. It was 2 am in the morning when Niall got through to me in Belfast. I listened to what had happened and to the White House request and basically I told him to get the White House people to catch themselves on. I couldn't be issuing statements everytime these silly stories appeared. I was moved to ask, 'Does this mean I have to apologise every time an Irishman gets into a fight with an Englishman in a pub?'

Niall persisted. Essentially he agreed with me that this was nonsense. But as the President was going to make a call on the visa shortly he argued that we should leave no excuses for others to trip us up. Eventually I agreed

to issue a statement condemning the bomb threats, which Niall worked out with me.

The next morning President Clinton spoke to Warren Christopher and to Janet Reno, both of whom were still against giving me a visa. At 10.30 am he told his staff he was going to authorise the visa. It was to be a restricted visa for two days only and I had to remain within New York. But it was still a visa and the next morning, Monday I picked it up at the US Embassy in Dublin before just managing to get the midday Aer Lingus flight to New York.

I was surprised at the furore the visit created. It was an education. By this stage the British government's handling of the issue had ensured that my visit was a huge international media story. I didn't quite realise how big until I landed in New York. There were television crews there from all over the world and I did more interviews than I could count in the next two days. People have said to me that I was very calm. I was too tired to get excited. One of the most important interviews was with Larry King. He opened by pointing out that it was against the law in Britain to put my voice on television. His remarks immediately highlighted the use of censorship laws by the British government because for his show to be broadcast in Europe, which covered Britain, an actors voice had to be used – in this case an American actor. Most US journalists and broadcasters were not even conscious of the broadcast restrictions and many could not understand the logic nor did they approve of this denial of a basic civil right.

On Tuesday February 1st John Hume, John Alderdice of the Alliance Party and myself attended the NCAFP conference at the Waldorf Astoria. DUP leader Ian Paisley and UUP leader James Molyneaux had declined to participate because of my presence. In my speech I gave an overview of the situation back home. I finished by saying; 'It is our intention to see the gun removed permanently from Irish politics.'

After more interviews I went to an event at the Sheraton Hotel which was attended by a capacity audience of cheering, shouting, excited Irish Americans and some more recently arrived Irish. The meeting was sponsored by 'Americans for a New Irish Agenda' and Bruce Morrison chaired it. Paul O'Dwyer shared the platform with me. It was a powerful emotional event. The best part was the question and answer session. The craic was mighty.

" Where did you get that tie "?

" Dunnes Stores".

Which was the truth.

" Do you like New York?"

"If you can make it here you can make it anywhere"

" Can you sing that?"

The event was a celebration, a vindication of the refusal of the New York Irish to give up on the Irish cause. It was great.

When Brian McCabe, the New York cop who was looking after me, deposited me back on the Aer Lingus jet bound for Dublin I was barely in my seat before I fell fast asleep. When I awoke the plane was making the approach to Shannon. It had been a mad whirlwind few days. But an unprecedented number of people heard the Sinn Fein message. The door into the USA had been opened. Irish America opinion was invigorated and

informed. That potentially powerful community had a real sense of what was possible and there were new players, particularly within corporate America who were prepared to play a new role.

In the meantime the British media and political establishment went wild in their condemnations of the New York visit. UUP MP Ken Maginnis said, 'In the future deaths in Northern Ireland will be Clinton deaths.' The Daily Star commented that it would love to see me in a coffin with a gap where my face used to be. The Sunday Times referred to 'gullible Americans'. Hurd and the British Ambassador in Washington attacked the US media. Renwick told CNN, 'When I listen to Gerry Adams I think, as we all do, it's reminiscent of Dr. Goebbels' – Hitler's propaganda chief.'

Sometimes I am asked how I put up with this kind of vilification and demonisation. I suppose if I took it too seriously this type of personalised hatred could have an effect. To tell the truth the first time many, many moons ago that I heard myself described in these terms I thought they were talking about someone else. The reality is that I have always felt very much a part of a community in struggle. Undoubtedly not everyone in this community agrees with me but most of the expressions of odium and contempt come from outside as part of the wider propaganda campaign. I regret the loss of anonymity but compared to what others have lost I can't really complain. The fact is that republicans have challenged the status quo. We are seen as a threat. Others see me, and the likes of me, as a front man for terrorism and they respond accordingly. So I have to accept that all of this goes with the job that I am trying to do. If it was true of course, it would be unbearable. No one likes to be unpopular, politicians particularly, but Irish people especially know that standing up to colonialism brings its own punishment and reward. I am rewarded with the support and protection of our community in struggle.

After the US trip some Conservative politicians demanded that the censorship ban be tightened but others in Britain, including the London Independent and the Guardian called for its removal. The Daily Telegraph described relations between Britain and the USA as 'The worst rift since Suez.'

Douglas Hurd rushed to the US to meet with the Vice President Al Gore. On his return to London he attacked me as a 'failed politician'.

Major spoke to my 'smokescreen of evasions and falsehoods'.

Back home as this tide of hysteria broke over me I asked Colette what she thought.

"You must be doing something right" she said.

- * The Connolly House group - *Connolly House*
- * Joe Cahill - *visa*
- * Jean Kennedy Smith & Alban

Chapter 17
A Space for Hope

Sinn Fein emerged from the Letterkenny conference united and confident. It was difficult at times for all our activists to keep pace with the developing situation, and this could be unsettling. The Letterkenny conference brought everyone up to date. A few years before, Sinn Fein strategy was limited. Now that we were driving a process our activists had a real sense of being agents of change, and of the party being at the core of developments. So while there were uncertainties and doubts morale was good.

Progress was also being made behind the scenes in the meetings and discussions with the Irish government. We were in the final stages of putting together a position with the Connolly House group. And the peace process was now on the agenda in the White House where President Clinton's National Security Advisor, Tony Lake and his deputy Nancy Soderberg, were keeping a close watch on developments.

Martin and I gave the IRA another assessment of the situation in early August. It was coming to the point of deciding if this was the right time to start putting the jigsaw together. Timing was critical. If we pulled everything together and the Army said no then the process was over before it really started. I was able to tell the Army people of the progress that we had made; in my opinion there was an identity of view between Sinn Fein, the SDLP and the Irish government on a range of issues and commitments given were about a programme, a process for change.

How deeply committed Dublin and the SDLP were to this would emerge in due course. There was considerable tension still within sections of the SDLP leadership. Contrary to some stated views the divisions within the SDLP were not in Sinn Fein's interest. A united SDLP supporting its leader was more suitable to us and our enterprise. Because we had vested so much on the Hume Adams axis any distraction was counter productive. So at different times in the process the Sinn Fein core group applied itself to considering how to reduce the SDLP's internal difficulties.

In many ways we had a sense that our agreements with John Hume were just that. While Sinn Fein was supportive of what I was trying to do sizeable sections of the SDLP did not give John the same back up. In fact at different times we had a sense of efforts to knobble him. Notions of a pan nationalist alliance were fanciful and the stuff of unionist press statements although that of course was what was required. But the tensions within the SDLP leadership and the deeply ingrained anti-republican hostility of some of its leaders made this impossible. It is a credit to John Hume that he persevered despite all this and that we were able to find agreement on a range of important issues.

These included for example an acceptance that partition had failed, that the present structures were inadequate and had to be changed, there could be no internal settlement within the six counties, that the Irish people as a whole have a right to national self-determination and must be able to exercise this right freely and without external impediment, and that this was a

matter for agreement between the people of Ireland alone. We also agreed that the unionists could have no veto over discussions or the outcome of those discussions, and that a negotiated settlement required fundamental constitutional and political change.

There were of course well-documented differences of opinion on how a number of these principles could be interpreted or applied in practical terms. But nonetheless it was my opinion that there was sufficient commonality of view on these political principles to allow us to move forward. There was also a need to address a number of areas of immediate and practical concern to nationalists living in the north. These included parity of esteem, equality of opportunity, and equality of treatment for the Irish culture and identity.

Martin was able to report that after a long process of negotiation with the Irish government Dublin had provided written assurances that if there was a cessation there would be an immediate response on practical matters. Sinn Fein would be treated like any other political party and would not be subjected to harassment and marginalisation. The immediate effect of this would include a meeting between the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, myself and John Hume. There would be a meeting soon after between myself and Albert Reynolds and consultation between us regularly after that. There would also be consultations between Irish government officials and Sinn Fein as regularly as required.

There would be immediate bi-lateral discussions between Irish government representatives and Sinn Fein representatives on the proposed Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, which was how the Sagart's original idea for a convention had turned out. We would participate in the Forum on the basis of our electoral mandate. The Irish government was also committed to seeking to influence the British government and to encourage the US administration to take a more positive approach to the issue of visas for republicans.

The Connolly House group had also passed back to us a document which set out a serious programme of work and commitment from them and Irish America. Entitled 'Policy Statement by Irish American leaders' it said that in the event of a ceasefire they would commit themselves to 'the creation of a campaign in the United States dedicated to achieving' a number of specified goals. Among these were:

- **An immediate end to all visa restrictions imposed by the US government on Irish republicans**
- **the provision of unrestricted access for the Sinn Fein party leader; including access to the same level of the administration and members of the House and Senate as is available to all other major political party leaders.**
- **The creation of a staffed, representative office in Washington DC to educate and inform American media and influence public opinion on the peace process**
- **They would act as guarantors insofar as they could and to get the US government to act as guarantors, so that any agreements entered into by the governments were adhered to.**
- **A campaign to stimulate private and corporate investment in the North of Ireland**

- **An effort to get the White House to provide new forms of aid from the US**

The Connolly House group also committed themselves to mobilising to bring maximum American pressure to bear on the British government to use every means possible to prevent loyalist murder gangs from operating. They also committed themselves to seeking to end the harassment and surveillance of members of the Irish community in the USA.

The IRA meeting to which we reported all these matters had a different quality from the others. It was obvious that matters were coming to a head although there was still work to be done. The Army people agreed to meet again within days to receive an update from us of our last minute deliberations. It was coming close to make your mind up time. Everyone knew this. And just to be sure, to be sure, I said so. What was not so clear was how the Army Council would formally deal with a proposition for a cessation. Some clearly were prepared to support the idea if it was a launching pad or a dynamic which could drive the struggle forward. But these were hardheaded people. They could see the political landscape changing as a result of Hume Adams and other initiatives. Some of these initiatives had been authorised and devised by them. But short-term tactical initiatives, even risky ones were nothing compared to a decision to call a halt to operations.

Some of the leadership were against a cessation. They had been very frank about that. And they were good people. Longtime, sincere, serious and committed activists. People you could rely on. People you could trust with your life, provided you were straight with them. They would be disciplined and committed enough to accept whatever decision was made but they would do their best in a totally honest and democratic way to ensure that that decision was the one they favoured. It was going to be a close call.

Arrangements for meetings with the IRA were always problematic. Martin and I both knew that our movements were constantly monitored, phones and homes and offices were bugged. So we had to be careful – very careful – and this made for some torturous travel arrangements.

One meeting Martin McGuinness and I had with the IRA sometime later when Martin had just returned from the USA illustrates the lengths to which secrecy is maintained. We had already been in three different cars and then we had to climb into an old van. The floor of it was dirty. And covered in old straw, dried clay and what looked suspiciously like sheep shite. Martin wrinkled his nose and grinned at me. He was very jet-lagged. His dark lounge suit looked rather out of place. So, I am sure, did mine. We sprawled on the floor of the van. The driver flung a few empty bags towards us.

"Here, sit on these. Sorry youse are in your good clothes."

He pulled the van door closed behind him. The windows were blacked out and as the door slammed shut we were plunged into darkness.

"Last night the White House," Martin chuckled as the van lurched forward. "Today this."

Meanwhile back in Belfast our core group met again to review the situation. These meetings also had a security element to them. And I am not referring here to the commonsense arrangements needed to protect us against attack. Our concern that the British should not know what we were discussing meant that we held the most important meetings outside of our

offices or other places which would be obvious targets for eavesdropping or electronic surveillance.

So it was that our group crowded into supporters bedrooms or spare rooms to plot the next steps. I was of the firm view that we needed to choreograph a series of statements, actually more public initiatives than statements, from John Hume, Albert and the Connolly House group, which would actually signal the coming together of the different pieces of the package. In this circumstance though I didn't tell the meeting this, such a public manifestation of support for an alternative approach would be very helpful in persuading the AC that there really was the possibility of another way forward.

We also needed a visa for Joe Cahill and party colleague and Monaghan Councillor Pat Treanor to travel to the USA. Pat Treanor was an important representative in his own right but he would also be a travelling companion for Joe who was not in good health.

Our goal in getting Joe and Pat into the US was to ensure that if the IRA decided to have a ceasefire Joe Cahill, a senior respected figure would speak to republican and Irish-American support organisations in the USA. It was also one of the issues which the Army people had raised with us. They wanted to see whether the Irish government was prepared to take on the British on this issue and if it could win such a political battle with the British within the US administration. It would also be an important indicator of how seriously the Clinton administration intended to take the issue of peace in Ireland. If the visas were denied the IRA would weigh that heavily in any decision about the potential for the peace process.

The Sagart's support was enlisted. He had modified his role in recent months to doing follow up with all of us. He kept me on my toes, pushed the Irish government, and kept in constant touch with John Hume. The Sagart had a great affection for the Holy Spirit. At different times over the years when the situation appeared dire he would remark to me. "It's up to the Holy Spirit now."

Once, a year or so before in a telephone conversation he was trying to find out from me how things were. The two of us were very conscious of phone lines being tapped. We were being very cagey, especially me, and the Sagart was being very unsuccessful at ascertaining whether the particular business I was involved in was going well or going badly.

Eventually he asked "Do we need the Holy Ghost on the field?"

We are both big hurling and gaelic football fans.

"I have him playing in goals," I answered. He knew we were under pressure.

That became an accepted code between us. Over a long time this developed spontaneously. I don't know what the code breakers of GCHQ in Britain made of it. If the Holy Spirit was on the team at all we were in trouble. His position on the field indicated the state of play. So, if he was in backs we were on the defensive. Forwards we were on the attack. In goals we were in real trouble. If he was on the bench things were progressing well. Once I told the Sagart the Holy Spirit had transferred to the other team. Another time he, or she as the Sagart reminded me,

was injured. In one memorable conversation the Holy Spirit was sent off for fouling. That was against Dublin. The Sagart thought the ref. was too harsh. Once he or she scored three goals within minutes. These conversations invariably occurred at points of great tension after crisis meetings.

By now the Sagart was a firm friend of Jean Kennedy Smith. He undertook to lobby her and the Taoiseach as well. In his telephone conversations with me during that episode the Sagart had the Holy Spirit playing in every conceivable position. The British were dogged in their opposition. President Clinton is said to have looked at Joe's 'CV' – as a young man in the 1940's he had been sentenced to hang. His sentence had been commuted but a comrade, Tom Williams, was hanged. In 1974 Joe was caught smuggling several tonnes of weapons into Ireland from Libya. He had also been deported from the States. Since his release from prison some time after this he had been a senior figure in Sinn Fein and a key proponent of the peace process. The US Ambassador to Ireland, Jean Kennedy-Smith supported the request for a visa but the pressure from the British was intense and the Taoiseach and Ambassador fought a determined battle.

The Connolly House Group returned to Ireland on August 25. They met the Taoiseach on their arrival. The following day, Friday, they were at Connolly House again where they met with a senior Sinn Fein delegation including myself, Martin McGuinness and Mairead Keane. The outside of the building still bore the scars of the loyalist rocket attack several months earlier. Inside we discussed the policy statement they had signed up to and sought assurances from them that these would be followed through on. The establishment of the Washington office and its funding was particularly important. I also told them early in our conversation that it was my view that the IRA was moving toward taking a decision on a cessation. But I pointed out no decision had been made and there was no certainty about the outcome of that decision. And I asked them to respect the confidentiality of the meeting. Outside speaking to the media Bruce Morrison told them, that he was very encouraged and that the group felt that the process was moving in a very constructive direction.

I saw the meeting as an important contribution to our efforts to convince other republicans that a strong international element did exist and could be brought to play in support of the Irish side in any negotiations with the British. This would be significantly reinforced by the visa for Joe Cahill. Pat Treanor now needed one as well. On the day that the Connolly House group arrived in Ireland Pat had left for the States. Or at least he tried to. Instead he had been stopped by Immigration and sent back. This wasn't good.

Albert Reynolds was pushing Clinton hard and Jean Kennedy Smith in particular was pulling out all the stops. But so was London. The visa issue was now the subject of a pitched battle between Ireland and Britain or at least between the diplomatic services and governments of both countries. In many ways I felt my visit to New York was wee buns compared to Joe's travel plans. I was a bit like John the Baptist.

The following Sunday John Hume and I met and issued another joint statement. We recapped the work we had done thus far. We restated our view that agreement on a peaceful and democratic future was no threat to anyone. We also put the onus on the British government to respond positively, both in terms of the demilitarisation of the situation and in assisting the search for an agreed Ireland by encouraging the process of national reconciliation.

Later that evening the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds issued a statement in which he also expressed a belief that a historic opportunity was opening up. He too said that the British government had a heavy responsibility in all of this in assisting the Irish people to reach an agreed accommodation for the future and in removing the injustices which have fuelled conflict in the past. He said he wanted to see an all-round demilitarisation of the situation and the full participation of all parties, on equal terms, in talks leading to a comprehensive political settlement.

That was it. All the pieces of the jigsaw were together. But it had taken a frenzy of work since last we met the Army leadership. Martin and I met the Army Council again. The meeting was inconclusive. People needed more time to cogitate over all the issues. And while Joe's visa would not have broken the deadlock it certainly was a test of whether we could deliver. I relayed all this back to the Taoiseach. Then late on Monday night, August 29th, the President gave his authorisation for the two visas. The Taoiseach rang the Sagart who was staying in the same house as Joe in expectation of this. The next morning Joe and Pat picked up their visas from the US Embassy in Dublin and by lunchtime they were on an Aer Lingus flight to New York. Subsequently Joe's five-day visa was extended to fifteen to allow him to travel across the USA.

To those in the know it may have seemed obvious that there was going to be an initiative by the IRA in the form of a cessation. While we were able to report at a special meeting of our party's Ard Chomhairle and other leadership figures on the gathering together of the various pieces of the jigsaw everyone understood that the Army would make its own decisions.

But I had always argued that a changed political climate could break the political, constitutional and military stalemate and create the potential to eradicate the underlying causes of conflict. It would take time but those who took the initiative would have the advantage. At least for the opening rounds. I did not underestimate the difficulties involved.

On the way to see the Army Council again I was preoccupied with all these issues and probably a little withdrawn. Whatever way this meeting went a rubicon had been crossed. Martin and I and all the other hard working people who guided and advised and strategised with us had put together the package. It was now over to the IRA leadership. Would the Army give our package space? Obviously I felt that it should. The direction of politics could be changed irrevocably if it did. But there were powerful forces against change. And not only within the British establishment and within unionism. The Irish establishment had its interests as well. And history told us that the Irish government could not be relied upon.

Everyone at the Army meeting was a little tense. I had some sense of the way people might vote by the way they had spoken at other meetings and

by their attitude to the reports we had been giving them but there had been no individual lobbying and it was impossible to predict the outcome. These people would make their own individual decision. Martin McGuinness spoke eloquently. So did others. For and against. About the overall struggle. About the Army and the strains and stresses on it. About the British government's attitude thus far in response to IRA initiatives. What would happen to the struggle if the British spurned a cessation by the Army? How would volunteers react? Or that wonderfully resilient and loyal support base which had sacrificed so much over the decades? About the families of volunteers who had been killed. About the prisoners and their families.

One of Martin's great qualities is his sense of conviction and confidence. He can bring a strength to a debate which is very, very compelling. Even if you might not agree with him you know he is going to deliver on any commitment he makes or that he will die trying. He spelt out how the last few years had been the education of a lifetime for many people. The Hume Adams initiative had given people hope. More and more nationalists were seeing republicans making an effort, a real effort to build peace. Republicanism was stronger. There was a sense of Irish nationalism reasserting itself. And there was a strong and growing Sinn Fein party with a sense of itself and of what it should be doing.

The struggle wasn't ending we told them. They knew that of course. In its public statements the British government had spelt out its commitment to dialogue with Sinn Fein and to addressing other matters including cutting back on the British military presence. These were all on the public record. If the Brits reneged, as they might, then they would be seen as spurning the possibility for peace.

The difference between this cessation and any other one we argued was that in the past these were bi-lateral arrangements which were negotiated out, usually in secret between republicans and the British. Now any arrangements would be multilateral ones. At other times the IRA had been the main, in places the only manifestation of republican struggle. The armed struggle was the struggle. When the Army stopped the struggle stopped. Now the struggle was bigger than the Army.

There was also the question of the unionists. We were being told that elements there wanted peace. Republicanism in its essence is a generous philosophy. Well let's see, we said, if between us all we can reach out to the unionists to build that peace. John Hume, had remained true to the process despite all the problems, and now Dublin were giving firm commitments and a powerful element within Irish America was prepared to play its part. And all of this had come to be because we and people like us created the space and the conditions for all these possibilities.

In many ways, I said, the easy decision was for the IRA to continue to fight. Then when eventually it was all over those republicans who survived would meet at each other's funerals or at commemorations like we had seen so many others doing over the decades from other periods of struggle, and we could reminisce about how we had kept the faith. We could swap yarns and loose talk and take certain succour from being seen as old irreconcilables. As sound. That was the low risk option.

The high-risk option was the one we were arguing for. It meant uncharted waters. It would involve compromises. It could mean risking – and

losing – everything. And unlike others, who had lost in the past, we would be seen as responsible for the loss. We would be the ones to blame. We who had taken the wrong path. But we could also be the generation who would win freedom. We could set in place a process which could create new conditions for a genuine and just peace and from there build a pathway and a strategy into a new all Ireland republic.

A formal proposal was then put to the meeting. In essence the Army was going to give the process a chance. It would cease its military operations, go to the sidelines and monitor progress. Each of the Army Council members spoke in turn and declared their vote. The proposal was then formally put to the meeting. The cessation was on. It was formally decided that the vote would remain secret. Those who voted against pledged their support to the new position. Unity, they said was essential. I have always considered that the peace process and the republican cause, and the IRA owes a special debt to those Army Council members. It could be argued that those who proposed or supported the proposition for a cessation deserve credit and that may be fair enough. But to be passionately against a position and then to go and argue and debate and defend and promote that position with your peers is worthy of credit and commendation also.

The AC had to bring forward its proposal to the Army Executive. All commands had to be instructed. It was to be a busy and unsettling time for the people involved. There was also a statement to be written. Some sources have suggested that the Army were considering a different kind of a statement to the one which was released. This is not the case. According to these sources Albert Reynolds sent a strong message that nothing less than a full cessation would suffice. But no such message was ever given to the AC. It was not needed. In fact it would have been counter productive.

Such was the significance of the IRA initiative that the IRA's Publicity Director, P O'Neill could not draft anything which would undersell or allow opponents of the peace process to pick holes in what was being announced. So it was on Wednesday at noon the IRA declared its intentions

'Recognising the potential of the current situation and in order to enhance the democratic peace process and underline our definitive commitment to its success the leadership of Oglagh na hEireann have decided that as of midnight, Wednesday, 31 August, there will be a complete cessation of military operations. All our units have been instructed accordingly...

'Our struggle has seen many gains and advances made by nationalists and for the democratic position. We believe that an opportunity to create a just and lasting settlement has been created. We are therefore entering into a new situation in a spirit of determination and confidence: determined that the injustices which created the conflict will be removed and confident in the strength and justice of our struggle to achieve this...'

- * Second Visa - Probs celebration
- * Meeting State Dept - ran with White House

Chapter 18 America Again

The IRA cessation was the opening of a new phase of struggle. It was, as the Irish Nobel Poet Laureate Seamus Heaney was to write within days of its announcement – a space in which hope can grow. Our task was to deepen that space and to widen it so that the hope would flourish. We had to fulfil the potential the IRA initiative had created. A mighty task given the range of political and military forces ranged against our efforts and the shaky consensus on the nationalist/republican side.

We knew we had to hit the ground running. Dialogue with our activists, with our support base, and with wider public opinion was now imperative. In the immediate hours after the statement became public, and as it was being flashed around the world, Martin McGuinness and I, along with other senior Sinn Féin leaders Pat Doherty and Bairbre de Brún, arrived at Connolly House for an impromptu rally. There were hundreds of people there. As we pushed our way through the cheering crowd I was struck by the awesome responsibility of it all. The hopes and aspirations of all the people who were clapping us on the back and the dreams of the many others who would be watching this unfold were now pinned to our ability to deliver. Someone thrust a bottle of champagne and a bunch of flowers into my hands as I climbed onto the small platform that had been erected outside Connolly House.

I praised the IRA leadership for its bold and decisive initiative. They had created a crucial moment, a decisive moment in the history of Ireland.

The crowd was enthusiastic. Many of them were friends and activists I had known for many years. Some had lost loved ones in the struggle. Among them was Paddy Mulvenna. The anniversary of the killing of his son, Patrick, an IRA volunteer and my brother-in-law was that day. For the Mulvenna family and others like them this was going to be a difficult time. "The freedom struggle is not over". I said, "We are in a new area of struggle. There is a role for everyone in this new situation. We must develop an irreversible momentum for change, which will move the British government away from the failed policies of the past.

I also took the opportunity to speak to unionists. Their leaders had been quick to condemn the IRA's move. Ian Paisley claimed that unionists now faced the worst crisis in Ulster's history. Jim Molyneaux said it was a destabilising move. In his view it was not an occasion for celebration, quite the opposite.

So, I tried to speak over the heads of their political leaders by appealing directly to the unionist section of our people to join with the rest of us in creating a new democracy.

And in the middle of all of this I took time to single out and to thank one individual, a private citizen, who has played and who will continue to play a crucial role in this process. I was, of course, referring to the Sagart, but mindful of his desire for privacy I declined to name him. As the speeches finished a cavalcade of black taxis and cars, all crammed full of people waving flags and cheering, sped to travel throughout nationalist Belfast

Our spontaneous public event had one unexpected side effect. Sky television, which decided to carry it live, had to use actors' voices for Martin McGuinness and myself, because of the British government's broadcast restrictions. But Pat Doherty and Bairbre de Brún were broadcast using their own voices. Perhaps they ran out of actors!

There was another private, and for those involved undoubtedly a personal demonstration of the effects of the IRA announcement. All that week scores of people visited the republican plot in Milltown cemetery. Friends and presumably relatives of the patriot dead who are buried there, made their own little pilgrimage to mark what was a deeply emotional development. Colette met Mairead Farrell's mother. She was very uplifted by the Army's move 'I'm only sorry my Mairead isn't here for this' she said.

The new South African government, led by a recently elected President Mandela, lauded the decision and Archbishop Desmond Tutu described it as absolutely unbelievable news. He told reporters that his excitement was similar to the day that Nelson Mandela had been released from prison. In the United States President Clinton expressed his support and delight at developments.

But while the rest of the world welcomed and applauded the IRA move the usual begrudgers issued dire warnings of doom and gloom and the British government went into prevarication overdrive. The voices of the past were shouting loudly. According to Conor Cruise O'Brien it was all a clever IRA plot to create a civil war, which would end with the collapse of democracy in Ireland and the IRA in control. One of his articles in the London News of the World was headlined 'IRA will march into Dublin.' His answer to this devious republican master plan was simple – internment.

The British government decided to play for time. Having spent months arguing over clarification of the Downing Street Declaration the British now engaged in a new word game around the IRA statement. The statement they said did not include the word 'permanent!'

I set out the Sinn Féin stall at a packed press conference in Dublin two days after the IRA announcement. Sky News was again going to take it 'live' albeit with an actor's voice. So, the first thing I did was to call on John Major to end the nonsense of the British broadcasting restrictions and lift the banning orders against Sinn Féin leaders travelling to Britain. I went on to urge the creation of inclusive all-party negotiations as the first crucial step in any conflict resolution strategy. I also called for visible and speedy progress on the many issues which had contributed to the conflict.

In the discussions within our core group before the cessation we were aware of the dangers to the peace process posed by a British government still locked into a war mindset, allied to a unionism fearful of moving away from its 'no surrender' and 'not an inch' mentality. Major's diminishing majority within the British Parliament was also a serious consideration. Part of the Sinn Féin strategy, in our discussions with the Irish government, had been to agree a number of confidence building measures – what I referred to at that time as 'the strategy of alternative initiatives' – which did not require British involvement or approval.

The first of these - meeting with the Taoiseach and John Hume was set for Wednesday September 6th. But already only a day or so after the cessation there was trouble. Dublin contacted me to ask if that meeting could

be rescheduled. Seamus Mallon apparently was demanding that there be an Irish government- SDLP meeting before our get together. I said it wasn't on. We had just done the impossible and now I was being asked to rearrange one of the commitments that had persuaded the IRA. Eventually when it was obvious that we were not going to budge the meeting at Government Buildings between John, the Taoiseach and myself went ahead as had been agreed.

A small group of us, including Rita O'Hare, Sinn Féin's Director of Publicity and Jim Gibney accompanied me. It was a 'lá stáiriuil, cruinniú stáiriuil' – an historic day, an historic meeting. I wore a Bobby Sands T-shirt under my shirt and tie. I thought it was appropriate. The meeting itself was a relaxed affair. Albert was very down to earth. I liked him. There was tea and buns all round. John seemed a little under pressure. None of us mentioned the attempt to rearrange our get together.

The main item for discussion at our meeting was the proposed Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, which was scheduled for late October. Afterwards the three of us spoke to the media and we were photographed together shaking hands. The significance and symbolism of this was enormous. I was very conscious about how unionists might perceive the public coming together of nationalist Ireland. Already one young Catholic man, John O'Hanlon, had been killed on the first day of the cessation by loyalists. I spoke of extending in generosity the hand of friendship to my protestant brothers and sisters.

I also extended a word of thanks and appreciation to the government officials. While there were obvious differences of disagreement between Sinn Féin and Irish government officials, throughout this process the officials engaged with us and continue to engage with us, in a constructive and positive way. As the story develops Sean O hUiginn and Martin Mansergh were joined by others, like Tim Dalton, Paddy Teahon, Tim O'Connor, Ray Basset and Dermot Gallagher. There were at least a dozen other very committed civil servants who were less junior but no less important.

There was an air of quiet celebration afterwards in the foyer of Government buildings as we said our goodbyes. Away from the media Cleaky was busy getting photographed with everyone, including the Taoiseach. I had arranged to see the Sagart and we picked him up on route through Dublin City centre. We chose a pub at random in Dorset Street to have a quiet yarn. It was Joxer Dalys. I had never been there before but it is a fine pub with old-fashioned snugs. It was also fitted out with memorabilia of the 1916 Rising. Cleaky and our security team took this as a good omen as we crowded into a quiet corner surrounded by photographs of the leaders and the events of the insurrection.

I was moved to buy a drink. Some of our company thought that was just as much history as one day could contain. I didn't mind. The Sagart was a teetotaler. The rest of them were on duty. So it was soft drinks all around. Except for me. My work was done for the day, so mine was a pint.

Beneath the benign gaze of Pearse and Connolly and the other 1916 leaders we raised our glasses to one and other.

" Slainte"

It was a good day's work.

* * * * *

In the meantime local communities along the border began to take their own little initiatives. The border separating the north from the south stretches for over 300 miles and cuts across several hundred major and unapproved roads, some of them little more than country lanes and cow tracks. Over the preceding years the British Army had used a variety of devices – large concrete blocks, miles of razor wire, the cratering of roads with explosives – to prevent traffic moving back and forth. The impact on local communities was enormous. Economically towns were cut off from their natural hinterlands. Farmers sometimes had to make detours of scores of miles to get from one piece of their land to another. Families also found that retaining social contact was now much more difficult. It often necessitated going through British Army checkpoints where harassment and delays were frequent.

This caused a range of community and action groups to regularly play a cat and mouse game with the British forces. Suddenly they would appear and fill in a crater or using large trucks and lifting equipment, to remove concrete bollards. Occasionally they built a new road around a particularly well-constructed block. It would stay open for a while and then the Brits would move in, swamp the area and block the road again.

On Sunday September 4th, in an impressive demonstration of people power, community associations in Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Cavan, Monaghan, and Tyrone converged on closed cross-border roads and began reopening them. At the same time Sinn Féin produced our first ever-detailed breakdown of the extent of the British military garrison in the six counties. It was a colour map with an area-by-area itemisation of the British presence. Queen's University lecturer Mike Tomlinson estimated that 1994 troop levels were now such that there was one British Army/RUC member for every 3.7 catholic males between the ages of 16 and 44.-Estimating the full costs to the British government of its garrison in Ireland was a difficult task. However it was conservatively estimated that over the previous 25 years the cost was probably somewhere around £20 billion. The RUC had 161 installations throughout the six counties. The British Army had 135 fixed military installations and structures. Between them they had 32,000 people under arms. We were the most militarised area in Western Europe.

Ten days after my meeting with Albert Reynolds and John Hume the British Prime Minister John Major announced the lifting of the broadcasting restrictions and the opening of 10 of the 250 closed border roads. It was a small but welcome first indication by the British government that it might be prepared to move beyond prevarication. But predictably, in dealing with the British government you always have to watch for the negative message. That came during a visit by Major to South Africa on September 22nd when he ruled out the release of political prisoners. He went further. He told his hosts, most of who were ex-political prisoners themselves; 'In the UK people are not in jail as political prisoners.' When South African President Nelson Mandela was a political prisoner he was described by Major's predecessor Margaret Thatcher as a 'terrorist.' That was the reason, or excuse; she gave for not talking to him.

At the same time Major's officials in the British Embassy in Washington were lobbying the White House and State department not to give me a visa for a return visit to the United States. When this failed and a visa waiver was issued the British then briefed the media that they had achieved a 'diplomatic breakthrough' by succeeding in preventing me from meeting President Clinton. I was surprised, and I'm sure he was, to hear this, as we had no arrangements to meet!

Richard McAuley and I left for Boston on Saturday September 24th. By this point Mairead Keane was our representative in Washington. She was busy planning to open an office there, working out the details of this trip and discussing with Larry and Sean Downes, Ciaran Staunton, Fay Devlin, Shannon Eaton, Sean Mackin and many others, the establishment of a 'Friends of Sinn Féin' group in the USA.

This first major trip was for three weeks, beginning in Boston and then travelling throughout the USA and to Vancouver and Toronto in Canada. Each day was a blur of meetings, media, dinners and receptions. Our objectives were straightforward: to put the Irish Republican position on the political agenda in the USA; to influence opinion makers in support of the peace process; to build relationships with political leaders and business leaders; to hold discussions with existing Irish-American organisations and to clear the way for Americans to fund-raise for Sinn Féin.

It was an exhilarating and an exhausting three weeks. Everything was new and everyone wanted to help. Senator Kennedy was a gracious host in Boston, taking time out of his senatorial election battle to meet us at Logan airport and later to host a public event. Congressman Richard Neal brought us to Springfield in Connecticut where the first words spoken to me were by a Kerry man speaking in Irish. Here were the last people to leave the Blasket Islands off the coast of Kerry. Others were from West Mayo. In Philadelphia, the people were from Tyrone. In Cleveland, they were from Mayo. And so, on and on it went. I asked an old Clare man in Detroit how come people from the same area in Ireland settled in the same place in the USA.

'Did you ever see a flock of birds flying. One comes down then another, than another 'til the whole flock lands.'

We also met Italian-Americans; in New York Comptroller Alan Hevesi arranged a meeting with the Jewish business community. We met Native Americans and African-Americans.

The visit to Cleveland was a personal highlight for me because there I had the honour and privilege to meet Mrs Rosa Parks whose stand against racial prejudice and her refusal to sit at the back of the bus is credited by many as sparking the American Civil Rights Movement. We also held a large meeting with the local Irish-American community, which was made up almost entirely of judges and police officers. I joked to them that here in the United States I was discovering a new and completely different relationship with judges and police from that which I had back home.

It had been eight months since my previous visit into New York. The reception again was overwhelming. Those travelling with me for the first time in the Big Apple were amazed by the number of New York cops

who met us at the airport and took us in a convoy of lights and sirens into the city. I told the press conference that when we stopped Richard got out of the car with his hands up! The last time I had that sort of escort I was on my way to jail.

In New York we met the Connolly House group and discussed the help they had promised to provide. There were also public meetings with capacity crowds of cheering and jubilant Irish-Americans and our team did the rounds of the media stations and editorial boards. Big Brian arranged for the Harbour cops to take us in one of their patrol boats to Ellis Island offshore Manhattan and close to the Statue of Liberty. Ellis Island is the place that was used to process all of the emigrants to the USA. About one million Irish passed through there.

Amid the exhibits of clothes, photographs, family heirlooms from Italy and Germany and Poland and Latvia, is a little delft plate of the four provinces of Ireland. In another section there is a shillelagh. One could imagine that anyone going away for good would take their most treasured possessions – a photograph of parents or family, a favourite item of clothing, a little personal memento. So many of us did that it is little wonder, then, that the first person processed through Ellis Island was an Irish woman, Annie Moore.

A few days later on October 1st in Philadelphia I wrote to the White House requesting a meeting with representatives. We had already been given to understand that a meeting would take place but no arrangements had been finalised and US policy still banned meetings with Sinn Fein.

The week before I travelled to Washington, a Unionist delegation had visited the White House where Vice President Al Gore had met them. Our efforts to secure equality of treatment by the Clinton Administration were to be eventually played out in the unlikely setting of Hickory Hill.

Hickory Hill: the very name resonates with American history. The home of the late assassinated US Attorney General Robert Kennedy. The place where he and his older brother, US President John F. Kennedy, spent a lot of time during the scary days of the Cuban missile crisis. We had been invited to spend our first night in Washington in Hickory Hill by Robert Kennedy's daughter, Courtney Kennedy when we arrived in Boston on September 24th and were formally welcomed by Senator Edward Kennedy and his wife Vicky. I was told then that there would be no meeting at the White House, no meeting with the Vice President, and that we would have to make do with a meeting in the State department.

To be denied by the White House the same access afforded to the Unionists risked inflicting a serious blow on a fragile peace process. I made this clear to the National Security Advisor Tony Lake and Nancy Soderberg, Staff Director of the National Security Council, through Niall O'Dowd, who was the conduit for messages between us. I told them also that I was prepared to picket the White House when our group arrived in Washington.

It took most of our visit and a series of phone calls between myself, O'Dowd and Soderberg as we toured from city to city before we

got an acceptable outcome on this issue. I put a compromise proposition to the White House from Philadelphia, that I should speak to the Vice President over the phone and that this would be publicly announced as the end of the ban on White House contact with Sinn Féin. It took time to get someone to close on this and our telephone calls punctuated our journey towards Washington, from airport to airport, and eventually on the last leg of our journey, by car. At one point we stopped in a lay-by on the side of the Potomac river, which some in our exhausted group kept referring to as the Pontiac, and continued to negotiate the following day's arrangements. As luck would have it, our mobile phones were as tired as we were, and one after another the three we had with us died, their batteries drained. The White House thought we were hard balling. They were right but the poor health of the mobiles gave an added tension to the dialogue.

To add to this Jack, our driver, couldn't find Hickory Hill. And so it was much later when we finally arrived in the dark outside the white stone Georgian house that is Hickory Hill, and home to Ethel Kennedy and her clan.

Courtney and her husband Paul Hill were there to greet us. Paul was one of the Guildford Four. He had served almost 20 years in jails in England on trumped up charges. Using the house phone, we concluded an agreement that would result in a five-minute phone call with the Vice President the next morning and a White House announcement that the ban on contact between Sinn Féin and the US government was lifted.

I slept that night in Robert Kennedy's room and awoke early to discuss with our little group how we would approach the pending phone call with the Vice President.

At 8.35 am Sunday October 3rd the White House rang. Courtney wanted me to take the call in her father's study, so I was sitting at Robert Kennedy's desk, when Al Gore came on the line. The significance of the call and of the location was not lost on any of us.

After the initial "how are you", we discussed developments and I explained to the Vice President the significance of the IRA cessation, Sinn Féin's objectives and our view of the administration's role in the peace process. At the end of our allotted time, and as he thanked me for our efforts, I took the opportunity to invite him to Ireland.

A few minutes later a fax letter came through from the White House, from Tony Lake, officially telling me that the ban on direct US—Sinn Féin contacts was lifted, and inviting me to begin a process of engagement with the White House. This was to include Nancy Soderberg's participation in the State department meeting that was to take place the next day.

A short time later we drove into Washington. Courtney invited us to stop along the way and visit her father's grave and the grave of President John F. Kennedy. I thought of Milltown cemetery in Belfast where so many of my own family, friends and comrades are buried. But Arlington was unlike any other cemetery. It stretched for miles and miles. Thousands of white crosses for the young Americans who lost their lives in Vietnam faded towards the horizon. Courtney knelt and prayed at her father's grave. She had brought flowers from the house

and gave me some to lay at his memorial. We all stood about her in silent reflection. Like so many families in Ireland the Kennedys had been touched by violence and suffered much.

Later at the State Department I met Ambassador John Kornblum, the senior deputy-assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian affairs, Leon Fuerth, assistant to the Vice President for National Security affairs, and others. Among the US delegation was Nancy Soderberg, Staff Director of the National Security Council who had herself played such a pivotal role in getting the process this far.

It was a friendly, relaxed and business-like meeting and we discussed the broad constitutional, political and other matters. We put to the US government directly our need for their support to build confidence in the peace process and to keep moving it ahead. I pressed the need for inclusive negotiations. We also visited Capitol Hill where we met a range of Irish-American Congressional members from the Ad Hoc Committee on Ireland and the Friends of Ireland. Republican Congressman Peter King and his staff had been enormously helpful. With no Sinn Fein office yet in Washington, he and his people worked long hours with Mairead Keane to ensure a successful visit.

Before we left Washington it was arranged that I would do an interview on the Larry King show with Ken Magennis of the Ulster Unionist Party. The British government had been loath to send a minister to visit the US at the same time as I was there but they wanted a contrary voice and arranged for Michael Mates, a former Conservative party minister at the NIO and Ken Magennis to travel there. Both men, who would not speak to me back home, never mind go into television studios to debate the issues, crossed the Atlantic to do exactly that in America. I did an interview for a BBC programme out of New York with Mates and then subsequently the Larry King show in Washington with Magennis. When I offered to shake hands with Magennis before the show, he refused. Many Americans later told me that for them that was the point Magennis lost the debate.

What neither Ken nor Larry King nor the millions watching knew was that just prior to entering the studio the zip on my trousers had broken. It happened when I was clowning about in the reception room where our group was waiting for our segment of the programme to begin. I was trying to get focussed and was looking for a quick brainstorm but of course everyone ignored me, as was their wont. I jumped up on to the table, emulating Robin Williams in Dead Poets Society.

'Captain my captain' I cried.

They continued to ignore me, as was also their wont.

I dropped my trousers. That got their attention. Unfortunately when I pulled them up again my zip was busted. There was a frantic few minutes as we tried to repair the damage or find a pin – to no avail. Time ran out and I had to go into the studio. During the programme that wasn't too much of a problem as we were sitting at a desk. However when the discussion ended my plight was obvious. I stood exposed. I picked up a newspaper that Ken had brought with him, folded it and held it strategically before me. When Richard and I arrived downstairs in the huge lobby of the building housing the CNN offices there were six or more television crews interviewing Ken about the programme. Keeping the newspaper carefully placed, I walked across this

huge wide-open lobby, stepped up behind Ken, put my hand on his shoulder and asked him how he was doing?' He rushed off as if just stung by a bee. Richard, I and Ken's newspaper followed in his wake.

And then it was off to the West Coast. We were met coming off the plane by the usual contingent of police officers. There was a familiar face among all the uniforms: Jack Webb, a regular visitor to Belfast and a long time activist for the Irish cause. He was a retired police officer. In fact local rumour had it that the Clint Eastwood character 'Dirty Harry' was based upon Jack's police exploits. He certainly looked the part and carried the firepower to prove it.

I was delighted to see him and as we walked towards the terminal he filled me in on the upcoming events. My attention was caught by a passing group of bigwigs.

'Who are they' I asked Jack.

'Assholes' he hissed in true Dirty Harry style.

And that's the way the rest of the visit went.

There is a very active Irish republican activist community in San Francisco and they pulled out all the stops. The next day, along with California Senator Tom Hayden, we travelled down to Los Angeles. I had to speak at Berkeley University in Oakland where the packed audience had been primed by our hosts, including Angela Davis and Rene Castro, to sing Happy Birthday to me. It was October 6th. I was 46.

That evening Fionnuala Flanagan, the well-known Irish actress and her husband Garrett O'Connor hosted a party at their home in Beverly Hills. Among those who attended were Gabriel Byrne, Sean Penn, Martin Sheen, Angelica Houston, Barbara Hershey and Colm Meaney. Midway through the proceedings Fionnuala produced a birthday cake. I shared it with another of the guests, Pedro Meyer whose birthday it was also. Pedro is a renowned photographer; his wife Trisha Ziff has had a long interest in the conflict in Ireland. That night the birthday cake was for both of us. The evening ended with Irish, American, Mexican and Irish-American voices raised in song and recitation. The craic was mighty.

Outside, a reporter for the *Sunday Times* was skulking around, trying to identify those who were attending the party. He needn't have bothered they were all quite pleased to be there. So were we. Especially Aidan, friend of the stars.

And then for most of my colleagues it was back home. Gerard McGuigan and I travelled on to Vancouver before going to Toronto. The Canadian events were as well attended, celebratory and enthusiastic as the American ones. In Vancouver just in case we were homesick a small crowd of unionist supporters barracked us on our arrival. More moving was the welcome by a group of native people who recognised us on the plane and as we made the approach run into Vancouver airport they sang a native song of welcome. It wasn't only a fitting beginning to the Canadian events it was also an evocative and poignant end to the US trip. I also had the bonus of reconnecting with my Aunt Rita and my cousins in Toronto. It was the first time that I got to meet with them on their home turf.

The day before I left Canada for Dublin the various loyalist paramilitary organisations, united under the title of the Combined Loyalist Military Command called its ceasefire. It was a direct result of the IRA's cessation but

it was a mighty step in any case marking the possibility of new thinking within unionist paramilitarism.

Dec. 1994 - Kield in D.C.
First meeting with Tony Lake + Ron Brown
FOSP incorporated.

Chapter 19 Seizing the Moment

John Major was under enormous pressure by those in Britain and Ireland and internationally who wanted progress. In the aftermath of my three weeks trip to the USA and Canada the banning order barring me from travelling to Britain looked even more ludicrous than ever. It was October 21st before Major announced he was lifting the banning orders on Martin McGuinness and myself. In the face of a mounting campaign by local people along the border he also announced the opening of all cross-border roads.

Exactly one week later the political representatives of 82% of the Irish people came together at Dublin Castle for the inaugural meeting of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. It was chaired by Catherine McGuinness, a wonderful and exemplary Irish woman. Dublin Castle was the administrative centre of British rule in Ireland for centuries. It had witnessed many dark deeds. Now from within its opulent splendour we were building a process, which I believed, would lead eventually to the end of British rule in Ireland. One of my memories of this time was when one of the attendants ushered me into a side room to use the toilet. To my surprise a wall plaque proclaimed that this was the room in which the badly wounded 1916 leader James Connolly was held before his execution.

Two days later, nationalist children on the Lower Ormeau Road were batoned by the RUC as they protested against a planned Orange march through this nationalist area. The RUC's political bosses raced to defend this action and Patrick Mayhew assured unionists that he had no plans to change either the name or the structure of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Instead Mayhew chose to press the issue of IRA weapons and to erect it as an obstacle to substantive negotiations.

Then the peace process suffered its first serious blow with the unexpected resignation on November 17th of Albert Reynolds. The collapse of the Coalition government centred around a controversy involving a Catholic priest, Fr. Brendan Smyth, who subsequently served a prison sentence for sexually abusing children. There were allegations that someone in Dublin had tried to prevent Smyth's extradition to face these charges in the north. Reynolds' Fianna Fail party and Dick Spring's Labour Party came to loggerheads on the issue and the Labour Ministers on the government resigned. Reynolds then resigned as leader of Fianna Fail and was replaced by Bertie Ahern. In the weeks that followed intense negotiations took place between the major parties in the Irish parliament. I was concerned that the loss of Reynolds at a time when John Major was still not engaged in the process might seriously, or perhaps fatally damage what had been put together. Our assessment and calculation, prior to the cessation had been that the Reynolds government was the strongest in more than twenty-five years. That stability and leadership had been crucial to persuading the IRA that the peace process and the nationalist consensus that had created it, was a viable alternative to the armed struggle. And now this important element in our strategy was gone.

In all my dealings with Albert Reynolds I found him practical and straightforward. I think he had a positive attitude to life and at times a happy go lucky approach. We got on well and he and Martin McGuinness in particular struck up a good rapport. It was to Albert's credit that he instructed his own system to engage with us and that he took risks that his predecessors shied away from. He deserves great credit for this. I am more critical of his handling of the Hume Adams propositions and how the British were able to collapse this down to the Downing Street Declaration. He defended this to us on the grounds that he was dealing with the practical politics of the time. He has a point of course and everything is relative. For many in the Irish establishment the Downing Street Declaration was an advanced document. To republicans it was a stopgap of sorts, an advance perhaps but significantly short of what was required. But there is no doubt that Albert did his best and that this was significantly more than any other Taoiseach before him. I got to know his wife Kathleen and his family. They were good craic and without any pretensions. They were deeply upset by Albert's fall from power and one of his daughters was especially outraged by what she saw as Dick Spring's role in this. Albert was more philosophical, on the surface at least.

The negotiations to form a new government took almost four weeks. There was also a coalition but this time it was led by John Bruton, the leader of Fine Gael. Bruton was seen by many republicans and most nationalists living in the North as pro-Unionist. It was unlikely that he would see himself as the leader of Irish nationalism in the negotiations with the British government. Faced by a British government and Unionist parties seeking to either reduce the potential of the process or collapse it entirely, Bruton's attitude was likely to prove disastrous.

Even as this crisis was playing itself out we were trying to keep the pressure on the British government. The day Albert resigned I was in London for my first visit there since the exclusion orders were first imposed in 1993. I did a series of meetings with British MPs from the three main parties, the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats and the inevitable media interviews. I also did my first ever book reading to a packed room at Waterstones Bookshop in central London. The crowd was so large that we needed the help of some very pleasant London 'Bobbies' to make it back to the car.

There was still no sign of Major's government setting a date for the promised talks with Sinn Fein. Indeed, we were informed that we would not be invited to an economic conference in Belfast on December 13th at which John Major would be speaking. In interviews and articles I made it clear that we would not accept any preconditions being placed upon our electorate or upon us.

John Hume and I added our joint voices to a call for the British government to move more speedily. On November 30th we warned against any stalling. The British by this stage were suggesting December 15th as the date for a meeting between us but the row over our exclusion from the economic conference and the public and private uproar and criticism from nationalist Ireland and Irish-America forced them into a re-think. Roderic Lyne, Major's Private Secretary, replied on December 1st to my letter to Major informing us that Quentin Thomas, Deputy Secretary at the NIO – one of the senior people involved in the messing around the secret talks between us –

would lead their delegation. They suggested December 7th as a date for our first meeting. Although I would not be participating in these talks myself it was felt that we should seek a two-day postponement to allow me to return from the USA where I was scheduled to meet President Clinton's National Security Advisor, Tony Lake, at the White House.

The British also moved to resolve the row over the economic conference but in a typically offensive fashion. There was to be no equality of treatment. Instead they said that six Sinn Féin Councillors on six local council economic committees could attend for two and a half hours. We rejected this. Several hundred people subsequently picketed the conference.

I arrived in Washington on Monday December 8th and held a series of meetings with senior political figures, including Senators Ted Kennedy and Chris Dodd and Congress members Peter King and Ben Gilman. I asked for a meeting with the State Department and spoke also to Martha Pope, Secretary of the US Senate. In January she would be taking up her new post working closely with Senator George Mitchell who days earlier had been appointed President Clinton's Secretary of State on Economic Initiatives in Ireland. During my meeting with Martha, Senator Mitchell who was in Maine getting married, rang and we spoke for a few minutes.

The next day Mairead Keane, Richard McAuley, Ciaran Staunton and I went to the White House. It was another first in a year that was now bursting with these. I gave Tony Lake and Nancy Soderberg our assessment of the peace process and expressed our concern at the British government's reluctance to take up the challenge and engage meaningfully with the process. I stressed the importance of the role of the US in helping to resolve differences that might emerge. We needed someone outside the frame, friendly with all sides, and with the ability to exercise influence and persuasion.

As evidence of the administration's increasing interest in the process the Commerce Secretary Ron Brown dropped by to discuss the investment conference in Belfast. Ron was an African-American who entered politics through the Civil Rights Movement. In the time ahead he was to play an important supportive role in seeking to improve US economic ties with the North and the border counties. As our meeting concluded he asked me what the US government could do to help and in an obvious reference to Mrs Rosa Parks, I told him not to ask me or Irish republicans to sit at the back of the bus. He laughed and from that moment we had an important ally in the US government.

Ron Brown was to visit Ireland many times. It was clear both from the speeches that he made and from initiatives of which he was part that he identified with the battle against discrimination. Working closely with him were Virginia Manuel and Chuck Meissner. Both spent a lot of time in Ireland working with us and with community activists on economic initiatives and ensuring that trade missions from the US visited economical deprived areas in Belfast and along both sides of the border. Tragically, Ron Brown and Chuck Meissner were later killed in an aeroplane crash in the Balkans.

Before we left the US I held a meeting with colleagues who had formally incorporated 'Friends of Sinn Fein. Inc', as a not-for-profit corporation in the state of New York. Our goal was to raise funds, which would help us run an office in Washington, organise public tours of the US by Sinn Fein spokespersons, and provide the financial back up necessary for Sinn Fein in Ireland to build our party. We had already complied with US Department of Justice requirements for registration under the Foreign Agents Act. The right to fundraise was going to be another battle. Already the British Embassy was lobbying hard against the administration giving its approval even though Sinn Fein could fundraise in Britain.

I returned to Belfast in time for our first publicised meeting with the British government. It took place at Parliament Buildings, Stormont. Our delegation was led by Martin McGuinness and included Sean McManus from Sligo, Lucilila Bhreatnach, Siobhan O'Hanlon and Gerry Kelly, who was secretary to our delegation. Quentin Thomas led the British delegation.

Martin began by remarking on the absence of women within the six-man British delegation and then asked after 'Fred' – Colin Ferguson - the British representative in the secret talks. He read prepared opening remarks and handed over a submission by us which set out, from our perspective, the cause of conflict – Britain's claim to sovereignty over a part of Ireland. Martin welcomed the resumption of discussions between us but criticised the British government's continued failure to properly recognise our democratic credentials.

As far as we were concerned these were merely preliminary discussions – exploratory talks – which should conclude quickly in order that we could move onto inclusive peace talks led by the two governments and addressing the three broad areas of political and constitutional change, democratic rights and demilitarisation and associated issues. But it was quickly clear to Martin and the others that the British government was not prepared to move at this time to substantive negotiations. It seemed that they were going to make the surrender of IRA arms a pre-requisite for that.

The Sinn Fein delegation also raised other related issues of prisoners, Irish language rights, harassment, border roads and more. A few days later on December 15th John Bruton was elected as the new Irish Taoiseach. The next day he and I met at a session of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin. Three days later Martin was back with our delegation at Stormont and he returned again in early January.

The British had provided two written submissions to our team. The first outlined its basis for entry into dialogue. The second was a broad, non-definitive response to a number of questions we had put in our submissions. The British delegation had been quite frank in putting the position that Sinn Fein was not to be accorded equal treatment despite the acceptance of their delegation leader Quentin Thomas, that our party threatened no-one and that Sinn Fein was a main political party with an electoral mandate. London had responded to our verbal submissions on such matters as equality, prisoners and cultural discrimination. But the overwhelming focus of the British delegation and most of their energy had focussed on IRA weapons. At the meeting of December 19th the British delegation sought to present our

delegation with a decommissioning document. They had wisely declined to accept it.

As 1995 began it was becoming obvious that the British government was engaged in a strategy that involved at best, stalling the process through the deliberate erection of barriers and at worst attempting to create and sustain a crisis around the issue of IRA arms. And to do all of this in a way which would portray Sinn Fein as being the unreasonable and inflexible party. The entire logic of a peace process for me was that through peace talks we would arrive at a peace settlement which removed the causes of conflict and took the guns forever from the political equation in Ireland. In our submissions to the British government we made this clear.

But this was not good enough. Or so the Brits said. At the January 16th meeting the British government paper stated that 'As a matter of principle and of political reality substantial progress on the issue of decommissioning would be necessary before Sinn Fein could and would be included in such a dialogue.'

Then to add insult to injury, as the sixth meeting between the delegations was to begin on Thursday February 9th, Cleaky's security personnel, who travelled to and from Stormont meetings with our delegation, found an electronic listening device in offices allocated to us in Parliament Buildings. It was mutually agreed with the head of the British delegation to postpone the meeting. Clearly this was a serious breach of trust. But for us the most important matter was still the fact that we were being treated differently from the other parties, our electoral and democratic mandate was not being respected and no British political representatives had been introduced into the discussions. We spent the next two months trying to reverse that situation. I wrote to John Major and Patrick Mayhew, and Martin wrote to and met British officials privately, along with Siobhan O'Hanlon, to try to break the deadlock.

At the end of February the British and Irish governments produced a discussion paper titled the 'Framework Document'. This had been under discussion for over two years and it was supposed to set out their joint view of future developments. In their words it outlined 'a shared understanding between them on the parameters on a possible outcome to the talks process.'

We saw it as an opportunity for the British to move into a proper engagement with Sinn Fein. However, it immediately ran into a storm of controversy and protest because it envisaged new political structures in an all-Ireland context. This was too much for the unionists. The UUP threatened to pull down the Major government. Major moved quickly. He tried to reassure them 'Northern Ireland is a central part of the United Kingdom...for my part, I cherish the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland's part in it.'

- * St. Patrick's visit DC. March 1995.
- * May economic conference - Major refuses fund-raising: phone calls

Chapter 20 Major Mistakes

Having pulled back from the Framework Document, John Major's tactical and negative approach to the process became ever more apparent in his government's public efforts to blame republicans for the difficulties.

British briefings to the media claimed that we were refusing to discuss decommissioning. Martin McGuinness publicly and privately told the British that we wished to engage in serious, substantive and constructive discussions with British ministers on all relevant issues, including the decommissioning of weapons.

Speaking on a visit to Washington for the St. Patrick's Day celebrations, I had also expressed our willingness to discuss every issue, without exception, including decommissioning. But predictably the British government was going out of its way to make things difficult. The British Embassy in Washington lobbied to prevent me getting a visa – no surprise there. They lobbied to prevent me getting an invitation to the Speaker's Lunch, to which the Irish Taoiseach and other Irish political leaders are traditionally welcomed. They lobbied to prevent the White House inviting me to the President's St. Patrick's Day event. They lobbied against Sinn Fein getting the right to fund raise. They lobbied Congressional and Senate members not to meet me. Patrick Mayhew travelled to Washington in early March for meetings with the Vice President Al Gore and the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher. Mayhew told them that there would have to be decommissioning of weapons by the IRA before Sinn Fein would be allowed into substantial talks.

At a breakfast meeting with journalists on March 7th Mayhew spelt out three preconditions which Sinn Féin would have to satisfy before we could enter into all-party talks. With impeccable audacity these preconditions were presented as the Washington 'principles'. These demanded that the IRA disarm progressively; that it spell out what this would entail; and that it actually decommission some arms to start the process. Mayhew told the journalists that only by agreeing to these could republicans remove what he described as 'their self-imposed disqualification.'

The British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland left Washington apparently satisfied that he had achieved his goals. But he had failed to take proper account of the many political and business leaders who were now solidly behind the peace process, who believed that the British approach was wrong, and who wanted their government to take a different tack. Congressman Ben Gilman and three other co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Committee on Irish Affairs, Peter King, Tom Manton and Richard Neal – Republicans and Democrats – sent a letter to President Clinton supporting my visa. Senator Chris Dodd spoke to the President during a round of golf on the same day Mayhew was talking to the journalists and came away convinced the President was open on the issue of fundraising. Ted Kennedy phoned President Clinton and other Irish Americans rowed in behind. Sinn Fein's commitment, which we had

already given to the British, to seriously discuss every issue, including decommissioning, was good enough for the White House. The President agreed to Americans having the right to fundraise for Sinn Féin and I was invited to the White House St. Patrick's Day event. The British were furious. Clinton sent a letter to John Major explaining why he had done what he had done. But from March 11th and for five days the British Prime Minister refused to take a telephone call from the President of the United States.

When I arrived in Washington on March 14th my first job was to open a Friends of Sinn Féin office. The battle line was drawn, one Mayo woman versus hundreds of British diplomats. The Brits were in trouble. Then it was off to the Speakers St. Patrick's Day lunch. I was accompanied by Congressman Peter King.

As well as Peter, Republican Congressman Thomas DeLay of Texas and Susan Brophy, Deputy Assistant to President Clinton on legislative affairs were at our table. I had expected to meet the President once the media were ushered out. But there appeared to be some problems. Someone said that the Irish Embassy and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs had vetoed a meeting. Then we were told that the veto had come from one of Newt Gingrich's staff. This was getting to be a surreal situation. The harpist in the corner, strumming away, guests eating their corned beef and cabbage and President Clinton and me sitting a few yards apart without a word passing between us. So I asked Peter King to tell someone in authority that I was going home.

Peter and Susan and the US Ambassador to Ireland Jean Kennedy Smyth, went off and cornered Gingrich's aide. They then came and told me that John Hume would be introducing me to the President. Whether there was any real problem or not I don't know. A few minutes later Peter told me that they wanted me to meet the President now.

I couldn't resist staying put.

'They want you now', Peter repeated anxiously.

I looked him straight in the eye.

'He'll have to hold on,' I said jokingly, 'till I finish my dinner.'

John did the introductions. Many of the seventy-six assembled guests started to applaud when they saw what was happening. Clinton told me the British government was beating up on him and I remarked; 'Now you know Mr. President what we have to put up with!'

Bill Clinton was enthusiastic about the peace process. I was very impressed by his commitment. In time as I got to know him I was impressed also by his grasp of the detail, the personalities, the politics, and the strategies involved. In subsequent meetings it was clear that he understood and had a real insight into the scheming and game playing. I became convinced that his engagement was a genuine and committed one.

That evening Mairead, Richard and I attended the annual American Ireland Funds dinner in Washington. John Bruton was guest speaker. We were amazed, and Irish Americans around us were outraged, when Bruton made remarks that put him firmly on the British side in the arms debate. He called for the IRA to move on weapons and

in interviews with the media in the coming days suggested that the White House was putting us under pressure to secure movement by the IRA on this issue – which wasn't true.

The next evening I visited the White House accompanied by Mairead Keane. We were standing in line, along with Richard who had come over to drop us off and make arrangements to pick us up again. We were spotted by a very pleasant Sergeant in the Secret Service who came over, introduced himself and took us out of the line to get us into the White House more quickly! Richard was chuffed when the sergeant handed him a business card with his number and told him to ring if he needed to contact me. The incongruity of it – a secret service agent who gives out a business card! And to Richard McAuley. Some secret!

Before formalities commenced I had a chance to speak to both the President and the First Lady Hilary Clinton. The 'Celebration of Ireland' was a fine St. Patrick's affair and an entire floor of the White House had been opened up for the event. A senior official told me that such affairs were normally restricted to about a hundred guests, but with the Irish that wouldn't work: it took about three hundred invitations to get proper representation.

The White House was designed by Irish-born architect James Hoban, who won a gold medal for his effort. And the first President to live in it was an Adams! - President John Adams. In the library we saw an old weapon which had been found hidden in the chimney – undecommissioned. We were also told of how the British burned the building in 1812 and how some fine paintings were saved from the blaze.

The schedule, as was the norm at a Clinton event, ran overtime. At 10 pm when we were supposed to be finishing the President was just beginning to speak. Back at our hotel Richard, Ciaran Staunton, Shannon Eaton and Kieran Clifford, a young Irish American woman who helped run our Washington office, were watching 'The Quiet Man' on television – it was St. Patrick's Day after all. Ciaran, a Mayo man, was getting quite sentimental. Especially over the sheep.

Incidentally, some months later when I met with Maureen O'Hara who starred alongside John Wayne in that film, she took great delight in telling me how in an interview with chat show host Gay Byrne she had declared her wish to see Ireland reunited. 'That remains my hope and my prayer,' she told me. 'Keep up the good work.'

Meanwhile back at the hotel Richard was worried that we were standing outside the White House waiting for our lift. So he decided to ring Mairead's mobile. She had forgotten to switch it off and as President Clinton spoke it started to ring. Everyone shifted uneasily. We knew instinctively it was Richard. He is famous in our circles for his attachment to telephones. The phone kept on ringing. The audience was visibly discommoded. Richard was being persistent. The phone stopped briefly. The President kept talking. The phone started again. The President concluded his remarks. The phone continued. Eventually it too gave up. Some time later when she hoped no one was looking Mairead slipped her hand into her bag and turned the phone off.

After the speeches and entertainment, Eileen Ivers and Joe Derrane led other musicians into a seisiún. It was a lively evening. And,

as with so many Irish events it ended with singers from the floor giving their rendition of a favourite song. John Hume, who has a good voice, began to sing 'The Town I love so well' about his native city of Derry. I joined him and together we cleared the building.

During my time in the States I remained in regular contact with Siobhan and Martin. Apart from lobbying against us in the USA and their refusal to introduce a Minister into the talks, the British were objecting to us raising the issue of demilitarisation in the discussions. They resented us equating British violence and British weapons and British armed organisations, with all of the other armed groups in the conflict. Then when it appeared that we might have agreement on an agenda for a meeting involving Michael Ancram, a British Minister at the NIO this collapsed. Patrick Mayhew rejected my commitment to seriously discussing all issues, including decommissioning, on the basis that this did not provide the clear and reliable assurance, which the British government needed.

Meantime Ancram had no difficulty meeting with loyalist representatives, none of whom had any electoral mandate and all of whom had said that no weapons would be handed up until a political settlement was reached.

Martin and Siobhan continued to battle away in letters and in smaller private meetings with Quentin Thomas and Jonathan Stevens. In an effort to clear a way through this impasse Martin suggested that there should be no formal agenda but that the meeting would be preceded by an exchange of letters. Both sides would set out their own view and address each others concerns. On April 12th Patrick Mayhew announced that the British government would soon be holding bi-lateral meetings with all of the other parties – except Sinn Fein. Martin wrote to Quentin Thomas accusing the British of establishing a two-track approach to talks, with Sinn Fein in a second track, at a different level and pace from the other parties. A week later he wrote again pointing out our concern at the continuing discrimination against our party and electorate.

Then on April 24th, almost eight months after the IRA's cessation began, the British announced that following intensive exchanges with Sinn Fein the government believed a sufficient basis now existed for the entry of Ministers into the exploratory dialogue with us. I welcomed this move although it was obvious that the British government was still treating our party differently. This was reinforced two days later when Mayhew sent out invitations to all the other parties, except Sinn Fein, for bi-lateral meetings. We were still being kept within a process of 'decontamination'. The Irish government moved to blunt the British approach by also issuing invites to all the parties for bi-laterals – including us.

But the proposed injection of Michael Ancram into a meeting with Sinn Fein didn't fool anyone. Most people knew the process was in trouble. Albert Reynolds summed it up when in an interview with the London *Observer* on April 23rd he remarked 'There was supposed to be a generosity from both governments. The Irish government has shown it but the British have not. The British may have miscalculated that they can sit back and do nothing. But if they (the IRA) went back to the armed conflict people won't blame them because they have shown good faith.'

I knew that a meeting with Michael Ancram was unlikely to speed up the process. We had to keep up the pressure on the British government. All of our experience to date was that there was still no real political commitment to the peace process. The British strategy, so it seemed to me and other republicans, was one still focussed on defeating republicans. The stalling and prevarication were about reducing expectations, diminishing hope, and encouraging schisms among our ranks.

That was always a danger. There was quite a lot of justifiable grumbling within the wider republican community. Certainly, on the ground the behaviour of the RUC and British Army did not give cause for hope. The raiding of homes was still commonplace. A remilitarisation programme – especially in the South Armagh area and in Fermanagh and Tyrone and in Belfast - was taking place. Worse, many nationalist and republicans were now having more unwanted attention from and unwelcome contact with the British Army and RUC than they had had before. These forces were taking advantage of the IRA cessation to travel in and patrol and harass residents in areas where until now they would rarely have stayed for long because of the fear of attack by the IRA.

We needed to get momentum back into the process. We also needed to try and get through to the British political leadership that their approach was wrong and if it was based on a genuine fear or a concern about republican intentions, to try and tackle that through direct dialogue with them. Talking to Michael Ancram wasn't going to achieve that. I therefore wrote to Major in early May asking him to clear a meeting with Mayhew.

We were all very conscious that President Clinton's Economic Conference in Washington was now looming. Unlike the British one in Belfast this conference was all-inclusive. How could Mayhew and I be in Washington, be in the same hotel, at the same conference, and not meet – even accidentally in the corridor? Was he going to hide behind the potted palm trees? Fawly Towers how are you? Were British minders going to be clearing hotel corridors and lifts to try and prevent us bumping into one another? And what sort of message would it send to people about the peace process if we were sitting in the same conference hall and he was surrounded by handlers trying to stop me walking over to shake hands? So, I put it to Major, as Martin McGuinness had in his discussions with the British delegation in February, that there should be a formal meeting between Mayhew and myself.

On May 8th I was off to the United States for a three-week speaking tour that would conclude at the economic conference in Washington. Twelve cities – no breaks – from the East coast to the West. But it was a US traumatised by the Okalahoma bombing against a Federal building the month before. The British government and sections of its media sought to exploit this tragic event to attack republicans and embarrass me. I had already written to President Clinton extending my sympathies and condolences to the families of the dead and injured.

Richard and I landed in Boston. We did an event there and then flew up to Portland, Maine in a small two-engined plane. We hit a lot of turbulence and for some time it was a white-knuckle ride. Shannon Eaton, one of our key workers in that region had organised a number of

really good events. Our guests included the legendary Irish musician Tommy Makem.

And then it was down to New York on May 10th where we held our first annual Friends of Sinn Fein dinner at the Essex House Hotel, with Fionnuala Flanagan. It was \$1,000 a plate and 400 people packed into the event.

'Far from it we were reared,' I told our guests.

The same day in Belfast Martin McGuinness, Siobhan O'Hanlon, Lucilita Breathnach, Sean McManus and Gerry Kelly met a British government delegation led by Michael Ancram. Our submission and message to Ancram stressed the importance of equality for our party and electorate, and the urgent need to work out the logistics for all-party talks. Ancram however was still locked into Mayhew's Washington preconditions.

By now the British knew that there was now no way of Mayhew avoiding me in the Sheraton Hotel in Washington, the location of the conference. This was confirmed when Ancram started to talk about the possibility of a meeting between Mayhew and myself at Washington, but only in the context of exploratory talks – not as part of his bi-laterals with the other parties. Ancram refused to be definitive but it appeared to us that the pressure on the British had to be considerable.

By the time I had travelled back and forwards across the USA and reached Washington Mayhew had asked for a meeting. Speaking at the Washington Press Club on May 23rd I welcomed this, pointing to the fact that for the first time ever all the main players, the Dublin and London governments, the Unionists, the smaller loyalist parties and nationalists and republicans were all under the one roof.

The conference billed as the 'White House Conference on Trade and Investment in Ireland' was hosted by President Bill Clinton and organised by Senator George Mitchell, along with Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and his colleague Chuck Meissner. Vice President Al Gore and a whole range of US political leaders and business people attended. It was scheduled to take place over three days from May 24th to 26th, during which time participants would explore business possibilities in the north's six counties and the six border counties in the south of Ireland.

My meeting with Patrick Mayhew was scheduled for Wednesday evening May 24th. Richard handled the arrangements. This wasn't easy as he was now being followed around the hotel by a media team who assumed that where Richard was, I would eventually be – and so would the meeting. Richard had several discussions with some of Mayhew's PR people, about the venue and press access. At one point the British wanted to change the venue and move the meeting out of the hotel entirely. Richard refused.

At around 7 o'clock in the evening Richard and Mick Conlon, another of our group, went to Suite 6006 - followed by the media. The lobby and corridor outside the lift and room where the meeting was to occur were packed by journalists, camera crews and photojournalists.

Richard and Mick went in and were met in an outer room by the British Ambassador Sir Robin Renwick and his embassy colleague Peter

Westmacott. They discussed the arrangements for the meeting, which was to include myself; Richard and Mairead Keane and which would take place in an inner room. There was to be no coffee, tea or anything stronger. Just a quick handshake — in private, no cameras — and a fifteen-minute meeting.

Richard left to report back to me, and Mick remained, using the time to discuss with the British Ambassador the merits of fly-fishing and whether the best location for this was the West of Ireland or Alaska. Renwick preferred Alaska, and Mick remarked, 'Maybe sometime we could share a fly there.' Mick also told the assembled British officials after Richard left that he felt like a hostage being left behind as evidence of good faith.

Mairead, Richard and I left our room and, followed by journalists, with camera lights bright in our faces, we fought our way eventually through the media throng into Suite 6006. Here we were shown into the backroom where Patrick Mayhew and James Cran were waiting to greet us.

The handshakes were brief but cordial. Mayhew, using a written speaking note, told us why the British government would not allow Sinn Féin into all-party negotiations. He was visibly shaking and nervous as he spoke, and he stuck rigidly to the text of his note, which the British issued afterwards, almost word for word, as a public statement.

I leaned forward, almost touching Mayhew, and told him that it was very important that he understood that we were very serious about making the peace process work. We accepted that there were differences in our positions but we had to see beyond these. The peace process, I told him was a personal priority for me and the political priority for Sinn Féin. The great achievement had been the silencing of the guns and we needed to build on that. There couldn't be a two-speed process, inequality was wrong, the open-door policy of President Clinton and the Irish government were the way to move forward. We needed to secure an agreement. That meant taking risks. We were taking risks, I said, with our lives. They, the British government needed to seize the moment.

But Mayhew insisted we couldn't move into substantive talks unless there was movement on decommissioning. I remember wondering how could I break through this British mantra — I had to try and ensure that after our meeting Mayhew was left with some food for thought. I said, 'We're both political creatures and there is a temptation to lock horns. We have to avoid this. You did the right thing by agreeing to do this meeting. Let's keep doing the right thing'.

The meeting lasted longer than the allotted 15 minutes. It took about thirty-five minutes and at the end of it we went out to meet the media separately. Almost a hundred journalists, trapped in the hotel corridor, desperately tried to make sure they heard every word or captured every move on their cameras.

We kept the presswork tight. And left Richard to the business of briefing the media. The rest of us went off to network with business people, US, Irish and British politicians, and others at the conference. We also had our first face-to-face meeting with loyalist political

representatives, including David Ervine and Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist Party, which represents the UVF and Gary McMichael and Davy Adams from the Ulster Democratic Party, which represented the UDA. The three Dunfey brothers from Boston, Bob, Jerry and Jack facilitated the meeting. Mitchel McLaughlin, Caoimhghin Ó Caoláin and Shannon Eaton represented us. The Dunfey family, originally from County Kerry are well known through the Boston based Global Citizens Circle for their support and work for democracy and human rights in South Africa. Over the years they have also been very supportive of the Irish peace process.

There was a lesson in the Washington experience, especially for the British government. The US had arranged this event, had pushed and sold it to the parties and to public opinion. The result was, no one could resist attending. Could the same not be true of inclusive talks? But London wasn't interested. The dynamic in the process was coming from the Clinton administration when it should have come from Downing Street.

The meeting with Mayhew and the networking on the margins of the economic conference, including the meeting with the loyalists, all pointed up the importance of the US involvement. It had also provided an opportunity for Mitchel McLaughlin to do some meetings on the side with Mo Mowlam, the Labour party spokesperson on the north. The British government's decontamination period was not only highly insulting; it also caused real resentment among republicans. So whatever the substance of the meeting with Patrick Mayhew, the fact that it took place was important in getting the British government to face up to the unworthiness of their position. More importantly it also soothed some, though not all republican sensitivities.

- * Clinton first visit to ~~Ireland~~ -
- * Decatur - Row.

I flew off to the USA on September 11 for a series of meetings in Washington. It was to be an intense lobby. We needed the USA putting the maximum pressure on Major and if an international body was to be established that it was set up for the right reasons. I met the National Security Advisor Tony Lake and Nancy Soderberg. And Vice President Al Gore dropped by. I also met George Mitchell and a variety of senators and congressional representatives. The Americans now publicly set a date for President Clinton's first ever visit to Ireland, and the first visit by a US President to the north. It was to take place between November 28th and December 2nd.

The White House was very mindful of the President arriving in the midst of a crisis or worse, and therefore had a real interest in pushing for a resolution of the impasse. The twin-track approach – an international body and substantive bilateral and trilateral talks between the parties and the government – was now acknowledged as the best, probably the only way out of the growing mess. The White House was keen to push ahead with this, as was I. But we had to get it right and that meant we were now engaged in a negotiation over the details.

I had arranged a second visit to the White House but the British got wind of it and briefed some journalists that I was being summoned back there to have the riot act read to me. I cancelled the meeting and arranged to privately meet with Tony Lake and Nancy Soderberg. As I had to be in New York Nancy Soderberg and Tony Lake agreed to travel there. They booked a room in the Sheraton Hotel on 7th Avenue and Mairead Keane, Richard and I met them. It was a good meeting.

As usual our US trips weren't all about briefing political leaders and negotiation. I visited Georgetown University and gave a lecture to a packed hall of keenly interested students. There was also some time for a bit of craic with those we were talking to in the White House. Tony Lake was an avowed baseball fan. He commended baseball to me as a metaphor for the need for rules in the peace process. I succeeded, thanks in the main to the efforts of Brian McCabe to get a copy of the all-Ireland hurling final. Off it went to the West Wing with a note from me, 'These are the rules we play by.' Later he told me he enjoyed the video, 'It's a wonderful game' he said. And he was right. Hurling is the best game in the world.

September was a month awash with speculation of a breakthrough. There were news reports that there was to be a substantial communiqué, and rumours of a British commitment and a date for all party talks. All of this was because of the upcoming visit by President Clinton.

London and Dublin were indeed working on a draft communiqué. A draft of this in early September acknowledged that the two governments had agreed to create the conditions for all party talks, in round table format, aimed at reaching an agreed political settlement based on consent, could commence before the end of 1995. The British were apparently hinting that December 15th might be a good date. The draft said that meetings would take place with all parties to lay the ground work for these talks. The draft also said that the governments had agreed to establish an International Decommissioning Commission. This Commission would have the initial and limited remit of reporting to the two governments by Mid-November, 1995, on whether it had established that a clear commitment existed on the part of the relevant

paramilitary organisations to the full and verifiable decommissioning of all illegally held arms in the appropriate context and manner. The two governments aimed to meet before the end of November 1995 to agree the appropriate way forward.

Along with some colleagues I was now immersed in private meetings with Irish government officials trying to make sense of this proposal and to ensure that the British would not seek to manipulate it and turn it back on us. We were now working with Paddy Teahon and Tim Dalton along with Sean O hUigin. John Bruton had a special adviser Sean Donlon who dipped in and out of our discussions without any real effect. We told them that the draft was not acceptable. It wasn't specific enough in terms of an agreed date for all party talks; the remit of the international body was too vague; there was nothing guaranteeing that the British would use this to get off the Washington 3 hook or that Sinn Féin would be treated on the same basis as all of the other parties. I told the governments, and the White House, that any international body – and George Mitchell was by this stage in the frame as its chair – had to be a political body, that is political parties would make submissions. I also argued strongly that the initiative, if it was to have any hope of working needed a guarantor.

As a consequence of all of this the proposed summit between Bruton and Major was cancelled but work on a text for a joint communiqué continued. The IRA gave its own verdict of British machinations in a statement on September 27th. It described the decommissioning issue as a deliberate distraction and stalling tactic by a British government acting in bad faith and it declared that there was no possibility of the IRA meeting these demands.

A new draft on September 25th elaborated on the role of an international body. It would now have three members and would ascertain and advise on whether and by what means the question of arms could be settled to the satisfaction of both governments and all parties. Accordingly, the body would report by a date unspecified whether it had established that a clear commitment existed on the part of the relevant paramilitary organisations to a satisfactory process for the full and verifiable decommissioning of all illegally held arms.

Bruton then had a series of meetings with John Major to discuss the details of the twin track approach. Nancy Soderberg arrived on this side of the Atlantic in early October for meetings with the two governments and ourselves. I met her on October 4th. The British were now shifting the December date and moving it back. But discussions on what the twin track would involve, how it would work and who it would involve continued. So too did our efforts and the efforts of others to push the British in the right direction.

Diplomatic activity between Dublin, Washington, London and us was now intense as President Clinton's visit drew nearer. On the streets Sinn Féin was holding demonstrations calling for the peace process to be saved. John Hume and I met to discuss how the impasse could be ended. On October 6th we put together our own proposed draft of a joint communiqué for the two governments. It set as November 30th a date for the commencement of substantive talks, removing any preconditions and was broad enough in its description to include the issue of all arms. We asked for a meeting with John Bruton to give this proposition to him. Bruton refused to meet us. This caused

consternation and raised the real fear that he was preparing to do a deal with the British without reference to his two partners in the nationalist consensus.

Martin McGuinness then passed our proposals to the British government at a meeting with Michael Ancram on October 20th. In an effort to move the process on, and to demonstrate our willingness to be flexible, Martin told Ancram that we had commissioned a paper which would deal with a range of issues, including decommissioning and a response to the British government paper on modalities, as part of a submission to an International Body – should one ever be set up. Martin told Ancram that we would be willing to give serious consideration to the recommendations of an International Body on its merits. We wanted such a body to deal with the issue properly. That meant removing it as a pre-condition. But we needed to be assured that the twin track was serious and genuine and that the governments would ensure that substantive talks would begin not later than Hume and I proposed or the December 15th date being suggested by the British. To our alarm Ancram now put a different timetable. The British were now arguing that three months was needed for the twin track to reach all-party talks. This would put talks well into the New Year!

Without prejudice to the discussions Martin and Ancram also discussed who would be on the international body, how long would it sit, would its hearings be private or public, where would it sit, and what would its terms of reference be? The British indicated that they were still only looking submissions from loyalists and republicans. Martin firmly told them that other parties had to be able to make submissions. The British still also wanted to keep the remit to a narrow definition focussed on 'illegal' weapons. We argued for a wider more open definition and the British agreed to look at words.

Most importantly we wanted to know if the demand for actual decommissioning was now off the screen? Would the British accept recommendations from an international body which disagreed with the British position? The British conceded that while Washington 3 was still their position, an international body might produce a new position. At a subsequent meeting with Irish government officials it emerged that London was now going to produce a concepts paper. We were told that in their discussions with the Irish government there appeared to be no urgency on the British side.

Towards the end of October the British sent us and the unionists a copy out of their concepts paper, now called the building blocks paper, which set out their view of the twin track. It was an amended, slightly longer draft of the last draft joint communiqué discussed by the two governments. But no where in the paper did the British government commit itself to a firm date for the commencement of substantive all party talks. It continued to limit the scope of discussions to what was described as unauthorised arms.

Moreover, then and in subsequent discussions in the following weeks the British made it clear that they would not set a date for all party talks unless the unionists were on board for them. This provided the unionists – and in particular David Trimble – with a veto over talks.

The diplomatic discussions between all of us continued through November. John Hume and I tried to give the process a much-needed kick in the pants by publicly releasing our proposals to the two governments. John Major again added to the sense of political crisis by

rejecting a call, made by the Taoiseach in a speech in London on November 11th, for a date for all party talks. The toing and froing over the detail and a text for the joint communiqué led to some of the bitterest words from Irish government sources about the British. The media were told of 'blatant lies', of 'cynical manipulation' and 'disinformation', as well as the British trying to 'dump the blame for failure on John Bruton.' I smelt Sean Donlon's spin. Whoever it was they were right. They were also far too slow about figuring this out.

Then in a last-ditch effort to resolve matters and as President Clinton's plane, Air Force One, was in the air on its way to London, the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister met at Downing Street for discussions, which lasted until midnight on November 28th. I tried in vain throughout the day to talk to the Taoiseach. I began ringing his office at 9.45 am that morning. I was worried that Dublin would move too far toward the British position. In March Bruton had called for a gesture from the IRA on the arms issue. In October he had refused to meet John Hume and myself. That meeting still hadn't occurred by the time of the joint communiqué. Then when a joint communiqué was eventually produced by the two governments, shortly after 10pm that night, we received our first copy of it from the media. We were deliberately kept out of the loop.

The joint communiqué was at best a fudge. But the reality for many people, including British officials who briefed the media, was that Dublin had blinked first. All of the pressure, all of the British media blame aimed at Bruton, had worked. Major by deliberately taking the negotiations to the wire, and with President Clinton on his way, had succeeded in facing down the Fine Gael Taoiseach.

Dublin had signed up to a joint communiqué that failed to meet even the minimum standards it had itself set. There was no firm date for substantive negotiations, only an aspirational point at the end of February 96. The discussions period set for the twin track was 12 weeks not the six that the Irish government had argued for. Dublin had also argued that the International Body should take the entire weapons issue within its purview, not just Washington 1 and 2 but the communiqué reflected the British definition that the discussion of weapons would be limited to those held by the IRA and loyalists. The third precondition which demanded the actual decommissioning of weapons, wasn't mentioned but the British Prime Minister John Major reiterated it at the press conference of Tuesday night November 28th. It was reinforced by him in a subsequent speech.

The British had also succeeded in reinforcing the unionist effort to thwart progress into substantive talks. In addition unionists had been stridently demanding an election to an Assembly or convention in the north. The Irish government's view was that if any elected body was to be flagged up, then any joint text must adequately reflect the consistent view of nationalists on this issue. The communiqué did not do this. Unionists could take succour from a paragraph that said that the participants to the talks, along with the governments, would properly take account of democratic mandates and principles, including whether

and how an elected body could play a part. There was no recognition of northern nationalist opposition to this position.

Significantly, the issue of arms decommissioning featured in 9 out of the 12 paragraphs. The role of the International Body, to be chaired by Senator Mitchell, was advisory with neither government bound by its conclusions. The two governments proposed to meet again in Mid February to review progress and to consider the recommendations of Mitchell's body which was due to report in mid January.

We discussed the joint communiqué and its proposals. We did not think it would break the impasse. The British government was clearly still messing and the Irish government had failed to stand up to it. But the peace process was at a defining point and it was a time to take some more risks if we could. The test would be whether this development removed the weapons precondition and how quickly it would lead to all-party talks.

But before engaging in the twin track process and meeting the two governments and the International Body we had first to meet President Bill Clinton as he made his triumphant visit to Ireland.

- * Clinton in Ireland.
- * End of sectarian.

Chapter 22 President Clinton on the Falls Road

President Clinton arrived into Belfast early on November 30th. It had been a long evening and night as we negotiated the format of my meeting with him with the White House. It was almost a rerun of President Clinton's Irish counterpart Mary Robinson's visit to West Belfast two years earlier.

The British were, predictable as ever, trying to block all of this. Most important they did not want a photograph of the President and me shaking hands. I wanted a meeting on the Falls Road. Some of the White House people wanted it at the Mackies engineering plant, which was on the Springfield Road between nationalist west Belfast, and unionist west Belfast. But given Mackies sectarian history, whatever changes had come about in recent years, it would not go down well within nationalist opinion if our meeting took place at a factory renowned for discrimination.

The eventual outcome of the late night calls was an agreement that the President would make a stop on the Shankill to visit a unionist working class district. He would then travel to Mackies where he would speak at a public event and then after that, and on his way across the city, he would stop en route at the junction of the Falls Road and Springfield Road and meet me. And it was agreed that there would be a public handshake outside McErlean's bakery shop.

President Clinton arrived into Belfast International airport about 10 miles to the north west of the city. He travelled into Belfast in his bullet and bombproof Cadillac limousine. He first went to Violet Clarke's fruit shop on the Shankill. He next travelled to Mackies, which provided one of the most poignant points in the trip when two young children, 9-year-old Catherine Hamill, a Catholic and 11-year-old David Sterrit, a Protestant, read out letters they had written to welcome the President. Standing on a wooden box so she could reach the microphones and be seen, Catherine said, 'My name is Catherine Hamill. I live in Belfast. I love where I live. My first daddy died in the troubles. It was the saddest day of my life. I still think of him. Now it is nice and peaceful. I like having peace and quiet for a change instead of having people shooting and killing. My Christmas wish is that peace and love will last in Ireland for ever.'

Catherine's father Patrick was shot nine years earlier in September 1987 in his home in Forfar Street, a few hundred yards from where Catherine was now standing speaking to President Clinton. He died the next day in hospital. Catherine was six months old at the time. Sometime after the Clinton visited it emerged that her father had been targeted for murder by the British intelligence agent Brian Nelson.

While the President was visiting Mackies I went to the Culturlann, an Irish language centre on the Falls Road with Richard and Big Eamon to meet Blair Hall, a political counsellor at the US Embassy in London. Blair was dressed up for the day with trench coat, hidden walkie talkie,

an ear piece and a microphone attached to the inside of his coat sleeve. We were about a half a mile from the spot where the meeting with the President was to take place. We had coffee and Danish pastries while I listened to live radio coverage on my walkman. I gave one of the ear pieces to Blair. He now really looked odd sitting with two earpieces.

We were the only four in the place and occasionally Blair would use his walkie talkie to check how the President's schedule was going. We left the Culturlann and walked down the Falls Road. We were accompanied by Allison Hartley, one of the pupils from Meanscoil Feirste, the Belfast Irish language secondary school, her mother Liz and one of the teachers Cahal. We had arranged for them to be in McErlean's to make a presentation to the President about the lack of British government funding for Irish language education. At that time Irish had no legal status.

As we approached the junction of the Falls Road and the Springfield Road where the meeting was to take place we could see that the road was already blocked by hundreds of people. A US official, dressed in the compulsory trench coat emerged from the throng and told us that the President was running slightly late. So we went for a walk in the grounds of St. Dominic's High school for girls. It gave me a chance to gather my thoughts. The peace process was in trouble. The two governments had produced a twin track which leaned too close to the British position, and with no evidence that the British would use it to get the process off their hook on the weapons issue. The President's visit had the potential to kick-start the process and shift it away from collapse. His presence, what he said and how he used his influence were now crucial.

A US official arrived and asked if we would take a car round to the back of the bakery. There were some concerns about the interaction and the hostility between the hundreds now gathered to greet the President and the RUC. I knew it would be OK and refused the car. We walked through the crowd over to McErlean's. Richard and I went in and spoke to some of the customers who were sitting at tables at the back having tea. Among them were Marguerite Gallagher and Pat McGivern who run the Green Cross bookshop, and Chrissie McAuley. They were there to make sure that everything ran smoothly when the President entered the bakery. I also arranged with the women behind the counter to have some local bread in a bag ready to present to the President.

Outside Richard, Big Eamon and I waited with the White House people and Blair Hall for the President to arrive. As the limousine swung round to stop in front of the bakery a black van pulled between the lorry carrying the camera crews and photographers and me and the President. This was probably the vehicle that carries the critical care nurses whose job it is to stabilise the President in the event that he is shot or hurt or takes ill. Working on the old Irish maxim 'Murphy's law – if it can go wrong it will – Richard was prepared and pulled from his pocket a small camera he had borrowed the previous night from a photojournalist. He took several photographs of the President and I shaking hands and talking. The media were furious at having been prevented from getting the shot they all desperately wanted. There was

even talk that the White House had arranged for the van to deliberately pull in front of the press. Richard had also arranged to have the engagement video recorded. When it was over he gave the camera to the press photographer from whom he had borrowed it and it was flashed around the world.

'Hi ya Gerry', the President said with a smile.

'Ceád míle failte,' I said. A hundred thousand welcomes.

He told me that he had been reading one of my books – *The Street and other Stories* – as he flew into Belfast that morning.

'Now I know where you get your inspiration from,' he said.

The President then went into McErlean's. I stood outside talking to Tony Lake. Inside President Clinton was given a bag of soda farls, bannocks and wheaten bread. And Liz Hartley and Allison and Cahal got the chance to make their presentation to him. The people inside were delighted to see him. Outside the crowd was enthusiastic and he drove his security people crazy when he decided to do an impromptu walk about. He went to the chemists next door and then walked about 50 yards down to a barrier that had been erected across the road where hundreds of hands were outstretched for the shaking.

Of course there was no security problem. The biggest danger to Bill Clinton was when it appeared that he might go into the Sean MacDiarmada Gaelic Athletic Club. The Macs are one of Belfast's premier hurling and football sides, as well known for their hospitality as their exploits on the field of play. If the US President had ventured into the clubrooms it is likely he might be there yet. But the press of people as well as the security barrier prevented that possibility.

It was a big day for the Falls Road. It had been the scene of so much resistance, so much sorrow and anger. The people here had suffered a lot. Pilloried, demonised, disenfranchised and targeted by British Crown Forces and their surrogates in loyalism, now they were host to the most powerful man in the world.

Below where the President received a warm welcome from local people, Nora McCabe had been killed by a RUC plastic bullet, below that was the battle scarred Sinn Fein office, the scene of the killing of Paddy Loughran, Pat McBride and Michael O Dwyer. The crowd around Bill Clinton were not star struck groupies. Many of them would have concerns about US foreign policy. But they were genuinely pleased to see the US President. They recognised the role he was playing. They understood the significance of his visit. And they felt he was on their side. He had come to visit them in their own place.

As President Clinton left to travel across to east Belfast and then on to Derry, I met Niall O'Dowd and Bruce Morrison who were part of the presidential entourage. We walked up to the Springvale Training centre, where a lunch had been arranged for US Commerce Secretary Ron Brown. It was like meeting an old friend. We hugged, shook hands and went into listen to the speeches. Afterwards, along with Bill Flynn, Niall, Bruce and I walked over into the Kashmir Road where, in the living room of a small terraced house I told our Irish American friends that while Sinn Fein would engage in the twin track process our every political instinct and our experience talking to and dealing with the British,

convinced us that it was unlikely to work. Everyone was elated by the Presidents visit but there was still work to be done.

That evening the President turned on the Christmas tree lights in Belfast. There were people as far as the eye could see outside the City Hall and they gave him and the First lady a tumultuous welcome. The 49-foot white pine tree had been felled in Al Gore's home state of Tennessee in November. Later that evening there was a reception in the Whitla Hall at Queens University. As the President rose to speak someone, thinking ahead to the Presidential re-election campaign, shouted out 'Four more years.' The Hall erupted in applause and laughter. The President smiling said, 'The plane for America leaves tomorrow. I want you on it.' His speech fitted the moment. He looked to the future. And he pledged America's support, 'The question of whether you will go forward is all up to you, but if you do we will be proud to walk with you.'

I stood with several Sinn Féin representatives at a rope line as the President and Hilary Clinton made their way along the line greeting and talking to the scores of guests present. Later we met for 20 minutes of small talk and a photo-opportunity for the media.

The next day the Clinton entourage headed to Dublin to another tremendous welcome. By the time it was all over it was clear that Ireland had carved a huge place for itself in the hearts of President Clinton and Hilary. The following year the video footage of his reception in Ireland became a central part of his campaign for re-election.

But for now it was back to the grind stone and seeing what we could do to make sense of the twin track. The two governments had sent letters of invitation to all the parties for meetings. I had met George Mitchell privately for an hour on December 2nd along with Fr. Reid and given him a brief background of the situation. The Sagart had spent longer with him. The Senator formally wrote to me on December 7th to arrange a public meeting. That same evening the IRA declared that there was no question of Oglai na hÉireann (the IRA) meeting the ludicrous demand for a surrender of IRA weapons either through the front or back door.

That was the realpolitik. There was no possibility of any of the armed groups being prepared to disarm at this time. But Sinn Fein was prepared to engage in a serious way in an effort to defuse the crisis over arms. We met the International Body at 8 am on Monday December 18th in Dublin Castle. We arrived much earlier at the front of the building and had a little distance to go to get to the Commissions office towards the back. It was a sharp misty morning as we made our way through the cobbled courtyards of the Castle. We appeared to be the only ones about the place. Martin McGuinness recited poetry for our edification. Lucilita Breathnach remarked that the last time Republicans were in Dublin Castle at such an early hour was during the Easter Rising.

Senator George Mitchell had now been joined by the former Finnish Prime Minister Harri Holkeri and Canadian General John De Chastelain who was Canada's Chief of Defence Staff. Martha Pope was also in attendance. Rita O'Hare, Martin, Lucilita and I were there for Sinn Féin. We presented them with a comprehensive and detailed submission, entitled Building a Permanent Peace in Ireland. We also gave them a collection of videos as

information. We reminded them that the British government said in September 1993 that there would be no attempt to impose prior restrictions on the agenda of any talks. Our meeting lasted for over two hours. It was a good engagement. I formally requested that they should ask the British government for copies of various reports on collusion, shoot-to-kill and other matters which had been suppressed by them.

Our submissions took the view that there would be no unilateral surrender of arms by any of the armed groups. However, given an acceptable political scenario, the practicalities of disarmament could conceivably be worked out and agreed without any great difficulties. We also pointed to one of the methods raised by the British themselves, that was the destruction of arms by those in possession of them. It was Sinn Féin's hope that the International Body would clear away the British government's obstacles to inclusive talks. I was impressed by the speed and urgency with which the Senator and his colleagues approached their task. In fact these very busy people had come from all parts of the world and in a hectic round of talks over 4 days met more people and received more submissions than the British government had in the previous 16 months.

A few days later I wrote to George Mitchell with some additional information he had requested. In addition because the International Body was being given conflicting positions by us and the British on whether the decommissioning of IRA weapons had been raised prior to the IRA cessation, I provided him with a quote from the Fianna Fail leader Bertie Ahern. On June 20 1995 Ahern speaking in London said that decommissioning had not been raised as a precondition for Sinn Féin's admission to full talks before the IRA ceasefire announced on August 31st last year.

We met with the Irish government in the twin track process on the same day that we met the International Body. We met the British government the following day, December 19th. I put to Mayhew as forcefully as I could that there should be no preconditions, no vetoes, no precluded or predetermined outcomes to negotiations. A framework should be established and ground rules worked out by agreement between the party leaders and the governments. We proposed that he and Dick Spring host multi-party discussions immediately after the New Year.

December was also the month which saw John Major's Parliamentary majority reduced to five as a result of deaths and defections. The Ulster Unionist's 9 votes put them in an even stronger position than before. John Taylor, their deputy leader put it bluntly, firing a warning shot over Major's bow. He announced that there was no reason to bring about a premature election so long as the governments acted in the best interest of the UK in general and of Northern Ireland in particular.

As we entered 1996 all eyes were on George Mitchell and his colleagues as we waited the outcome of their deliberations. The British still gave no hope for progress. George Mitchell returned to London on January 11th for meetings with them. Mitchell later recalled telling Major that the International Body was not going to recommend prior decommissioning. He was going to propose parallel decommissioning during the political negotiations. Major told Mitchell that if they did he would reject the report.

Meanwhile David Trimble publicly demanded elections for an Assembly or Convention. The Irish government, the SDLP, Fianna Fail and ourselves all

rubbed the idea. Michael Ancram in a dinner conversation with George Mitchell and his colleagues said that the British wanted some reference to an election in the International Body's report because the unionists were insisting on an election and an Assembly before any negotiations. Ancram also suggested that the issue of parallel decommissioning should be placed in a separate section of the report. On January 23rd the International Body produced its long awaited report. It rejected prior decommissioning and offered an alternative proposal. This contained three elements. Firstly, to be eligible to participate in negotiations parties would have to promise to adhere to six fundamental principles of democracy and non-violence. Secondly, the parties should consider parallel decommissioning and thirdly, the report set out a detailed process to achieve decommissioning.

And in a short paragraph George Mitchell, Harri Holkeri and General John De Chastelain said: 'Several oral and written submissions raised the idea of an elected body. If it were broadly acceptable, with an appropriate mandate, and within the three strand structure, an elective process could contribute to the building of confidence.'

The unionists were elated. The rest of us were worried. And with some justification. The following day John Major spoke in the British House of Commons. He took the one paragraph on elections out of the 62 paragraphs in the report and told his colleagues: 'The government believe that such an elective process offers a viable alternative direct to the confidence necessary to bring about all party negotiations. In this context it is possible to imagine decommissioning and such negotiations being taken forward in parallel.'

The Mitchell report had been effectively dumped. The commitment to all party talks contained in the joint communiqué in November had been brushed aside. There was widespread nationalist anger. A week before this, at a trilateral meeting between Sinn Féin, the Irish government and the British government, Patrick Mayhew had told me that the two governments would consult all the parties before responding to Mitchell's report. It would, he said, be greeted only with a holding statement. Some consultation – some holding statement!

John Hume accused Major of playing politics with peoples lives and of buying the votes of the House of Commons in order to keep the government in power. He was right. The unionist votes were more important to the Tory government than anything else. Hume went on to accuse Major of 17 months of time wasting. Dick Spring described British tactics as divide and conquer. It was obvious that the Tories were not prepared to alienate the UUP votes in the British Parliament and the 20 or more right-wingers in the party who were quite capable of bringing it down. London was prepared to string out the process in the hope that republicans would splinter, lose credibility and support. It wanted unilateral control of the pace of events in a way that suited its needs and objectives. It was also obvious that the British Labour Party, was not prepared to take a different approach this side of a British general election.

At the end of January (1996) I flew to Washington to provide the White House and senior political, business and labour leaders with our assessment of the situation. Major had binned the Mitchell report. He had abandoned the twin track approach and the February date for all

party talks and imposed a new precondition – the unionist demand for an election to an Assembly.

I met President Clinton and Tony Lake and engaged with a wide range of US political opinion. I repeated the urgent need for rapid progress to substantive talks. I left my meeting at the White House with the clear impression that President Clinton had not signed on for Major's election idea.

On February 7th in an effort to break the logjam Dick Spring suggested to Mayhew at a meeting in Dublin that the two governments should convene talks similar to those held at Dayton in the USA, which had been held to resolve the Bosnian conflict. This would involve a two day multi-lateral proximity meeting. Spring failed to get agreement from Mayhew and Michael Ancram later described the proposal as premature.

Two days later at around 6pm Richard received calls from several journalists asking him about reports that RTE in Dublin had an IRA statement saying the cessation was over. By the time he and I met shortly after most of the media had heard that the cessation was over and he was inundated with calls for a Sinn Fein line. While he worked on this I alerted some of those we had been working with. I rang John Hume. I rang John Bruton's office and I phoned Tony Lake at the White House. I knew that Dick Spring was in Washington and I rang the Irish Embassy in Washington to get a message through to him. And then the media queries about an IRA statement became reports of a bomb alert in London.

The IRA statement announcing, with great reluctance the end of its cessation, with effect from 6 pm on February 9, was issued at 5.30pm. Asserting that its objective had been to enhance the democratic peace process it accused the British government of duplicity. Shortly after 7 pm a huge IRA bomb exploded at South Quay station beside Canary Wharf on the Isle of Dogs in London. Two people died and there was massive damage running into tens of millions of pounds.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack I had little time to reflect on what had happened. I was stunned. The collapse of the process need not have happened. The IRA had to take responsibility for the bomb but the British government's refusal to grasp the historic opportunity which had been handed to it guaranteed such an outcome. My big regret was that people died and that Sinn Fein strategy was once again relegated to the passenger seat.

What to do? The Sinn Féin peace strategy was the right strategy. We couldn't afford to become fatalistic or despondent. We still needed a peace process and a negotiated peace settlement. At a personal level as television footage showed the extent of the damage the bomb caused I felt a bit overwhelmed by it all. This one explosion cost the British Exchequer more than all the other bombs of the previous twenty five years. There was bound to be fallout over that. I was also bound to get some of the blame. I could imagine the media questions already. Did I know the cessation was going to end? Did I know about the bomb?

The reaction of the two governments was also predictable. Within days the establishments in Dublin and London were back to the old agenda of trying to isolate Sinn Féin. The Irish government announced

that there would be no more Ministerial meetings with us. The British also refused Ministerial contact. I wrote to Major and Bruton asking for urgent meetings. I still had the hope that there were some within the governments who had been persuaded by the peace process that the only way to end this conflict was through dialogue.

The Irish government agreed to meetings between Sinn Féin and officials. Subsequently the British government also agreed to meetings with officials. We told both that any attempt to rebuild the peace process needed dialogue – as soon as possible and with no preconditions. On February 18th another bomb, smaller this time, exploded on a bus in Wellington Street near Covent Garden in London. One person, an IRA Volunteer Edward O'Brien, aged 21, from Gorey in County Wexford died. The bomb had exploded prematurely as it was being transported. The day before two square miles in the heart of London, including Trafalgar Square, Pall Mall, Piccadilly Circus and Oxford Street were all closed off after a bomb warning from the IRA. A small bomb was subsequently defused but not before it had caused chaos.

Ten days later John Major and John Bruton held a summit in London. In a joint communiqué afterwards they finally announced a date, June 10th, for the commencement of all party talks. An election was to be held and details of that were to be worked out in the course of multi-lateral consultations. The two governments would meet the parties at Castle Buildings at Stormont. All the parties that is but Sinn Féin. We were again excluded.

The irony of it all of wasn't lost on most people. For 18 months we had tried to get the British to remove preconditions and to set a firm date for negotiations. All to no avail. Now two weeks after the IRA cessation ended a date was set. The same day Major and Bruton met, John Hume and I met also. We then travelled to meet representatives of the IRA leadership.

* First meetings in White House - after ending
negotiations - phone calls with ^{cessation}
Tony Lake - All party talks begin

Chapter 23 Towards All-Party Talks

It was during the meeting with a seven strong IRA delegation, that we heard the news that the governments had set a date for all party talks. The meeting lasted for several hours. John and I had prepared our arguments, as had the IRA people. All of the IRA volunteers spoke, although their contribution was led mostly by two people. John was on form. He was articulate, focused and persuasive. Both of us acknowledged the difficulties and bad faith created by the British, but we also put a strong case for the restoration of the IRA cessation.

The IRA representatives detailed at length how the leadership had been won over initially by the agreements and commitments made in the run-up to the cessation. It was this putative alternative process and the structure of dialogue involved, as well as the British government's public commitment that negotiations would commence within three months without pre-conditions. It had been a leadership decision, within the authority of the Army Council but nonetheless IRA volunteers had to be brought on board. This meant the Army leadership placing its credibility and leadership on the line.

The IRA had finally agreed the complete cessation of military operations because it believed that a determined approach would be made by the breadth of Irish national political opinion. But John Bruton had fractured this. In the IRAs view, he paid more attention to the British agenda, supported its position on arms, refused to meet John Hume and me and publicly supported the unionist demand for elections to a Forum.

The British had also reneged on their public commitments – the refusal to demilitarise, the continuing ill-treatment of prisoners especially in Britain, the release of Lee Clegg, and the decision around the Garvaghy Road were cited. As one of the IRA delegation said, 'we sued for peace, the British wanted war. If that's what they want, we will give them another 25 years of war!' But the meeting had its positive moments as well. The most important of these was when we were told that the IRA leadership was prepared to restore the cessation if a viable alternative could be produced.

John and I pushed for the meeting to be made public and for the Army, and John and myself to make separate statements giving our views of our discussions and of our hopes arising from it. The next day an IRA statement said that it had listened attentively to the case presented by us. The IRA restated its commitment to republican objectives and placed the response for the breakdown of the process firmly on the shoulders of the British government, but it added that it was prepared to face up to its responsibilities.

John Hume separately told journalists that he hoped the initial consultative talks involving all the parties and the two governments, scheduled to begin on March 4th, would help create a situation in which a new cessation might emerge. I made it clear that Sinn Fein was prepared to participate in these discussions positively and in the hope that they might move the situation forward. But John Hume's hopes were quickly dashed when the British Minister, Michael Ancram declared, 'There would be no meetings (with Sinn Féin) before a ceasefire.' And consequently no invitation was issued to us to participate.

Of course not having an invitation was no reason not to turn up. On Monday morning I led a Sinn Féin delegation to Castle Buildings in the Stormont estate. Patrick Mayhew and the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs Dick Spring, who were available in the conference room to hear the views of the parties, refused to talk to us. The two unionist parties, the UUP and the DUP refused to attend because of the presence of the Irish government representatives. The unionists, now faced with the prospect of talks beginning on June 10th were trying to exclude or sideline the Irish government.

The hard-line approach of the British government toward republicans was especially evident at this time in its treatment of republican prisoners. Harry Duggan, from County Clare, who was in his 21st year of imprisonment in England, was refused compassionate parole to attend his mother's funeral. Harry hadn't seen Bridget in 20 years.

But most concern centred on the condition of Paddy Kelly. While held in prison in England he had been diagnosed with skin cancer but the prison authorities had refused, even while the IRA cessation was in place, to provide him with proper medical treatment. He was subsequently moved to Maghaberry prison in the north but we were campaigning to have him repatriated to Portlaoise prison outside of Dublin where he could be closer to his partner and family. We also believed that the Irish government would be more amenable to ensuring that he received the medical treatment that he needed, although our information suggested that he was now terminally ill. The British were refusing to move him.

On March 11th, a Sinn Féin delegation privately met with senior officials in the Irish government to identify the gaps in our respective positions and to see what could be done to bridge those gaps. John Hume and I met with a senior Irish government official some days before this. The delegation meeting focused on the failure of the Taoiseach John Bruton to defend and assert Irish national interests. The issue of weapons and its use as a blockage in the negotiations was exhaustively discussed. One Irish government official claimed that while this had to be addressed at the outset of negotiations everything else could not be blocked. He said that they had made this clear at all levels to the British government.

The officials claimed that in their discussions with the British government on the proposed Forum they had worked hard to ensure that it would have no administrative or legislative power. The problem was that most nationalists and republicans believed the unionists were getting their own way, aided and abetted by John Major, and assisted by John Bruton.

These issues underpinned a series of meetings between Sinn Féin and the Irish officials throughout March. We were also meeting with Fianna Fáil's Martin Manseragh on the same agenda.

Meanwhile three and a half thousand miles away Richard and I arrived once again in the USA for a series of public and private meetings. There was no invitation to the St. Patrick's Day event in the White House. And the British made much of this. But I now had the opportunity to do something many of my friends always wanted to do – to attend the Saint Patrick's parade in New York.

But first there was a round of meetings mainly with Irish America. These engagements gave me an opportunity to gauge at first hand the response of Irish America to the end of the IRA cessation. I wasn't

disappointed. Irish America, like Irish political opinion at home understood that while the IRA had to take responsibility for its own actions the blame for the collapse of the peace process was being laid firmly at the door of the British government. I also met with most of the Connolly House Group. They had deep concerns at the ending of the IRA cessation and its likely impact on our project in the United States. I outlined as best I could how I saw the situation.

The de facto reality was that the IRA cessation was over. I believed it could be restored but that would be very difficult. I outlined the areas of concern for republicans, including British bad faith and the fragmenting of the Irish nationalist consensus by the Irish Taoiseach. I told them confidentially that we were already in discussions with Dublin in an effort to rescue the situation. The White House and Irish America continued to be main players in all of this, in my opinion and we needed their help in removing the roadblocks to progress. Specifically, while there was now a date for all-party talks it was wrapped with barbed wire in an effort to keep Sinn Féin out. The process needed a dynamic built into it and that required a timeframe, as well as an inclusive agenda. This was where the White House could play a crucial role and the Connolly House group could educate and help in mobilising opinion and lobbying.

A few days later in Washington DC Mairead Keane, Richard and I met with Tony Lake, Nancy Soderberg and Maryann Peters one of their senior aides. I made it clear from the outset of our meeting that I wanted to be able to go to the IRA with a package that would address all of the uncertainties. I pointed that the British had now, apart from the restoration of the cessation, imposed three new preconditions on Sinn Féin; decommissioning, the Mitchell principles and participation in an elective process that we were very much opposed to. Bill Clintons National Security Advisor told us that he talked to the British about all of this on a recent visit to the Middle East and that the President spoke to John Major. He urged us to participate in the elections and argued that the Mitchell report was about dismantling the issue of arms as a precondition. He pointed specifically the use of the word address in relation to the arms issue. I emphasised my need to get clarity from the British. I warned about the dangers of establishing a Forum which reasserted unionisms demand for majoritarian politics. Such a development was intended to keep Dublin out of the situation; to internalise the problem and allow the British to off-load any failure onto the people in the north. Asked by Nancy Soderberg about the Mitchell principles I pointed out that I had already publicly said that we would approach this issue positively.

The next morning it was the early train and away to New York to take part in what is probably the most famous St. Patrick's Day march in the world. New York Governor George Pataki generously hosted a St. Patrick's Day breakfast at the Rockefeller Centre from where I travelled to St. Patrick's Cathedral for mass. I was told it was a typically cold, sharp March day in New York. But the warmth of the tens of thousands of people crowded along the pavement made up for the nip in the weather.

At St Patrick's cathedral the late Cardinal O'Connor greeted our party and everywhere there were cheers of encouragement. It was a great day. For some it had even more profound consequences. I was later told by some of the New York cops who I have come to know well on my many visits to that city that one of their number Ed Lewis broke ranks from the marching phalanx of New York Police Officers to speak to his girlfriend Eileen Breslin. He dropped to his knee, pulled out an engagement ring and proposed. A shocked Ms Breslin broke down into tears and said yes. Richard suggested that we should send Ed to speak to John Major.

At the end of the march we headed off for Scranton in Pennsylvania where the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick packed into a hall in their hundreds for a wonderful event. The next morning we drove back to New York to catch the flight home. We also tried to see the matinee performance of Riverdance at Radio City Music Hall but as luck would have it our driver – who I will not name – got lost coming back in from Pennsylvania and we arrived late. We were ushered in to the top balcony for a brief 20 minutes to see the closing sequences from the show. The dancers and music were brilliant and we left Radio City regretting that we had not seen the whole production. But at least I was able to buy the CD on the plane home – a small consolation.

Back in Ireland the two governments had published a consultation paper entitled 'Ground Rules for Substantive All-Party Negotiations.' The paper said that the agenda for the June 10th negotiations would begin with an opening plenary session, in which the participants would address the report of the International Body on arms decommissioning; all participants would make clear their total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the Mitchell report.

The unionist parties all reacted angrily. Both Trimble and Paisley warned Major that they were not prepared to accept the format for the negotiations. Paisley claimed that it was nothing less than an attempt to muzzle the elected representatives of the Ulster people and find a way of delivering our province into the hands of the Dublin dictatorship. Paisley said that the Irish government had now been given the right to challenge the north's constitutional position within the United Kingdom.

Less than a week later, on March 21st, John Major published his proposals for an elective process to a Forum. He also decreed that the negotiating team for each party would be drawn from those elected to the Forum but the Forum itself would have no power to intervene in the negotiations. The paper reaffirmed the British governments position that no invitation would be issued to Sinn Féin to select a negotiating team or to participate in the negotiations.

So, we had decisions to take around participation in the May election, in the Forum, the negotiations and the Mitchell principles. Our Ard Fheis was on top of us and delegates from all over Ireland crammed into the Ambassador Cinema, at the top of O'Connell Street to debate these issues. Many of the delegates made clear their preference to boycott both the elections and the Forum. They were not prepared to allow others to impose conditions or restrictions on our endeavours. But after an intense debate an

emergency motion was endorsed. This mandated the Ard Chomhairle to take the necessary steps to ensure the voice of our electorate was not isolated. Two other emergency motions were passed endorsing the party's peace strategy and committing us to continue with our efforts to reach out to the unionist and protestant section of our people. Tom Hartley spoke about our efforts to meet with unionists and he reported that there were now four sections within the broad family of unionism who were willing to engage with us; the churches, the business community, the community organisations, and the loyalists.

The question uppermost in most people's minds was could we restore the peace process? It was my view that we could and I said so. Part of this meant having a strategic sense of what was actually going on. The British government was indeed involved in a real negotiation. But that it was not with us. Their negotiation was with Dublin, the SDLP, the Unionists and the USA government. That is, bigger players with, from our perspective, weaker positions than ours who, the Brits believed, would accept less. London's aim was to lessen our influence by doing a deal without us and to concede the minimum possible to achieve this.

However, the combined political weight of the political parties in Ireland, even if exerted in a cohesive way, was probably insufficient to determine that the outcome of negotiations would be an Irish national democracy. Especially so when this was not our shared objective. Therefore, we concluded, external assistance was required to tilt the balance of possibilities in the direction of our objective. A first step had to be with the Irish government renegotiating the private agreements that had created the August 94 opportunity. We were sceptical about our ability to do this but were morally obliged to try. But even if we were successful the IRA for political reasons of its own might not buy into it. The experience of the last 18 months had soured the situation badly. Achieving a restoration of the cessation was not going to be easy.

Toward the end of March Mitchel McLaughlin and Gerry Kelly privately met the former Conservative Minister Michael Mates. Interestingly he acknowledged that unionists didn't want all party negotiations because they believed it meant having to give things up.

Six days later I wrote to Michael Ancram at the NIO in response to the British paper. Essentially I told him that Sinn Féin was opposed to elections in advance of and as a precondition to negotiations; opposed to a unionist Forum; opposed to the exclusion of any party from the election and opposed to the exclusion of any party with a mandate from the negotiations.

In our discussions with Irish government officials we discovered that Dick Spring had suggested to Patrick Mayhew that George Mitchell be brought in to chair the negotiations. The British Secretary of State had dismissed this because the unionists would not accept a role for Mitchell. However, Spring had since written to the British again proposing George Mitchell for this job.

Then out of the blue the SDLP Chief Whip Eddie McGrady announced that his party intended to stand in the elections and to participate in the Forum. This was a complete u-turn. When the UUP leader David Trimble had first proposed elections and a Forum McGrady had slammed it describing it as a unionist demand and an expression of unionist policy to prevent a real

settlement taking place. However, following McGrady's announcement that the SDLP would take part in the elections and Forum I convened an urgent meeting of our party leadership and on April 24th we reluctantly announced that Sinn Féin had decided to enter the election contest. With the SDLP contesting we had little choice unless we were prepared to give them a free run. It was still our view that the election and the Forum had no useful role to play but we felt that it was important to give leadership; to secure an endorsement of our peace strategy and to return a strong republican voice to prevent any attempt to return to the bad old days of unionist domination and majority rule. I made it clear that we would not be participating in the Forum.

The same day I wrote to the Rev Martin Smyth the unionist MP for south Belfast and the then leader of the Grand Master of Orange Order. I was very worried that the summer marching would see a repeat of the violence of previous years. I felt that a dialogue between us could be helpful. I acknowledged in my letter to him that the Orange Order had the right to march. But Orangeism had to accept that citizens also had the right to withhold their consent to marches.

With only 6 weeks to go before the June 10th date for negotiations a senior party delegation met with senior Irish government officials. We told them that we were there to try, even at this late stage and despite the obvious difficulties, to produce a package, which we could take to the IRA. They were unlikely, I said, to accept anything less than what was put together in 1994 and consequently we needed to work out with the Irish government a common view on political change, demilitarisation and democratic rights. There could be no impediments to progress and a time frame was necessary if it all wasn't to drag on indefinitely.

I put to them the widely shared view that the Clinton administration, could only intervene when given a choice between an Irish position and a British one. The problem was that John Bruton often took up positions identical to the British and occasionally, from our point of view, even more British than the British! We had to use the good will internationally to help move the British and to ensure that they kept to commitments made. And of course we needed to make every effort to get the unionists or a section of unionism on board for all of this. But they couldn't have a veto.

Making this happen over the next 6 weeks would not be easy. And convincing people, especially a sceptical IRA, would be very difficult. I suggested that there needed to be a public dimension to this. For their part the officials sought to assure us that the government was working with the British government to ensure that the negotiations were reasonable and not a charade. They also told us that there was no higher priority than creating the conditions in which Sinn Féin could participate in the negotiations, and that while the Irish government believed the arms issue would be addressed at the outset of discussions it would not be a blocking mechanism or a pre-condition. But this was not yet agreed with the British government.

We were told that they were pushing for George Mitchell to chair the talks. There was resistance from the unionists and the British side. However the British had a problem. Senator Mitchell had produced the International Report on Arms which they were now using as part of the negotiations process. How could they explain to President Clinton that they didn't want someone of Senator Mitchell's obvious stature? One official suggested that

we come back with an a,b,c,d of what we wanted the Irish government to do. And I thought that idea had merit. I also suggested that they should do the same thing.

Some of our discussion focused on the proposed method of agreement in the negotiations – sufficient consensus. What did this mean? Who would define it? One Irish government official argued that the one lever we and they had in this process was that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed. I asked had they a time frame in mind and they responded by saying if Mitchell was in the chair there would a limit to the amount of time he could devote to this.

The day of these discussions was the day the IRA placed its biggest ever-explosive device in England under London's Hammersmith Bridge. The bomb failed to detonate.

Our round of intense discussions continued on April 27th with a meeting with the US Ambassador in Dublin Jean Kennedy Smith and via secure phone link from the embassy with Tony Lake at the White House. I briefed them on our efforts to get a restoration of the cessations and they were very positive about this.

Around this time the Taoiseach John Bruton and the Tanáiste Dick Spring made speeches, which evidenced an effort by them to take on board what we were saying privately. Bruton especially sought to address the concerns of nationalists living in the north in a speech he gave on April 30th. He ruled out any internal six county settlement or the re-establishment of a unionist dominated administration in the north. He also said that he wanted to ensure that an exclusive focus on this issue of decommissioning did not prevent parallel progress on other issues. He argued that the negotiations would be real, covering all the issues, including equality, and he raised the need for an indicative time frame which to help ensure momentum and dynamic.

This certainly gave a spur to our private discussions with Irish government officials. The Irish government people were trying to pin the British down on how they would handle the arms issue and the question of the Mitchell principles in the negotiations. As well as the role of George Mitchell himself. By the beginning of May they were telling us that the British were amenable to George Mitchell, General de Chastelain and another as chairpersons. There was also now talk among the officials about an indicative time frame and they told us that the onus for confidence building measures would not just be laid at the door of republicans. It would also involve the two governments. While our team welcomed this, the reality was that it was all still work in hand, in negotiation with the British government. While the Irish government officials were placing as optimistic a spin as possible none of it was tied down.

I made it clear that we believed that there would be no decommissioning of IRA weapons outside of a settlement and that there would be no parallel or prior decommissioning. Our discussions on the weapons issue dealt with the establishment of a new Commission to handle it and the remit and legislation covering it. Much time was also spent on the mechanics of the negotiations process, for example, how meetings would take place, who would meet with whom, who would chair what session, what was

the function of the business committee and who would chair it, how would referendum work if there was an agreement and much more.

Martin and I tried to persuade the Irish government officials, in the interests of clarity, to set out all of this in a paper. In particular we wanted the British position tied down. Initially we were told no. There was a worry that a paper might become public or another party in the Irish Parliament might ask about documents forcing the Taoiseach to reveal the extent of our deliberations.

I suggested to them that even a non paper setting down the Irish government strategy in respect of core issues and its approach to talks, including decommissioning, would be helpful. I had been amused sometime before to discover that non papers were sometimes described as 'angel' papers. That quaint and whimsical title brought a different and wry note to the boring detail and tedium of the endless paper chain that made up most of the negotiations.

On May 10th on a secure line from the US consulate office in Belfast I spoke to Tony Lake in Washington. I reflected on my most recent conversations with the Irish government and the suggestions on the table for dealing with the arms issue, including the notion of a Commission. I advised him that we were trying to formulate a position which makes the Mitchell Principles and Sinn Féin's attitude to them more positive. And I sounded a note of warning over an article to be published in the Irish Times by John Major in the following days, which was being flagged up in advance. To be useful it needed to deal with all of the issues.

'We still have a lot of convincing to do,' I told Lake, 'I am encouraged by the meetings with the Irish government. Sometimes meetings can be unhinged but these meetings have been very useful and constructive'.

The pace of events and meetings, always pretty frenetic, moved up a gear. Sunday May 12th, saw the newspapers full of speculation about an imminent IRA cessation. No evidence was offered by those who ran the stories and I knew that this was not even on the radar screen at this point. But someone, in one or the other government, and possibly both, were trying to increase public pressure. And of course, once again we were being told that much of the pressure was coming from the United States. Again, not true.

By now a second draft of the non-paper was produced. It drew on public agreements, documents, speeches, assessments of the commitment and positions of the British government, covering matters such as the agenda, how the various strands of the negotiations would work, how road-blocks in the negotiations could be avoided and the timetable for talks. There were assurances to nationalists in the north, that the political process would be meaningful and that we would never again be marginalised. However, there was no sense or vision of a United Ireland.

I made it clear to the officials that I did not see the IRA agreeing to reinstate a cessation short of a recommitment by the Irish government to the position agreed by it in the 1994 discussions, prior to the IRA cessation. We gave them a copy of this. Some of the Irish government officials balked at the 1994 position, and one admitted bluntly that the objective of an "Agreed

and independent Ireland", centred on the 1994 position would not get past the government.

I gently, but quite firmly told them, this was a real concern for Irish Republicans. We were not interested in finding a better way of governing 'Northern Ireland' in a British jurisdiction. There had to be an all Ireland context.

Martin McGuinness, not one for mincing his words, warned the officials about the media spins coming from the governments. He said "People are saying no to a ceasefire now and are definitely saying don't decommission anything. An accumulation of demands by whoever, the Taoiseach, John Major, the President of the United States or the Pope in Rome won't have any effect on the IRA leadership. The only thing that will affect them is the work we are doing now and if we can put together a package"

We agreed to meet the following week.

In the meantime, Paddy Kelly, the terminally ill republican prisoner was flown by helicopter on the Tuesday, to Portlaoise prison. While this was good news for his partner Angela Rice and their child Sarah, the truth was that Paddy was coming home to die.

In an effort to try and create a more positive atmosphere, to tackle another of the preconditions laid down by the governments head-on, as well as signal our serious intent, I issued a statement, which spelt out Sinn Féin's willingness to endorse the Mitchell principles.

This was a major step for us but we felt that it was a necessary initiative to reach out to unionists and others. It also meant that a potentially difficult initial discussion on the agenda for the negotiations was defused before we reached it.

Six days before the election there was another meeting with Irish officials. We were flabbergasted when they told us that as far as the Taoiseach was concerned no deal had been done between the previous government and Sinn Fein in 1994. The officials told us that their instructions were to make this clear to us. Whatever had been said then was of no consequence and would have no bearing on this government. Martin placed on the record our firm belief that a deal had been done with the previous government.

The officials also informed our delegation that their last meeting with the British government was difficult. They still didn't have a clear scenario with the British on the weapons issue. It was also clear that with the elections only days away there was no real prospect of getting the British to focus on the issues, although the officials from both governments were meeting the following week.

The status of the non paper was changed to a speaking note, presumably as a device for allowing the government deniability in the event that it became public. But in effect it remained an outline of the Irish government's negotiating position on many of the key issues. Our task, irrespective of the title of the paper continued to be to try to reshape the government's position to one which would more effectively represent Irish national interests and face the British government with a united national position. We agreed to come back with a view – and amendments - of it for the next meeting.

The election was now dominating our work. For my part, my role as party leader was to be everywhere, to rally the organisation and to convince the electorate, that a vote for Sinn Fein was a vote for peace, for real change and for inclusive peace talks. I travelled the length and breadth of the 6 counties. On the eve of the election I went into the Ulster television studios in Belfast for an unusual party political broadcast – to the USA. The thirty minute broadcast was watched in over 30 states and in Canada. It was a unique and very successful experiment in speaking to Irish America without actually travelling there.

And then it was May 30th and time to count the votes.

To the consternation of our opponents people chose Sinn Fein in greater numbers than ever before.

We won 116,377 votes, that is 15.5% of the poll, or 42% of the nationalist vote. It was the highest vote we had ever achieved in this period of our history. The pundits had to go back to the 1955 Westminster election to find a better Sinn Fein result. In West Belfast we picked up four of the five seats and confirmed our status as the largest party in the City of Belfast with over 21% of the vote.

Across the north, we won 15 seats, three times what we took in the Assembly elections 14 years earlier. And with our increased mandate we picked up an additional two seats in the 'top-up list', making a grand total of 17 seats. The SDLP won 21, the DUP 24 and the UUP 30. The Alliance Party vote dropped badly and it emerged with only 7 seats.

The 'top-up list', providing two seats each to the ten parties with the greater share of the vote, meant that for the first time the UVF aligned Progressive Unionist Party had two representatives and the UDA aligned Ulster Democratic Party also got two. The other three parties to benefit from this unique electoral system were the Women's Coalition, the Labour Party and the UK Unionist Party. The leader of this latter party, Bob McCartney was elected in North Down giving them a grand total of 3 seats.

So the stage was set for the negotiations on June 10th. The people had spoken, the winners chosen and all it needed was for the parties to sit down in their new configurations and do the hard bit – reach an agreement.

John Major had said, "Once the elections are over, the route to negotiations is clear, direct and automatic." But that was before the elections. The count was not long finished when Patrick Mayhew made it clear that no IRA cessation meant no invitation to the talks for Sinn Fein. For the governments, our voters were second-class – our mandate less legitimate than anyone else's. So the pre-conditions on our entry to negotiations remained in place. For both governments, that meant a new IRA ceasefire. And for the British, it also meant decommissioning. Our behind-the-scenes discussions had failed to breach these positions.

In the immediate aftermath of the election our discussions intensified with the Irish government around possible positions for it and the British government. We only had days before the start of talks to construct a package which we could take to the Army leadership and persuade it to reinstate its cessation. Despite some pretty brazen media stories, planted by either or both governments to exert pressure on Sinn Fein, the reality – as the election results had just shown – was that we were under no pressure from within our section of the community.

At the beginning of June there were intensive talks between the two governments led by Patrick Mayhew and Dick Spring in London. John Bruton and John Major also took part in the discussions, which were reported to be in difficulties over the role to be allotted to Senator George Mitchell. The general shape of what was being agreed seemed clear enough. The talks would open on June 10 with a plenary session. Decommissioning would be considered by a sub-committee and while it proceeded, agreement would be sought between the parties and the governments on the agenda and the procedures for the talks, including how decommissioning could be dealt with. This process – with many breaks – would last until September. Then the decommissioning obstacle would be erected again.

This led to a 'senior IRA source' telling the Irish News and BBC that a ceasefire before June 10th was 'extremely remote'. The IRA source went on 'we remain ready and willing to continue with our position of enhancing the atmosphere for proper and meaningful negotiations. It would appear there is absolutely no likelihood of any substantive IRA move this side of June 10th.'

Dublin officials told us that it would be for George Mitchell to call time on the decommissioning issue when all parties had shown good intent. But when we asked if the British were committed to this approach, we were told 'No'. And there were many other issues, for example the timetable of the process, and the idea of sub-committees and others, which the officials had no answers to. At the end of a long tiring discussion I told the officials that I thought it unlikely that we could discuss all of this with the IRA, for that organisation to consult its volunteers and for us to get a positive response before Monday June 10th.

The next day the process was thrown into turmoil and political and public opinion was outraged, when Garda Jerry McCabe was shot dead, and a colleague seriously wounded in an armed raid in Adare in County Limerick. They had been escorting an An Post truck which was distributing around IR£100,000 in pension and social security money to Post Offices in West Limerick. The IRA moved quickly to deny that any of its volunteers or units were involved. But the allegations increased in ferocity and some time later, after carrying out its own internal inquiry an embarrassed IRA acknowledged that some of its members had indeed carried out the attack without authorisation of the Army Council. The operation had been cleared at a lower level.

Sinn Féin was the inevitable target of a political and media storm, especially in the south. I and other party colleagues faced a barrage of criticism. We repudiated the killing in the strongest possible terms but the damage done to our efforts to restore the peace process was considerable.

The two governments meanwhile had sent out invitations to the other parties to participate in the negotiations. So I wrote to both Mayhew and Dick Spring complaining about this.

June 10th dawned. All-party negotiations – minus Sinn Féin – were about to begin. It was potentially a historic day. Or it could have been if common sense had prevailed.

Page 10. *Kriegsmay Cluster in Whitehall*
to Middle East - Cuba etc

Chapter 31 Progress – and Setbacks

Shortly after the New Year the loyalist prisoners in Long Kesh said that they were withdrawing their support from the talks process. The PUP then threatened to pull out.

David Trimble and several of his colleagues visited the loyalist prisoners. They had a three-hour meeting. I was critical of their meeting. Not because I was against it - we had no difficulty with Trimble meeting the loyalists – but because he was refusing to speak to Sinn Féin.

But Trimble wasn't worried about any of this. His tactical approach was about minimising the potential for change. In an unprecedented move Mowlam also met with loyalist prisoners in the H-Blocks, at Long Kesh on January 9th. Her goal was to persuade them to continue their support for the talks process. She was widely criticised by unionist politicians. Some of them again demanded her resignation. But the loyalist prisoners opted to back the talks and her unusual and widely publicised initiative was vindicated.

Two days later, and on the eve of the resumption of the final round of negotiations I was asleep when my brother Paddy phoned me. I can remember my sense of shock when he said,

"Young Terry has been shot. He's dead. I'm up in the house now. Everybody is shattered."

Young Terry was Terry Enright, the 28-year-old husband of my niece Deirdre. He was shot and killed outside the Space Nightclub in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter. He was a community activist particularly popular because of his work with young people. He was a big athletic young guy, brash, open and very friendly. Terry's wife Deirdre was my sister Margaret's oldest girl. She also was a confident, and happy young person. She and Terry had two daughters Aoife, almost two and Ciara aged four.

The Enright family and our clan were devastated by Terry's murder. So was the local community in the Upper Springfield area. During Terry's wake I continued with meetings in Government Buildings. On the evening before his funeral some of the senior Irish government officials travelled across town with me to pay their respects. They were visibly shocked by the unrestrained sound of keening and wailing as we walked up the street to the wakehouse. It was the young people. A sense of mass hysteria seemed to have overcome the hundreds of youngsters who were gathered outside.

It was the same at the funeral. It took place on a bitter cold January afternoon. Thousands of people lined the route and thousands more followed the cortege, which was led by a lone piper from Terry's home to Holy Trinity Church in Turf Lodge. A huge number of young people attended. Many carried homemade banners and placards, some representing local youth groups; others had made their own personal tributes.

Terry was a keen hurler and footballer for Gort na Mona, the local GAA club. His coffin was draped in the club's colours and the funeral procession was stewarded by his clubmates and preceded by members of Gort na Mona camogie team. They carried a floral tribute to 'a true Gael'.

After the mass as we made our way down the Springfield Road towards the Whiterock Road I was walking close to Deirdre and gently joking

with her in an effort to keep her spirits up. She was being tremendously brave. We were talking about Terry and about the crowds who came to mourn him.

"If only I had got talking to him. Even just to say goodbye" Deirdre said. "Even if he would send me some signal".

Almost as soon as she spoke a rainbow appeared in the sky above us. Then as we got to the top of the Whiterock another rainbow crisscrossed the first one, making a huge multicoloured cross in the blue heavens. It stretched above us, from the heights where our sad procession meandered, across and over the city of Belfast. There was an excited little ripple of exclamations through our family group, particularly among the younger ones. Someone declared " That's Terry".

I know it sounds daft. But Deirdre and I and the rest of the clan thought it was him.

* * * * *

Meanwhile the two governments had put together 'Heads of Agreement' which they described as an outline of an acceptable agreement. It was tabled on their behalf by Senator Mitchell and it included proposals on constitutional changes to the Irish and British constitutions; a new British Irish Agreement to replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement; an intergovernmental Council drawn from the two governments and the various Assemblies within Britain; a North-South Ministerial Council to bring together those with executive responsibilities in both parts of Ireland in specific areas; implementation bodies; an Assembly in the north elected by proportional representation; and a Bill of Rights. There was also a cursory nod in the direction of prisoners, policing and other matters.

Most of the parties generally welcomed the proposals. We didn't because they failed to properly address some of the crucial issues. There was no equality of approach across the three strands. For example the issue of an Assembly was elevated above the north-south institutions. The Assembly was dealt with in quite specific language. The north-south bodies were outlined in more ambiguous terms.

The unionists publicly claimed that the Heads of Agreement paper was a victory for them.

The killings went on at a frightening rate. On January 18th a young Catholic was killed in Maghera. The following day the INLA killed a UDA man in South Belfast and within hours another Catholic – a taxi driver – was shot dead on the Ormeau Road. The next three days saw three more Catholics shot and killed. Belfast was a dangerous town. I was very conscious of this as I moved around. While life appeared to go on as normal there was a tension and brittleness about the place. Nationalists in the city were particularly aggrieved because all the recent killing were happening in the context of the IRA cessation. To many it seemed that nothing would satisfy the unionists. The random nature of the attacks also meant that any Catholic was a potential target. History was being repeated. Little wonder Belfast Catholics felt particularly vulnerable during times of change or potential change.

I wrote to Mo Mowlam and David Andrews asking specific questions about the north-south institutions. I also travelled with senior colleagues to London to meet Tony Blair again. This time while we raised our concerns about the Heads of Agreement paper and I gave Mr Blair another potted

history of the Brian Nelson affair and British involvement with the UDA. I put the ongoing UDA campaign in that context. I also pressed him about the killing of Pat Finucane and other state sponsored killings.

While he had no direct responsibility for these actions, which had occurred in the past, he did have a duty to lift the lid on this practice if he was serious about building peace. And he had a responsibility about what was happening now. These killings were continuing with the indulgence, direction or approval of elements of British government agencies, particularly the RUC Special Branch and British Military Intelligence. Again we raised the need for a Bloody Sunday Enquiry and again I noticed a marked difference in his approach. He was more informed than in our earlier discussions and as I listened to him and Martin discussing in a fairly detailed way the events of that day I knew progress was being made.

The IRA was also watching events unfold and on January 21st a statement from the Army rejected the Heads of Agreement paper as a basis for a peace settlement. It accused Tony Blair of succumbing to the orange card.

The next day the RUC Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan finally acknowledged what everyone already knew. He blamed some, although not all, of the recent killings of Catholics on the UDA. Twenty-four hours later the UDA admitted that it had killed a number of people in 'a measured military response' to the INLA. According to the statement the UDA was now back on ceasefire. A few hours later Liam Conway, a 39 year Catholic was shot dead in north Belfast. His death was followed 24 hours later by that of another Catholic taxi driver, John McColgan. Their deaths made a mockery of the UDA statement.

But what to do about the UDP, the UDA's political representatives in the talks? That was the question that now faced the governments. They and the other parties had agreed the rules, during the period when Sinn Fein was excluded from the talks. We wanted no one excluded and I said it was a matter for the two governments.

The talks were to move to Lancaster House in London on January 26th and it was expected that the presence of the UDP would be the first item on the agenda. Meanwhile in private meetings with senior Irish government officials we were focusing in on the need for a north-south paper, which would bring any envisaged institutions into line at least with the Framework Document. We were also making it clear, in a without prejudice way, that there would have to be major checks and balances and safeguards against unionist abuses if an Assembly was established, despite our opposition to it.

Constitutional changes were also discussed, including the need for changes to Article 29 of the Irish constitution to allow for the new north-south structures. We were assured there would be no constitutional changes to the Irish constitution without a wider agreement, and we were given draft words that Dublin had written up on Article 1 of any new agreement. This would deal with the issues of self-determination and consent. We agreed to look at it and come back to them.

At another meeting with senior officials I was told that the two governments were beginning to put down their thoughts on an endgame paper and that this would be ready in a few weeks. The north-south paper

was unlikely to be ready for the start of talks in London and anyway the issue of the UDP would take up the first day.

A large Sinn Féin delegation flew to London on Sunday. That night some of us spoke at a packed public meeting. Back at the hotel the lights burned late in my room as fourteen of us jammed together to plot a course for the Lancaster House meetings. Pat Doherty had grabbed the one chair. Everyone else either stood or sat on the floor or the edge of the bed. We had twenty-four, or perhaps thirty six hours in which to influence the Strand 2 paper by the two governments.

Our meeting decided on a straightforward approach. It was to establish if the north-south institutions would exercise executive, harmonising and consultative functions; would they be responsible for policy and implementation; what areas would be covered? There was also a brief discussion about the participation of the UDP. We agreed that there would be no definitive public position by us on whether the UDP should be in or out.

The next morning we were all up bright and early. It was chilly but nice. We walked to Lancaster House, which was only a short distance away across Piccadilly to the end of Green Park. This is part of the Royal Parks complex including St. James's Park. I had my Walkman plugged in and as Christy Moore sang sweetly to me I was glad to take the air and stretch my legs along the avenue of mature trees, many of them very old and gnarled. En route a number of people greeted us pleasantly and wished us well. A dander down Queens Walk, alongside Lancaster House and we were on The Mall, across from Buckingham Palace. And not a peeler in sight.

Lancaster House was originally built in 1825 as York House. It is now owned by the British government and used for major conferences. It sits in the grounds of St. James's Palace, the London home of the Prince of Wales. After we cleared the security at the entrance we walked into a huge hall dominated by a central staircase that is 80-foot square and 120 feet high. We left our coats and walked up the staircase to the stately rooms on the first floor, which had been allocated for our discussions. These had witnessed many historic events over the years. Perhaps most famously it was the venue in 1979 for the negotiations which led to the end of Rhodesia and the creation of Zimbabwe. Almost two decades earlier this is where the Commonwealth decided to kick out the apartheid regime of South Africa. And in another century the cause to end slavery was debated within these walls.

It was here amid the grandeur and the Louis XIV interiors and the other fine furnishings, which were undoubtedly stolen from around the world or purchased with other ill-gotten imperial gains that we were trying to make our own history. The first order of business was the UDP. Senator Mitchell was asked by the two governments to speak to its delegation. He gently suggested to them that rather than wait until expelled, they should voluntarily leave. They agreed and left quietly soon after. The governments announced if there was a complete restoration of the UDA ceasefire the UDP would be allowed back into the talks. They returned four weeks later.

That evening Martin and I went for a walk. We were taken by Phil, one of a group of Irish and English and one Australian supporter, who look after us in London, to Speakers Corner at Marble Arch. It was late evening and there weren't many people around. Phil explained to us the tradition behind Speakers Corner. Martin and I decided it was a good tradition. I invited him to

say a few words and loudly introduced him. For a few minutes, to the amazement of our friends and the few people hurrying to their homes Martin McGuinness stood in oratorical pose and spoke loudly, about Irish republicanism and the need for the British to leave Ireland. Our small group applauded him with enthusiasm.

That Speakers Corner speech was one of his best orations. It was certainly one of his shortest.

More seriously, back at Lancaster House, I tried to focus the media on the refusal of the UUP to speak to Sinn Féin. This wasn't about having a go at David Trimble. I believed then and still do, that we needed a good engagement with a section of unionism to get an agreement and to make it work. Getting David Trimble into dialogue with us was central to this.

But if the truth were told the chances of that continued to be remote. At one point I tried to speak to Ken Maginnis. He was on his own and by now he had done several television interviews with Sinn Féin representatives, including me. So in a tiny little effort to build a conversation I said hello and tried to engage him in conversation. He wasn't having any of it.

'I don't talk to fucking murderers,' he said and stormed off.

I also tried to speak to Trimble on the margins of the conference room but he reddened, snapped his heels together and took off with an angry gasp of annoyance and nary a backward glance. Or an expletive.

Tuesday afternoon saw the eventual delivery of the two governments long awaited paper – 'Strand 2 – North/South Structures.' In it they restated their firm commitment to the positions set out in the Framework Document. The paper then posed 14 questions to the delegations, ranging from what the purpose of such bodies should be, to the nature and basis of the Ministerial Council. I welcomed the paper and stressed the importance of the equality agenda and the need to deal with justice, policing, cultural matters and much more.

That evening there was a reception in the front hall of Lancaster House attended by Tony Blair. He said a few words of encouragement to the assembled talks participants. It was a low-key event though I could see how the venue, with its plentiful supply of nooks and crannies, the move away from Government Buildings and the absence of Belfast tension could encourage progress. That is if there was a political will.

The following morning I wrote a private note to David Trimble and asked for a meeting. I got his response through the Irish Times. They received my note and a claim from Trimble that I wasn't serious and that the invite was just a PR stunt. That told a lot about Mr Trimble's mindset. He probably thought he was getting one up on me by breaking this wee initiative to the media. But if he really thought it was a PR stunt then why, I asked myself, was he acting as my press officer?

Anyway, the last day of the Lancaster House talks saw the parties respond to the government's questions. Senator Mitchell agreed that written answers could be submitted. The unionists were dismissive of the Strand 2 paper. To underline this point the UUP MP Jeffrey Donaldson tore up a copy of the Framework Document at a packed press conference, proclaiming, 'We as a party will not put our hand to any agreement based on the Framework Document.'

Rumour had it that he couldn't possibly have torn up the document, without first having it already partially cut and sections of it removed. This provided light relief to talks insiders, but it did not detract from the serious message of intransigence he was delivering.

Back in Belfast we prepared detailed answers to the 14 questions and gave our views to the Senator. We also put it to him that he needed to be serious about setting a deadline for the talks. He was amused by our insistence.

"You think I like flying back and forth across the Atlantic? I've told you before you have a life and this is it. I have a life and..."

"...This isn't it!" Martin and I chorused back at him.

Near the end of that month Tony Blair took the courageous step of announcing in the British House of Commons that there would be a fresh inquiry into the events on Bloody Sunday 26 years earlier. I consider this to be a brave decision. I believe the big breakthrough was achieved when Blair read a book of evidence prepared by the families of the dead and wounded of Bloody Sunday and presented by the Irish Government. He read it over a weekend at Chequers. That made up his mind. Whatever emerges from that inquiry it was a huge vindication of the decades of campaigning by the Bloody Sunday families.

We moved into February with a paper from the Talks Secretariat posing another list of questions for delegations in respect of an Assembly. Behind the scenes we were engaged in extensive discussions with the Irish government across all of the major issues, which this involved.

It was our view that it was tactically too early to even consider changing the Sinn Féin position on a northern Assembly. We continued hardballing. If this was now a real negotiation, and it was, we wanted strong north-south bodies and if there was to be an Assembly we wanted the strongest possible safeguards and as much power as possible.

The UUP seemed to be after a non-legislative Assembly with minimal powers. Their logic appeared to be that the less powers the Assembly had; the less powers any all-Ireland structures would have; the less influence and power nationalists and republicans would have; the safer would be the union.

The SDLP had already conceded on the Assembly but in fairness to them they were arguing for an Assembly with more power and authority than the UUP wanted. For our part we knew that this negotiation had some time to run and on the basis of what government officials were telling us privately, it would conclude with a paper prepared in the main by the governments, along with Senator Mitchell and his team.

An agreement needed Sinn Féin so this gave us some leverage in the negotiations and we intended to play it for all it was worth. I also knew that republicans would not countenance any involvement in anything, which resembled in any way the old Unionist status quo at Stormont. I would not countenance it myself though I thought as I have said before that we would have to give on the Assembly if we got proper terms and an acceptable agreement across all the other issues. The trick was not to tell any of our opponents this while trying to get the best assembly possible, firmly locked into and interdependent on the all Ireland institutions. Without the all Ireland architecture there could be no northern assembly.

Some within the SDLP accused us of being obstructive over the issue of an Assembly. The reality was that we wanted more than the SDLP. Our strategy was an all-Ireland strategy, not one focused on structures within the north, and with little attention being paid to the rest. This negotiation was going to go to the wire.

On February 9th a known drug dealer was shot dead in South Belfast. Almost immediately the RUC started briefing the media that it was the IRA who had shot him. The next day Robert Dougan, a senior UDA figure, was killed in Dunmurry, on the outskirts of west Belfast. It was alleged that he had been involved in recent sectarian attacks on Catholics, including at least one murder. Again the RUC pointed the finger at the IRA. A short time after Dougan's death three men were arrested in the nearby nationalist Twinbrook estate.

Unlike his procrastination over naming the UDA, within days the Chief Constable was telling Mowlam that the IRA was responsible for the attacks. The IRA said that its cessation of military operations remained intact. But the unionists had the bit between their teeth and as the talks prepared to move to Dublin for three days of discussions on Strand 2 the demand was for Sinn Féin to be expelled.

Sinn Féin was not involved in either killing. We were opposed to these actions. We had not dishonoured the Mitchell Principles. And there was no evidence to suggest otherwise. In addition there were clear double standards being applied by the British, both in respect of the killings by unionist paramilitaries but also by the ongoing actions of its own forces. We decided to fight any effort to expel us.

I made this clear to Mo Mowlam when I met her in Dublin Castle early on the Monday morning. It was not a good meeting. I challenged her to present evidence of Sinn Féin involvement in this attacks. How could we respond to an indictment if we couldn't see the evidence? And so it began.

The media, and probably the other parties, thought it was cut and dried and would be over by mid afternoon. That was certainly the impression the British briefers – spin-doctors – were giving. The penny finally dropped around 3 pm when Martin McGuinness told a bunch of astounded journalists that we intended fighting this every step of the way. What right had Ronnie Flanagan to decide who could or could not be in talks? Our mandate came from the people, not from the RUC.

Mowlam didn't make a formal indictment of Sinn Féin. Her position was set out in remarks she made to the plenary from a speaking note. Privately on the side of the plenary, in the plenary session itself and in the media our delegates and press people argued, debated, objected and challenged. Later that night a thousand people packed into Liberty Hall. There was an overflow of several hundred outside. Gerry Kelly addressed the crowd outside. I told the audience inside that if the British government thought they could bring us into Dublin Castle, kick us in the arse and send us home again then they were wrong.

Defiance was in the air and we brought it with us the next morning when we walked back into Dublin Castle.

The British remained reluctant to formally indict us. The Alliance Party came to the rescue. With no information to substantiate the British accusation they indicted us.

As the arguments continued to rage inside Dublin Castle we initiated a legal challenge in the courts. It was all very bizarre. Thus far there had been little or no substantive progress on the core issues. The unionists were barely talking to anyone and not at all to us. Now the entire focus was on expelling us. All of our efforts and the risks we had taken for peace, all the years of hard quiet mind numbing work, were being thrown back in our faces. And we were fighting a rearguard action for our rights and the rights of our voters against unsubstantiated allegations. To cap it all the unionists accused us of having an exit strategy from the talks.

By Tuesday evening the anger and frustration that had been building up within me exploded at a media doorstep and I told a surprised media pack that I was absolutely pissed off at republicans having to stretch ourselves all the time to save this process. It was not one of my more considered expressions, but it caused some amusement back in Belfast where someone produced t-shirts with 'I'm pissed off too' across their chests.

By the time the talks ended on Wednesday no other business had been done. The governments told us they would give their verdict to us on Friday. This was done at a ten-minute meeting at Castle Buildings where I was informed by some sheepish Irish government representatives and their British counterparts that provided nothing else happened we could be back by March 9th. I warned that we might not turn up on March 9th and asked for early meetings with the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister. An interesting and important postscript to this crisis came with the release several months later of the three men whose arrest and alleged links to the IRA had been used to justify our expulsion. The releases did not get the same coverage as the arrests.

The same day we were expelled a huge bomb exploded at Moira and two days later there was another one in Portadown. Both caused extensive damage but thankfully no one was hurt. Once again the unionists jumped to blame the IRA. It denied any involvement. Responsibility for the explosions was claimed by the CIRA.

The meeting I had requested with the Taoiseach took place on February 24th. It was a good meeting. He was relaxed but worried. We were out of the negotiations and the unionists were still setting out their impossibly inflexible position while refusing to engage properly with anyone. I told Bertie that the governments needed to build confidence into the talks. In the meantime we would continue to meet with officials. After I met the British Prime Minister Sinn Féin would decide what we would do.

As usual though other Sinn Féin demands were piling up. There were by-elections in Limerick and Dublin, as well as the normal work of running a party and representing a constituency. In the midst of this and before we met Mr. Blair and headed off for the usual St. Patrick's Day events in the USA, Richard, Eamon and I travelled to Wexford for the 200th anniversary of the 1798 Rising. It was a wonderful journey through some of the most scenic parts of Ireland. The weather was bright but cold. Wexford is a county replete with the history of struggle against the British. It was also the setting for some of the bloodiest fighting during the 1798 Rising.

Cnoc Fíodh na gCaor or Vinegar Hill, overlooks the town of Enniscorthy, through which runs the River Slaney. Its rocky terrain and steep sides must have seemed a perfect place in late June 1798 for the 20,000

rebels to made a stand. Now here we were two centuries later, thousands of us standing and remembering and celebrating the ideals for which they had died.

But terror too was never far away from the streets of the north. The uncertainty created by our expulsion from the talks, the refusal of the unionists to engage, the bomb attacks, the ongoing attacks by unionist paramilitaries and the behaviour of the RUC and British Army, all fed into a deteriorating atmosphere. This was made worse on March 3rd with the murder of two friends, Damien Trainor, a Catholic, and Philip Allen, a Protestant one a Catholic, the other a Protestant, as they sat in a pub in Poyntzpass in County Armagh having a drink.

That same day we were working our way through proposals on the political institutions and continuing with our lobby of the Irish government on constitutional issues. We had submitted advanced propositions on rights equality and justice; prisoners, security measures, decommissioning and victims and we were considering how an agreement would be implemented validated and reviewed. We had also identified almost two dozen specific safeguards, which we felt would be necessary to prevent unionists abusing any Assembly.

Our core group was now a cohesive and effective unit and our approach in these private discussions was to seek to extend the powers and scope of the all-Ireland institutions, to immunise them against unionist obstruction and subversion and to ensure that there was both the dynamic and freedom for them to grow and develop further. We also took the opportunity to put to the Irish government the potentially far-reaching proposal that MPs from the six counties could sit in the Irish Parliament.

I felt that some of these issues needed to be aired publicly. And we needed to give people some sense of where Sinn Féin was trying to take the negotiations. I therefore wrote a major article for the Dublin based newspaper 'Ireland on Sunday' on March 8th and followed this up the next morning with a press conference in Belfast to formally launch a short document entitled – 'A Bridge into the Future'.

Although it had been said before I felt that it was important to ensure that republicans especially understood that we did not expect these negotiations to produce a United Ireland by May that year. But we had a very firm view that any agreement had to provide a context in which we could continue to effectively pursue unity. Such a process also had to have an equality agenda with teeth and a process of demilitarisation, justice and an end to the RUC, as well as the release of prisoners.

We now had a detailed view of all these matters, influenced by our private negotiations with the two governments and proofed by a number of legal advisers who we enlisted for that purpose. The first rustling of ideas- the need for an alternative way forward - that marked the beginning of this journey with Father Des and the Sagart was now a detailed menu and a programme for change.

The following Thursday I was in London again for a 9 a.m. meeting with Tony Blair. It was a useful exchange. He told me that despite speculation that some people felt the British were trying to force us out of the talks, he wanted a deal with Sinn Féin. I told him that we appreciated his decision on Bloody Sunday and I spelt out the difficulties created for us by our expulsion from the

talks. But I repeated we were committed to playing our part in sorting out relationships between our two islands and we would be back into the talks – probably by March 23rd.

I had copies of 'A Bridge into the Future' for Blair but he had already read it. Specifically once again I raised with him the crux issue of sovereignty and the need for the British government to start unravelling the Act of Union by ending the Government of Ireland Act and the Northern Ireland Constitution Act by which Britain claims jurisdiction over the six counties. We also ran through the other issues of demilitarisation, prisoners, equality and human rights.

The Irish government was to hold a referendum on May 22nd to ratify the Amsterdam Treaty. Blair told us that the governments were looking at that date to also hold the referendum on any agreement. Mo Mowlam, who was present, acknowledged that the Orange marching season would create problems if the date was later.

A large part of our conversation was taken up with discussing the Assembly and its implications, and the north south bodies. I told him that whatever chance there might be for Sinn Féin signing up to any agreement which included an Assembly would be dependent on how much power was vested in the all-Ireland institutions and how he tackled the constitutional issue. I told him once again that Sinn Fein could not and would not be part of any northern assembly without the support of two thirds of an Ard Fheis.

Immediately after this meeting Richard and I were off to New York. As usual I arrived there tired, and this time there was no opportunity to catch breath. A helicopter was waiting to bring us to Seton Hall University in New Jersey. Five of us crammed into the small chopper. I doubted it could lift off with the weight. Slowly we lifted upwards and then gathering height and speed away we flew over Brooklyn, flitting between the skyscrapers and across the Manhattan skyline, directly over the statue of Liberty and on to a playing field at Seton Hall. It was a magical journey providing a view of New York unlike any I had seen before.

Seton Hall was packed and the reception was great. But it was a late night and by the time we drove back into New York to our hotel our body clocks were screaming at us. The next few days were spent travelling, talking and lobbying. We eventually arrived in Washington where on a bright and beautiful Sunday morning we drove out past the Pentagon to a little Baptist Church in Virginia. Colleen, one of our support staff is an African American with Irish and Native American ancestors. She was a member of the congregation and she invited us to join them for Sunday service. It was a wonderful experience. Our group, including Irish journalist Eamonn Mallie were the only white people in the church. We were warmly welcomed. The music and the craic were mighty and the service was communal and uplifting.

The following evening we spent an hour – minus Eamon – in the Oval office meeting President Clinton and his Secretary of State Madeline Albright. As ever his knowledge of the detail and complexities of the conflict, and of the personalities involved in the peace process was impressive. At this time he was going through a very difficult time

in his personal life and he looked a little drawn. But he was very focussed on our issues.

He knew that we were particularly irked that the unionists were still refusing to talk to us. He told me that he was trying to encourage David Trimble to engage with me and expressed some frustration that so far he had not done so. While most of our discussions were about Ireland I also raised the Middle East situation with him as well as the question of Cuba and the huge problems suffered by third world countries crippled by debt. I urged him to cancel third world debt and to use his influence to get other countries to do the same.

Madeline Albright was heavily engaged in the Balkans situation at that time and she volunteered a little update on what was happening there. As always the discussions with President Clinton went over time. He is an instinctive communicator, thirsty for information, soaking up opinions and eager to swap ideas and reduce issues to digestible concepts.

At the Speakers lunch on Capitol Hill and at the reception in the White House President Clinton told and retold the story of how the Israeli and Palestinian leaders had eventually got round to talking to each other and how necessary that was if there was to be any hope of peace anywhere in the world. In a pointed reference to Trimble, the President quoted President Kennedy who once famously remarked, 'civility is not a sign of weakness.' It made no difference. Despite White House efforts to have Trimble speak to me, he refused.

The First Lady Hilary Clinton was also an avid supporter of the peace process. On a number of occasions she sat in for discussions between us and the President. Her political instincts on issues of equality meant that she had a natural affinity with the struggle for justice and equity. I also think that she understood the dynamics of the peace process and of the need for it to have both forward momentum and a capacity to deliver on issues which affected disadvantaged people in their daily lives. She was to bring a singular contribution to the process on the issue of empowerment of women but in my engagements with her it was obvious that her mind was busy on all the issues that required attention.

George Mitchell had also been busy. On March 25th he set a deadline of midnight Thursday April 9th for the talks to end.

This phase of talks was to start on Monday March 30th. The aim was to get final comments from the governments and the parties, and to produce a first draft of an agreement by Friday April 3rd. After weekend consultations the plan then would be to produce a penultimate draft on the Monday and then have four days in which to come up with a deal.

It was an ambitious plan. But a lot of drafting had already been done by the governments and the talks officials. The key would be political will on the part of the participants.

One piece of good news to merge around this time was the release of Roisin McAliskey. The British Home Secretary Jack Straw refused Germany's extradition case on the grounds that it would be unjust and oppressive.

The day Mitchell announced his timetable for agreement I met with Irish government officials for five hours. On the back of this our own drafters

prepared a range of detailed papers with specific proposals for the coming negotiations around all of the core issues. This included a draft publicity campaign for the next 12 weeks working on the assumption that a deal was done. Our calendar included, at the very least the Easter weekend, with its hundreds of Republican commemorations across the island; our Ard Fheis in April; the referendum battle and an election.

The unionists were also preparing for the coming phase of intense talks. Trimble used a party conference to try and hook the SDLP into a separate deal. He said it was time the SDLP had the 'courage to move forward with us. I say to them, the days of relying on the Irish government to do your negotiating are over.'

This was at best a naïve proposal, with no real chance of the SDLP biting; at worst it was just plain stupid. The unionist position was well stated. They wanted an assembly with limited powers and a firm unionist majority to veto everything; limited cross border bodies, no prisoner releases, no reforms of the RUC and they were still denying that structural inequality or discrimination ever existed! Hardly a good deal for any nationalist party.

As for the British we feared that they would go down to the wire on some key issues and force the Irish government to negotiate back from what were the promising positions we had been working on with them. We were also concerned that the officials at the British end, mostly the same ones who handled this issue during John Major's term, would, once again, take up a unionist line.

But there was nothing new about any of this. If we had concerns so did our opponents. It was all to play for. It was a matter of doing our best and keeping our nerve. We had to play to our strengths.

On the eve of the start of the intense talks I pulled on a hooded anorak and slipped away on my own with our two dogs, Cara and Osgur, in tow through the streets of West Belfast. It was a good evening for a quiet walk. My thoughts were sombre. We didn't know what would come out of the talks. But the reality was that they could go on forever in this form. And that was doing our cause no good. I had argued that negotiations were now a part of our struggle. But negotiations had to advance the struggle. Our strategic aim was to secure an acceptable peace deal.

For four years now we had been arguing for intensive, concentrated and focused talks. In fact it was we who first asked for and consistently pressed for a timeframe in the negotiations. In the absence of any other dynamic, a tight timeframe could act as a catalyst.

Now we had two weeks. We knew the general outlines of an agreement and the detail of the substance but God alone knew how it would end up or if there would be an agreement at all.

Would the unionists stay with it? Would there be enough for us? Could we continue to build our struggle from there? After all that people had suffered would they stick with us?

Our dogs enjoyed the walk. So did I. No one disturbed us on our contemplative dander. As we turned for home the canines both nuzzled close to me.

"Down" I snapped at them "If you two mutts had my problems you wouldn't be so giddy."

Then ruefully I reminded myself than no one had asked me to be an Irish republican.

GFA negotiations ← overnight phone calls with Clinton p. 13!

Chapter 32 The Good Friday Agreement

Whether it was my walk with the dogs or just bad luck, Monday morning started with a headache, a sore throat and a blocked nose. I grabbed for the vitamin C and the Echinacea. But the flu was not to be denied and it gradually settled itself into my system over the next few days.

As we gathered in our rooms at Castle Buildings for our first meeting of this final round of talks I told the negotiations team to be prepared for a lot of hard work, and probably some sleepless nights. Our job was to do the best we could. We were a good team who had learned to work together efficiently over the preceding years, but in particular the last few months. There were a few new faces: additional admin staff and several lawyers. All in all we had a team of over two dozen. But with the exception of our core group they were rarely all there at the same time.

Castle Buildings was fronted by a sizeable car parking area and surrounded by a chain link fence. I, and mostly Martin McGuinness, used to walk regularly in the car park. Just beyond the perimeter fence the British had erected a marquee for the press. There were also a couple of small portacabins and the type of portable toilets you get on building sites or at big outdoor events. The marquee had tables and chairs and most important of all, phone lines. There was also some hot food for the hungry hacks. Between the fence and the marquee the various media broadcast outlets had erected their own little tents, which provided some shelter. But generally facilities for the media were atrocious. The BBC eventually went so far as to construct a small studio 20 feet up on top of a steel framework. This allowed the presenter to stand or sit with his or her back to Castle Buildings and talk solemnly about events inside. Occasionally they would focus in on movement in our office or next door in the SDLP office. It was like being in a fish bowl.

As more and more international media crews arrived and the days passed, the media's tent city grew. Our press people would take me, Mitchel McLaughlin, Martin McGuinness, Bairbre de Brún or another of our spokespersons outside to do press conferences and interviews. Sometimes we would be ushered along the line of cameras. The next ten days saw the efficiency of this operation increase enormously. I would occasionally sit at the window watching this slow motion version of Riverdance as either Sinn Féin or the other parties waltzed up and down the chorus line.

There was a copse of trees behind the media swamp. When I first arrived at Stormont I had asked for, as I do in all new places I visit, and received a little booklet about the Stormont estate. To my delight I discovered that there was a badger sett beyond the trees. I never saw Broc though I wandered around there a few times and kept watch regularly from our window. Maybe they were still hibernating. I wondered what they thought of the media invasion. Another time when Martin and I were walking in the car park I noticed a strange looking bird walking along the top of the air conditioning below the first storey windows. I was standing almost opposite it and although it saw me it was not perturbed as it made its way along the front of the building, while I ambled alongside it on the tarmac. Martin joined me as the *creabhar* – or, to give it its English name, woodcock – turned the corner of

the complex. It obviously knew we were following it but it proceeded into a little cul-de-sac where it nestled in. As Martin McGuinness watched I stepped forward very cautiously and made little clucking noises. The bird cocked its head and looked beady-eyed at me. I inched forward again and it flew off up onto the edge of the flat roof above us and gazed down at the two of us from this lofty perch.

'You couldn't get a bird in the Canary Islands! That poor thing probably thinks you want it for the cooking pot,' Martin remarked.

In between watching for birds and badgers the first couple of days were given over to a succession of meetings with Senator Mitchell, the two governments, and the other parties, or at least those parties which would talk to us. In fact there were so many meetings that it proved difficult to keep track of them all.

Castle Buildings was now a second home. Some of the discussions were intense and protracted. In between meetings we took every opportunity to stretch out on a floor or under a table. The concentrated bouts of negotiating and the preparations were mentally exhausting. Unlike the governments we could not fall back on the serried ranks of civil servants who resourced their every negotiating need.

Instead we worked in a compact way. For example, our negotiators, and the small number of drafters - those who had the job of parsing documents and writing our draft responses - and the PR people, would come together around the core group to review the work to date. We had a position paper that set out our goals, and this was the template for all our discussions.

These talks saw the first of a series of formal negotiations with the two governments on constitutional matters. They had their experts and we had ours. The British agreed that all the main provisions of the agreement and the all-Ireland bodies would be established through legislation at Westminster. This was important because it removed the possibility that the unionists might repeal through legislation in the Assembly, what we were trying to put in place through these negotiations.

Our first meeting with the SDLP was good. Martin and I and several others, met a delegation led by John Hume and Seamus Mallon. We wanted to secure common positions with them on key issues because in that way we believed we could counter unionist efforts to minimise any propositions, while pushing the two governments, and in particular the British to maximum positions. In our view policing and criminal justice were not problems that we could resolve in this negotiation. A mechanism was needed, which would have its own dynamic to push ahead on these matters. Commissions were the obvious answer and we plumped for two commissions rather than one. But the detail, the terms of reference and the timeframes had to be negotiated.

It was Senator Mitchell's stated goal to produce a first draft of an agreement by the Friday of the first week. This meant that negotiations were also taking place between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister. Much of their efforts were concentrated on the role and extent of the all-Ireland bodies in the Strand Two negotiations. They also had to make any final decisions on how far either government would go in respect of constitutional change. On the Tuesday I had a 15-minute telephone conversation with Mr. Blair. I told him that if the governments pushed hard that it was possible to get a deal. That would mean Blair taking tough decisions on constitutional

matters. I told him that we were prepared to accept commissions on policing and criminal justice provided that the British were serious about creating a new policing service. The RUC had to go. The issue of an Assembly was also raised and in the context of transitional arrangements I told the British Prime Minister that we were prepared to look seriously at this, but it meant the equality and human rights agenda being faithfully implemented and the all Ireland bodies having real powers.

Blair felt that he had moved the unionists a long way and that they now accepted the need for north-south bodies. He seemed confident that they could be persuaded to sign on for an agreement. We both acknowledged that dealing with the weapons issue was going to be, as he put it, 'tortuously difficult.'

Ahern and Blair were scheduled to meet in London on Wednesday evening. Instead of travelling up to Castle Buildings on the Wednesday morning I left West Belfast before 6 am for an early morning meeting with the Taoiseach. As I drove to Dublin the scale of the problem to be resolved just around the policing issue, was brought home to me with the news on the car radio. The United Nations was publishing a report that day calling for an independent inquiry into the murder of lawyer Pat Finucane and a second inquiry into allegations of intimidation and harassment of defence lawyers by the RUC. The report had been produced by a special UN Rapporteur, who also cited the fact that of 2,540 complaints lodged against the RUC in 1986 only one officer had been found guilty of an abuse of authority.

My meeting with the Taoiseach lasted several hours. He was flying to London later in the day and this was a last opportunity to directly emphasise to him the goals, as Sinn Féin saw it, nationalists needed to achieve in this negotiation. I met him in his office in government buildings. We had tea and scones below a portrait of Patrick Pearse the 1916 leader. On another wall Eamonn de Valera looked down at us. Bertie was as affable as always. I think he has a genuinely relaxed view of life, which he has developed and incorporated, perhaps even subconsciously, into his political persona. He is a natural conciliator, not the perfect disposition for dealing with the Brits I would have thought. This is not to say that he is not tough. He would not be the leader of Fianna Fail without being tough. And shrewd as well. Especially coming as he did from the Haughey era with its corruption and sleaze. To survive all that and become Taoiseach was no mean achievement.

I told him that we believed the unionists were playing a tactical game designed to minimise the potential of the talks, and to force nationalists and republicans to accept less than we were entitled to. This process would not work on that basis. It had to be about righting wrongs – not entrenching them further. It couldn't be about producing a replay of the Treaty of 1921 but had to involve fundamental British constitutional change.

I also gave Mr Ahern a copy of a paper we were giving to Senator Mitchell that day. For the first time we were, within the wider talks, outlining the safeguards necessary for Sinn Fein support for an Assembly in the North. This was a major step for us and included the need for key decisions to be taken by sufficient consensus, that is, a majority on the unionist and nationalist sides had to support a particular position.

After a through discussion on all these matters and proposed changes in the Irish constitution I left for Belfast again and the Taoiseach departed later

that day for London. Before he left for his meeting with Blair he told the media that there were large disagreements "that could not be cloaked". Their meeting lasted three hours. We were subsequently briefed that the British had agreed that the North/South Ministerial Council would have a legislative basis; that the number of areas to be designated to the Council would be detailed in any agreement; and that a number of Implementation Bodies would be established. But there were still big problems to be sorted out, including the demand of unionists to have the North/South structures incorporated in a structure covering relations between Britain and Ireland. We wanted a stand-alone all-Ireland body. As a result, Ahern and Blair were to meet again the following day.

I went directly from Government Buildings in Dublin to Castle Buildings in Belfast. It was apparent that relations between Sinn Féin and the SDLP were now deteriorating once again. Some SDLP spokespersons maliciously briefed the media that Sinn Fein had taken up observer status in the negotiations. The PR battle over who was best representing nationalist interests was unsettling them and we were also finding difficulty in getting bilaterals. This was a serious problem, which could only work to the advantage of the British and the unionists. I raised it with the Irish government representatives and asked them to convene trilateral meetings.

The Irish government gave us, and presumably the SDLP, its proposed amendments to Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. These give constitutional expression to the Irish nation and its territory and we sought expert legal and constitutional advice on these amendments and on our required changes to the British constitution. The coming days also saw extensive papers produced and argued over on issues as diverse as a mechanism for policy appraisal and fair treatment; policing and the administration of justice; rights and equality; and the Irish language.

Human Rights was an issue that was exciting a lot of debate. The British record in the North was lamentable. The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR) had been in existence for some years but it had no teeth to tackle human rights abuses by the state. Now we were discussing the creation of two Human Rights Commissions. One in the North and one in the South. As well as a review role, and the public promotion of Human Rights, the Human Rights Commissions needed to have the powers to go to court or to help individuals to take court cases. I felt very strongly, in keeping with our all-Ireland view, that there had to be a mechanism to bring together the new Commissions. The British government also appeared to be accepting that the European Convention on Human Rights would be incorporated into law in the North.

A stranger walking the corridors of Castle Buildings would not know that these discussions were going on. The corridors were like a sanitised zone. All the work was being done behind closed doors. Every so often we would get reports back from the Irish government on their discussions with the British. Following their negotiations on the North/South issues Dublin was very up beat. But whether these discussions would conclude in time for Senator Mitchell to produce his first draft of an agreement by Friday was unclear.

We were told that the Irish government had been assured by the British that any new constitutional legislation would supersede anything written before it. Their legal experts were working on this. In a phone conversation

with the Taoiseach on the Thursday I expressed caution. I also raised with him again the issue of Northern representatives being able to attend the parliament in Dublin.

Meanwhile Martin McGuinness was talking to British Minister Paul Murphy. He was hopeful that the Senator would have a paper to put before the parties by 3pm the following day. But there were still serious issues to be resolved. Foremost among these was whether there should be an Executive or Cabinet or simply Committees to run any government.

Friday April 3rd dawned and my flu was no better. The dry heat of Castle Buildings was not helping. More importantly, we didn't yet know for certain when we would get a paper from Senator Mitchell. In Dublin Rita was talking to senior Irish government officials, in London Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair met twice that day, and in Castle Buildings we continued with focussed discussions with both governments and some of the smaller parties. Except of course for the Unionists who were still refusing to engage at any level with a Shinner.

We received two papers that day on the issue of prisoners and while the governments appeared to have accepted in principle that prisoners had to be released, there was no time frame. There were also intensive talks about the status and the resourcing of the Irish language. Irish had no official status in the North and the burgeoning nursery and primary schools sector was entirely dependent on voluntary donations raised by parents and supporters. The North's Department of Education was notoriously biased in its attitude to requests for money for the Irish medium sector. We were determined to change this and for months had been putting pressure on the British government to sign up to the European Charter for Regional and Minority languages.

That day we also received an agreed text from the two governments for a section in the agreement covering the decommissioning issue. The terms were not acceptable. No party could have delivered on them. We were determined to do our best to take the gun out of Irish politics but this needed a collective effort. It was back to the template which had emerged from the discussions all those years ago with the Sagart and later with John Hume. We had to provide an alternative so that those with guns could be persuaded that they were no longer needed. All the parties and the two governments needed to commit to that while at the same time doing our best to bring about disarmament or as some put it, a demilitarisation of society. We told the governments this. In our view all the participants should commit to those objectives and to working to achieve them.

Later that day in an effort to maximise the ability of the Irish side to make gains and re-engage in a more positive atmosphere with the SDLP, I suggested to the Irish government that the three of us meet. After some toing and froing - we were told the SDLP were a bit tetchy - we eventually got together for over an hour and ranged across all of the issues, including the objectives, timeframes, terms of reference and other matters relating to the Commissions now being considered for policing and criminal justice. The details of an Assembly and the safeguards required for nationalist approval were also discussed, as well as a Code of Practice for Ministers.

At around 6.30pm Senator Mitchell received a call from the two Prime Ministers closeted in Downing Street. They hadn't finished their work on the

Strand Two paper and they asked the Senator to go ahead and produce his paper on all of the other matters, leaving Strand Two to the side for the moment. The Senator was reluctant to do this, primarily because his schedule called for him to deliver a complete synthesis paper at this point.

A series of meetings were held with government officials and the parties and the consensus position was to wait until the Strand Two paper would be included. The delay in producing this first paper, and the speculation of problems between Ahern and Blair, excited the media and led to a general pessimism about the likely outcome. The Senator was told by the two governments that he would have his Strand Two paper on the Sunday.

On Sunday a team of us went back to Dublin to see the Taoiseach and a meeting with him and his officials helped put some meat on the bones of what was emerging. It was a good-natured meeting, uplifted by the Irish government's sense that Tony Blair had agreed to a substantial Strand Two document. And that he was committed to persuading David Trimble to come on board.

I asked how the governments were going to define consent for Irish unity. There was no doubt – no equivocation – 'a majority is always 50% plus one' I was told. We had already raised objections to the possibility that any Commissions would be titled 'Royal' Commissions and at this meeting we were assured that this would not be the case. Our paper on the Irish Language came in for some unexpected praise with one official remarking that the SDLP had been astounded when they saw it. 'That's why they don't negotiate for us' one of our team said.

Flags and Emblems, Equality and of course North-South arrangements were all discussed. I left government buildings for the North, reassured that we were making progress. But I was mindful that the unionists and the British system were going to do their best to undermine the obvious potential for agreement that now existed.

Later that evening officials from the two governments finally brought the long-awaited Strand Two paper to George Mitchell. He said later that as he read it he knew that David Trimble would not accept it. It was, he felt, too specific. For unionists this translated into cross-border bodies having too much independence and too much power. A series of Annexes (or appendices) listing the possible areas of co-operation between the North and South was still being worked on by the governments. They weren't ready until nearly midnight the following Monday evening.

It is difficult to translate the complexity and interwoven nature of this phase of the negotiations. For example, while some of us were trying, as we saw it, to keep Dublin right Pat Doherty and Bairbre de Brún were having yet another run at British officials on the prisoners issue. That engagement ended in a row.

The Brits 'hoped' that a body not a commission would review each prisoner's case so that most prisoners would be out in three years but some would still be expected to do much longer than that. Prisoners serving less than 5 years would not be eligible at all. When Pat remarked that this was a mechanism to keep people in prison not to get them out the officials said they were restricted in what they could do especially with lifers.

Pat reminded them of the case of Lee Clegg, the British soldier released within three years of a life sentence for murder. When Bairbre de

Brún how many prisoners were serving less than 5 years, one official remarked 'We don't think there were many terrorist prisoners who fell into that category' to which Bairbre retorted, 'and we didn't know we had any terrorist prisoners'. And the curtain fell on that meeting.

Generally speaking meetings with officials yielded little progress particularly with NIO people. The more senior officials could be expected to absorb positive or progressive ideas but not surprisingly they did not move unless politically directed to do so. Obviously that direction had to come from their political bosses. But these bosses were subject to the demands of their own system, their own politics and the fierce lobbying of the unionists and the other parties. It was no secret that Sinn Fein was the party which wanted the most advanced positions from the governments. For their part both governments were quite prepared to get the best deal possible with the other parties and then to try and cajole, coax or shoehorn us into this. They, that is both Dublin and London, all the time watched where the unionists were on every issue. We could understand this. An agreement if it was to be made at all, never mind delivered on, needed the unionists. The problem was the unionists knew this also. They appeared to believe that their safest position was not to budge.

Another huge problem was that the six county state was entirely unionist in its ethos, agencies and symbols. This not only meant that there had to be a huge amount of change at every level to bring about a level playing field. It also meant that no one within the state had any notion of the depth of republican or nationalist alienation or the determination on our part to change all this. So they put a lot of wasted effort into trying to wear us down, either as a negotiating tactic or because they just did not know where we were coming from. This was one of the products of decades of refusing to countenance genuine grievances or to dialogue with us, or people like us. They just didn't know, never mind accept our point of view. This struck me again and again at different meetings. The ignorance of the system about so many issues was palpable. There was no democratic culture and little experience of accountability mechanisms or transparency in what passed for government in this part of Ireland. And there was a deep resentment that we were threatening this not least because there was little real sense of why we would want to do this, except of course because we were subversives, or as it was suggested once, because we were uppity fenians. That attitude left little room for pragmatism.

At Blair's level and with one or two of his senior advisers there seemed at least to be a sense of why there had to be change and of what motivated us to struggle for this. This did not mean that they were up for this. They had their own constraints, including the desire on their part to uphold the union, to keep their own system on board and to keep the unionists engaged. I was also very conscious that we lacked sufficient political strength to get everything we wanted at this stage. But we negotiated as if we were as strong as Mr Blair.

Notwithstanding any of this the negotiations went through well-worn processes. For example, after the run by Pat and Bairbre on the issue of political prisoners we sought a meeting with the Irish government and the British Secretary of State. We told them their position was totally unacceptable. If not resolved it could jeopardise the process. I later spoke to

Tony Blair twice on the phone and by 10.30 that night we had a paper on prisoners that accepted the need for an accelerated programme for release. But there was no timetable. This was obviously an issue which we would have to return to at another point. And so in this way all the issues were processed.

Despite the intensity of the engagements the atmosphere in Castle Buildings remained impassive and suffocating. As a matter of course unless we were actually in discussion we kept the doors to our rooms open. John Hume would wander in for a chat from time to time. Mo Mowlam was another regular visitor. She would amble in, sit down and put her feet up on a chair. She wore a wig because of hair loss following medical treatment for a brain tumour. Occasionally she pulled the wig off and put it on the table. Then she would launch into conversation with whoever was in the room. I liked her style. Sometimes she was deliberately provocative. Other times she was funny. At times I got the impression that she was just bored and wanted a bit of craic.

On one occasion as she got up to leave Mowlam spotted an Easter Lily lying on the table. The Lily, made of paper, is a small green, white and orange emblem, which is worn at Easter time in memory of Ireland's patriot dead. Mowlam lifted the Lily off the table and remarking that it looked nice she asked what it was. When she was told she pinned it to her blouse and left. Martin McGuinness returned just then and when he was told that Mo was away off wearing an Easter Lily he ran after her. He caught her just as she was heading for the unionist offices and gently persuaded her to remove the Lily. Some of our group thought Martin should have let Mo go ahead.

"Have a heart" he said, "She is in enough trouble without that."

Later when Blair came into the talks Mowlam was sidelined completely. Whatever role she may have played on her own side she was not at any of the meetings I attended with the Prime Minister. This was very strictly a Downing Street operation. There was a small group of officials around Mr Blair, led by his chief of staff Jonathon Powell and they dealt with everything. Maybe Mowlam attended to the smaller parties. I don't know if she resented her exclusion. Later as I got to know her better she would give off about the style of the Downing Street operation but during the Castle Building talks she appeared to accept that her role was secondary, very secondary to Downing Street.

Another caller to our office was Pdraig Wilson, the OC of the republican prisoners in Long Kesh. He did not call in person of course but Gerry Kelly rang the prison one day, as well as Portlaoise in the south and asked for access to the respective prison OCs. We needed specific information on life-sentenced prisoners – how many, how long had they been in and so on. The OCs asked for our telephone number in the talks building and that was the start of it. From then on we received two or three or four phone calls each day, and sometimes in the middle of the night as the talks went on round the clock. By the end of the week the prisoners knew more about what was going on in the negotiations than most of the people who were in the building.

By the middle of the second week the walls in our administration office were covered with messages of support from outside. Local community groups and party structures were faxing in, posting or delivering messages of solidarity. Something of a competition developed between Belfast and Derry

comrades in our offices led respectively by Sue Ramsay and Brid Curran, over which area sent in the most messages. Belfast won.

As we waited on Senator Mitchell's paper I received a letter from Mo Mowlam setting out the British government's response to our demands for constitutional change covering the Act of Union of 1801, the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and nine other separate acts of the British parliament.

The British Secretary of State explained that the new constitutional legislation contained in the agreement would repeal the Government of Ireland Act. It would reflect the principle of consent, 'that if there were majority consent for a United Ireland that wish should be given effect.' She explained that under British constitutional law it is a convention that the new legislation replaces the old. However, because of the many concerns we had raised on this the British now planned to put this issue beyond doubt by stating expressly that it was to have effect notwithstanding any other previous enactment.

I considered this to be a little victory. When I had first raised it with Dublin some considerable time before in an effort to get them to tackle the Brits on the issue they resisted my entreaties. Then I raised it with Blair myself the first time we met and at every subsequent meeting. I knew he wouldn't dump the Act of Union at this time though we pressed that also, but it was crucial to get new constitutional arrangements which moved in that direction. In fairness to Ahern, following my failure to get his closest adviser on board when I asked him to tackle Blair on the Government of Ireland Act and explained why he readily agreed.

Sinn Fein had long argued that the unionist veto had to end and that consent had to apply both ways, that is not just unionist consent but nationalist and republican consent as well. Consequently any new agreement had to be built on a working partnership of equality. Tackling the unionist veto constitutionally also had other longer-term consequences. At its heart it was about sovereignty, and the British Acts we were challenging gave expression to that sovereignty. As Tony Benn explained to me in a paper, which he sent during the talks, absolute British sovereignty can be regarded as having been absorbed and consolidated in the Act of Union of 1800, which united Scotland, Ireland and England and Wales as one kingdom. It remained absolute in 1920, when Ireland was partitioned, even though the majority of Irish people had voted for independence. Now, according to Tony, absolute sovereignty was being vested instead in the people of the north 'to be quantified or assessed by a referendum requiring a simple majority.'

As one of our team observed, what other state in the world has written into its legislation, and hopefully as part of an international treaty which we wanted to underpin the agreement, the right of a part of that state to secede if a majority within a specific geographical area wished to? States fought wars over secession. This was an important development, which highlighted the fact that everyone, including the British Government, saw the north as different from other parts of the United Kingdom. We were the semi-detached part, the optional bit.

Just before midnight on Monday April 6th the governments delivered the Strand 2 paper including three annexes. These listed the areas of implementation in which the North South Ministerial Council would take

decisions on an all-island basis. It also listed areas where the council should try to reach common agreements on policy.

Senator Mitchell called us all into the conference room where we were given a 65 page documents with the words 'draft paper for discussions' at the top of each page. At this wee small hours of the morning meeting the Senator appealed to the parties not to leak the paper. He underpinned this by telling us all that subtle changes in each text would allow the Chairs to identify which party leaked the paper, if any appeared in the press. Whatever the truth of this the document did not leak.

I pulled all of our team together to parse the Senator's document. I advised everyone to expect to be here round the clock until an agreement was reached or the process collapsed.

The next morning the unionists went into overdrive. Trimble's Deputy leader John Taylor told the media that he wouldn't touch the paper with a 40-foot barge pole. Trimble spoke to the Irish government, the British government, on three occasions to Tony Blair who was in Downing Street, to the White House and Senator Mitchell. He threatened to walk if they did not renegotiate the Strand 2 document.

Senator Mitchell urged the Irish government to renegotiate. By this time Trimble had released the text of a series of points he had put to Blair two hours earlier. He had warned the British Prime Minister that the UUP couldn't recommend the Mitchell paper. He was prepared to contemplate alternative proposals but wanted to know first if the two governments were prepared to do likewise. At an acrimonious meeting mid afternoon involving the Irish government and a unionist delegation led by Jeffrey Donaldson the unionists said they were opposed to the establishment of the North South Ministerial Council and its implementation bodies by legislation in Westminster and the Dáil. They wanted the bodies established by the Assembly. They also argued for 'working bodies' as opposed to 'implementation bodies'; and a reduction in the number of areas of co-operation contained in the annexes. Donaldson also opposed the terms of reference for the Policing Commission, and not unexpectedly decommissioning was a problem.

The Taoiseach's mother had died the previous morning. He was in Dublin to attend a church service. I spoke to him by phone just before 4 pm. At that point he seemed prepared to hold fast against Trimble's efforts. But with the unionists talking about alternative proposals I wondered whether there was any point in us working on amendments to Mitchell's paper? The Taoiseach's view was that if these amendments were more than presentational it would mean going back to the start again. He assured me that the Irish government had agreed positions with the British government and intended sticking to them.

Irish officials later recalled that Ahern was concerned that the Irish government should not be blamed if the Unionists walked away and the talks collapsed. Some had urged him to hold firm, others wanted him to agree to renegotiate Strand 2.

Later that evening Tony Blair arrived at Hillsborough Castle just outside Belfast. He was joined there a short time later by David Trimble.

In our offices at Castle Buildings we were working away on a response to Mitchell's draft paper, as well as continuing to network with the government ministers and officials based there. Other colleagues, including Joe Cahill,

Martin Ferris and Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin had joined us. Our little suite of offices was becoming seriously over crowded. The camp bed was in constant use and occasionally one of our wordsmiths, working away on a laptop, would have to turn or prod a loudly snoring colleague.

The final phase of negotiations began early on the Wednesday morning. Bertie Ahern had flown up for a breakfast meeting with Tony Blair. He travelled then to Stormont House, a short distance from Castle Buildings, where Martin, Richard and I met him and a sizeable party of officials. We were told that there was no movement on policing or prisoners and that the unionists had put forward a list of eleven or more items, including issues relating to Strand Two. The Taoiseach wasn't for the Senator producing a second draft. He was prepared to put everything on the table and go through all of this one item at a time.

I told him that the Brits could be moved on prisoners and policing. It might be at the last minute but we didn't intend to move unless they did. We also made it clear that any dilution in Strand Two would be disastrous. We had seventy-six separate observations, including amendments to Senator Mitchell's paper and we briefed the Taoiseach on these before we met Tony Blair. He was in Stormont House as well and I gave him a copy of a document we had prepared covering our main issues of concern and talked him through it. In between meetings we had to hang about Stormont House. I made my way into the back of the fine old building and wandered about for a while in the garden. I was joined by a gang of sleek and well-groomed cats. They seemed to be living in Stormont House. The place was full of surprises.

When Martin, Richard and I arrived back into our offices in Castle Buildings cats were also a big issue. Aidan's cat had become a mammy and when Gerry Kelly called early that morning, about 6 am, to pick up Aidan, one newly born kitten was stranded in a small gap behind the fireplace. The rest were in the hot press with their mother. Gerry arrived as Aidan was trying to rescue the kitten. They had to leave it and head for Castle Buildings leaving Aidan's partner, Teresa, to sort out the problem. There was a loud cheer in the admin office when the word came through that afternoon that Teresa had got some builders to remove the fireplace. The kitten had been reunited with its mother and both were doing fine. A notice to this effect went up on the notice board. I was beginning to get concerned that our group were stir crazy. When other parties enquired about the kitten I knew we had all been together too long.

Senator Mitchell, Martin and I met to discuss his draft paper. We had a lengthy discussion. He was genuinely frustrated by the unionists' refusal to talk to us. He was also perplexed at the gap between their position and ours and somewhat daunted by the paper we had given him. Martin once again outlined how far we had moved even to contemplate some of the concepts involved. For example, the notion of an Assembly. I don't know if the Senator thought we had put a lot of negotiating fat into our position. That is that we had put in elements that we would be prepared to cut out later in return for more important bits. He told us he had a sense, if no one walked out before hand, that there would be that kind of a trade off in order to get agreement. He thought the big challenges were for the unionists. If we had the persistence we would eventually get to where we wanted to go. The unionists were in a mess, rejecting everything out of hand, because they were afraid to give

anything. We, he felt, on the other hand saw the need to do business with the unionists.

At one point I told him that his paper was okay if presented in a different context. But we were dealing with a conflict resolution process. There was a need to get an alternative way, a process to bring about justice and people's entitlements. His job had to be about righting wrongs.

He looked at me directly and said quietly. 'My job is about facilitating agreement. The agreement itself is up to the two governments and the parties involved. But you are right. If my job was about righting wrongs then I would have provided a different paper.'

I met with the Taoiseach again later that day. He had travelled down to Dublin for his mother's funeral and returned. Along with the British Prime Minister he held a meeting with the Ulster Unionists. We were told that it was his intention to look at the issues raised by David Trimble. Blair put it to the Unionists that if the Taoiseach was prepared to do this they needed to come to other aspects of this negotiation more positively than they had done so far. In particular this should mean the UUP talking to the SDLP about the Assembly and the issues related to it. The game was clearly on. The two governments needed closure on Strand One matters, and that meant getting the unionists to move on key areas of disagreement there. The Unionists wanted something on Strand Two matters. The Taoiseach and I talked about this at some length. I told him I appreciated that in the negotiations he needed to play Sinn Fein demands off against the demands of unionists.

Thursday April 9th was supposed to be our last day. George Mitchell's schedule called for a deal to be concluded by midnight. But as the meetings began it soon became clear that the unionists were as yet not prepared to agree on an Executive or Cabinet structure or to the safeguards nationalists were demanding. Battle had also been joined over Strand Two. Discussions around the Strand Two paper continued all day and drafts were going back and forth between the governments and the main parties, sometimes only thirty minutes apart. By now we had abandoned even the thought of going to the canteen for our food. Sue Ramsey and Siobhan had developed a relationship with the staff there. Sue and others helped clean up and wash dishes. Consequently, every so often they would arrive with trays of food and copious amounts of coffee.

In the early hours of the following morning the unionists got some of what they wanted on Strand Two. The list of areas of possible co-operation was reduced, but the twelve that remained covered key areas like tourism, relevant EU programmes, Urban and Rural development, Strategic Transport Planning and aspects of agriculture, education, health and other matters. And we succeeded in ensuring that the North/South Ministerial Council would be established through legislation in Westminster and the Dáil, with Executive powers, and participation in the Council as an essential responsibility of relevant ministers in any new administration.

We also succeeded in ensuring that the Assembly, the North/South Ministerial Council and the British/Irish Council, which was being proposed, would all come into effect at the same time in order to reduce any possibility that unionists might succeed in frustrating the birth of any one of the institutions. All of these structures would be inter-locked and inter-dependent

to minimise the possibility that the unionists might try to collapse those aspects they didn't like and keep those bits they did.

Progress on Strand Two appeared to free the Unionists up on their discussions on an Assembly. By 3am they had agreed to the establishment of an Executive with many of the safeguards we and the SDLP had argued for. John Hume kept us posted on their discussions with the UUP and next-door in the SDLP offices, prematurely we thought, there were sounds of celebration. Nothing was agreed until everything was agreed and there was still some way to go. Bits of the jigsaw were being put together but the unionists still had to sign off on the complete board. So had we. The issue of prisoners, as well as the equality agenda, demilitarisation and decommissioning were still unresolved. This meant more meetings right through the night between us, that is mostly Martin and myself, the Taoiseach and the PM.

The prisoners issue was complicated by a number of factors including outstanding warrants against individuals, the case of people facing extradition, prisoners transferred from Britain, and cases which were known as the '40-year-men', that is prisoners in the south serving a minimum 40-year term. And then there was the case of people who were then facing trial and who might be convicted of the killing of Garda Gerry McCabe. Most of these issues we were told could be resolved but we needed more than that. Like all other aspects of the agreement these matters needed to be tied down.

Gerry Kelly and several others held a meeting with the British Secretary of State Mo Mowlam and several officials from the prisons department of the NIO. We had a sense that the Brits would probably settle for three years for the release of prisoners. We wanted to move them to a year but our fallback position was two years. Up to this point we had refused to give any timeframe. So had they. They now presented our representatives with a new paper but refused to allow them to leave the room with it. Gerry Kelly told them that that wasn't acceptable. If we were being given a new position our full negotiating team had to know what it was. Mowlam looked to the officials. The officials were adamant. Gerry brusquely told them that that was not the way to do business and left. A few minutes later, as he was relaying an account of all of this to us in our room a breathless Mo Mowlam arrived at the door with a copy of the document. She asked Gerry when we wanted the prisoners out. He said, immediately. She said that wasn't possible. Gerry then remarked that it needed to be within a year. Mowlam went off to reflect on that.

A few hours later, around 1 a.m. President Clinton's first call came through. Blair had been talking to him so he knew that we were stuck on the prisoners issue. I explained to the President that enormous progress had been made so far but that bringing people on board required early releases. This was very important to bolster republican confidence that this agreement was real and was bringing change. I asked the President to use his influence to make the British realise the importance of this. Mr. Clinton said that Blair needed us to endorse the agreement. He explained that the Prime Minister's worst nightmare was Sinn Féin not accepting the agreement. His worry was that we wouldn't oppose but we wouldn't endorse. He had told Blair that there had never been a time when I hadn't been straight with him. He felt that we could figure out a

way to resolve the prisoners issue. Blair had a political problem. We had a political necessity. We ended the call by agreeing to stay in touch.

Blair was being advised by those around him that the release of prisoners was one issue that he was very vulnerable on within British public opinion. One aide warned him that it could be presented as him being soft on terrorism. They were obviously discussing the issue back and forth. In a tight session with Blair and Ahern the PM made an offer that covered all prisoners belonging to organisations on cessation, without exception, and which would see all prisoners out in three years. I told him we needed to get it done within a year. We left it at that.

We still believed it would be possible to persuade Blair to reduce the release dates further and I asked Gerry Kelly to meet with the smaller loyalist parties the UDP and the PUP to see if they would come on board in a joint effort to get the prisoners out earlier. Gerry went down to their party rooms. He rapped on the door and put his head in. The large crowd of men sitting around on chairs and tables were surprised to see him. Gary McMichael and David Ervine came out into the corridor. Gerry explained the current situation on the prisoners issue and urged them to join us in lobbying the two governments. With both of us pressing on this issue we were confident we could reduce the timeframe further. McMichael and Ervine said they would think about it and get back to him. A short time later Ervine told Gerry that they had already agreed with David Trimble a three-year period for the prisoners to be released. He said that they didn't want to upset Trimble at such a delicate point in the process.

By now, like everyone else, we were all dead tired. Surrounded by sleeping comrades Martin, me, Gerry Kelly and a few others discussed all this. I decided to have another go at Blair.

By now I was padding about the place in my socks. I had discarded my shoes hours before for comforts sake. When I went in to see Blair he and Bertie were sitting quietly talking together. Blair told me that Bertie was concerned, if we got agreement, about winning any future referendum on the Irish constitutional matters. Bertie himself said that Article 2 and 3 could be a difficult issue for Fianna Fáil. I agreed with him. I asked Blair where he was on the prisoner releases. I put it to him if we came on board with an agreement that there should be prisoners released within a year. After a brief but intense discussion he said he would do it in two years. I pressed again for one year. He said he would publicly commit for two years. If it was possible to do it before that he would try and expedite matters. If we campaigned for a change in the Irish constitution, he said he would definitely try to do it within a year. I asked if he would publicly commit to that. He said that he was taking a big step and upsetting his own system publicly committing to two years. He could go not further. I told him the question of what Sinn Féin would do in any future referendum would be for our Ard Fheis to decide. Of course if there was an agreement we could accept we would promote it wholeheartedly. I made my sock soled way back to our offices.

Later I had to talk to the Taoiseach. Again the issue was prisoners. This time it was the prisoners on remand and facing charges arising from the killing of Garda Jerry McCabe. Pat Doherty had conducted our engagement with the Irish government on a number of issues in its jurisdiction. When he asked for assurance that these prisoners, if sentenced, be included in the

early release scheme he was advised that it would be better if one of us saw the Taoiseach. That someone was me. I saw the Taoiseach on his own. I explained how important it was that we had clarity on this issue. It would only arise if the prisoners involved were sentenced. I told him I was raising the issue because I realised that that this might be an unpopular decision for him and that I was sure the Garda Representative Association would use all its influence to prevent the men being released. I understood exactly how they felt, and more importantly how Garda McCabe's wife and family would feel but the reality was these prisoners, by virtue of their involvement with the IRA would be qualifying prisoners for the release scheme we were negotiating. It would be impossible, I told him, to keep the IRA on board if a few prisoners were to be excluded from any agreement. He told me he understood this. Part of the problem he claimed was that according to the reports he had received, some of these men had not been fully under IRA control but he could see that the organisation would not abandon them. If we got an agreement the Taoiseach told me, I would have nothing to worry about on that score. Fair enough I told him and we shook hands on it.

At the same time as this negotiation on prisoners was taking place, another negotiation; potentially more perilous to the outcome of the whole process was going on. The unionists were trying to secure a procedural linkage within the agreement between actual decommissioning and holding office in an executive. We had consistently warned the governments that any preconditions on our participation in an executive would be a serious mistake and undermine all of our efforts. Martin and I had three meetings with Blair and Ahern in the wee hours of Friday morning. They both knew that we weren't negotiating for the IRA and that there was no possibility of us signing up to something we couldn't deliver.

It was obvious that the British had listened to us when we challenged the first draft on the decommissioning issue. They had opted for a good conflict resolution answer to this vexed question. This called on all parties to use their influence to achieve decommissioning in the context of the implementation of the overall agreement. I have to say after our initial discussions we did not have to do any heavy lifting to get the British government to adopt this position. Our effort was to prevent them from moving from it at the behest of the unionists.

Around 2.30 a.m. President Clinton had a long call with Senator Mitchell who briefed him on where he thought the talks were and how close a deal was. About 5 a.m. President Clinton rang me again. It was a call I almost didn't get. Sue Ramsay was tired. The phone rang and a voice said, 'This is the White House. I have a call for Mr. Adams from the President.' Sue almost dismissed the call as the work of another republican having a joke at her expense. Fortunately, she quickly realised it was the real thing and passed it to me. I gave the President an update of where the negotiations were. I asked him to keep an eye to the issues which were of concern to us. He told me that he would do everything he could to work through the remaining issues. He also said that he felt we were making the best we could of the negotiations.

We still needed some aspects of the agreement to be sorted out as well as other issues like northern representation in southern institutions. We were assured by the Taoiseach and the British Prime

Minister that these could be addressed in the course of further meetings between us after Easter. We had also received a detailed paper from Dublin dealing with the concerns we had listed on receipt of Senator Mitchell's paper. The Senator and the two governments knew that our negotiating team was not mandated to close on a draft agreement. That decision had to be taken by the party. But we had to make up our minds on whether we had enough to justify going to the party with the positions that were now in place. It was a difficult call to make. There was clarity and a definitive quality to some aspects of the agreement. Other aspects were more aspirational. Some were ambiguous. Others were kicked back into touch to be dealt with by commissions or other mechanisms. We had a commitment from the British government and from the Taoiseach to meet us after Easter on all these matters. We also had an Ard Fheis in ten days time.

By now it was past dawn. The canteen was bare. There was no breakfast. The catering staff had also been working to Senator Mitchell's schedule and were not expecting us still to be here on Friday morning. But a loaf of bread had been put aside for the Sinn Féin dishwashers. When one of the other delegations saw republicans with bread there was a row! Later when the negotiations were over I received a very nice letter from the management thanking our people for all their help during that time.

I phoned President Clinton. The situation room in Washington put me through to him. It was only when he came on the phone that I realised the time. It was 4.45 a.m. in Washington. He had obviously been wakened from his sleep. He was in bed and when I apologised for this he told me not to worry. I told him that I thought we had the basis of an agreement but a lot depended on how the British delivered on its commitments. I pointed out some of the weaknesses in the Agreement in terms of delivery, timeframes and mechanisms. I told the US President that if we were to see this agreement delivered then he had to ensure that the British didn't pull out of their commitments. I also pointed up the hard reality that the unionists had yet to engage with us. I told him my fear was that once the negotiations were over the pressure would be off the Brits and the UUP. Regardless of Tony Blair's intentions his focus would be elsewhere and the unionists and the securocrats and the Brits' permanent government would come into the ascendancy again.

Bill Clinton told me he understood this. He said he was prepared to do all he could to guarantee any agreement.

Martin and I went up to see Senator Mitchell. His colleagues were now busy pulling together all the bits and pieces of paper that were to make up the agreement. We told him we were prepared to go to our party with a draft agreement but only if there were no further changes. We told the two governments the same thing.

David Trimble, who had left in the early hours of the morning, returned to learn that a final copy of the agreement would be ready for 11am.

All the parties were told that a plenary was scheduled for noon. Each party was to receive four copies of the agreement. That wasn't nearly enough for the large number of people we had in the building. Apart from our usual team we had been joined by Alex Maskey, Mick Murphy, Jim Gibney and

Dawn Doyle. Siobhan and Sue went up to the photocopier room close to the Senator's office. They began to slowly photocopy old documents, blank sheets of paper, anything in fact that kept them in possession of the copier. Several delegates from other parties, who obviously had the same idea, arrived too late and stood frustrated for a short time, perhaps hoping that Siobhan and Sue might give up. They didn't know Siobhan and Sue. When the document was delivered our intrepid duo still had control of the photocopier and our full delegation quickly received copies to examine.

As Siobhan and Sue were holding the copier against all comers I had several quiet conversations with Senator Mitchell who by this stage was exhibiting all the classic signs of what republicans call 'gate fever.' For those thousands who were held in Long Kesh prison in the 70's and 80's, with its wire fences and gates, the closer one got to release the greater the personal stress. Internees who never knew when they might be released would slag each other off about 'watching the gate.' Sentenced prisoners who knew their release dates would also become the butt of jokes from others as their date for walking through the gates to freedom drew closer. 'Gate fever' is a human condition, and Senator Mitchell now had it – big. He had promised his wife Heather to be home to spend Easter with her and newly born baby Andrew.

In the UUP offices a much-enlarged Unionist delegation was now going through the agreement clause-by-clause, line-by-line. It wasn't going down well. It was also, probably for the first time, beginning to dawn on some of them that they had before them a document that would see them in a power-sharing Executive with Sinn Féin Ministers.

The 12 o'clock plenary didn't happen. Instead shortly after lunch a unionist delegation, led by Trimble and Donaldson, went up to see Tony Blair. They set out their concerns to him. Blair told them that he would not change the agreement. But it transpired later that he provided Trimble with a side letter outlining his attitude to two of the issues the unionists had raised. Although it had no status the letter clearly breached the terms of the agreement. Blair wrote that it was his view that the effect of the decommissioning section of the agreement meant that the process of decommissioning should begin straight away. Trimble was looking for a mechanism to exclude Sinn Féin Ministers from the Executive. While refusing to concede this Blair said that he would keep it under review. This was no part of the agreement. It ran in the face of all our discussions.

For some in Trimble's party this letter was not enough. Some wanted to walk away. Others obviously knew that this would project the UUP internationally as wreckers of the hopes for peace. The pressure on David Trimble must have been enormous. Blair was phoning down every few minutes wanting to know what the UUP had decided. The Irish government and the other parties were also demanding to know what was going on. President Clinton phoned Trimble.

All this time we, like everyone else, were sitting around waiting to learn the outcome of the unionists' deliberations. Periodically John Hume would drift in or some of us would wander into the Irish government's rooms to get an update. The minutes and the hours slipped slowly past. We were unwashed, unslept, unfed. There was also by now a fairly big crowd of us, slumped together in our little office half awake, half asleep. Someone discovered the

bar was open. Siobhan went off for supplies of coke, bottled water and orange juice.

'The only bar in Ireland open for drink on Good Friday, and we're not in it,' Ted growled.

'Mother Ireland get off my back,' someone retorted.

By mid afternoon there was a sense of stupor about the talks building. I spoke to Senator Mitchell. 'The problem for David Trimble is that he didn't think you were serious,' the Senator told me. 'He expected Sinn Féin to blink first. He expected you to walk out. You haven't. And he is running out of time.'

Not long after four o'clock I called our core group together. By now Jeffrey Donaldson, the leading UUP member, and several others – nicknamed the 'baby barristers' because of their youth and professional standing – had stormed out of the meeting and the building.

Apart from our people who were doing the press work, and Mitchell McLaughlin was carrying a lot of this for us, – the media scrum was now huge – most of the group, like almost everyone else was doing nothing. We had taken the negotiations as far as our political strength and our ability could take them. It might yet all come to nothing if the UUP did not come on board. As we contemplated the options I gloomily reminded myself that even if Trimble did signal assent he had not even uttered one word to us.

I tell a lie. He actually had said two words to me. We met in the toilet one day. There was no one else there.

'We can't keep meeting like this,' I said to him in an effort to break the ice.

'Grow up,' he said.

I suggested to our group that we should press the Irish government to bring matters to a head. When I joined the senior officials they were as tired as everyone else. They told me the Taoiseach and Blair were together.

'Tell them we are going home soon if things don't shape up,' I said.

One of them was alarmed.

'Ask them to call the plenary. Otherwise the unionists will dither for ever.' I suggested to him. 'They have kept everyone waiting....'

'Someone needs to put testicles on David Trimble,' another official agreed. He encouraged his colleagues to go to Ahern and Blair. The most senior person agreed to go. When he left I waited. Minutes later the messenger returned.

'Message delivered,' he told us.

'Good' he was told by his colleagues. 'Someone had to do it.'

Shortly afterwards we were told that a plenary was set for five. Apparently David Trimble had phoned the Senator at 4.45pm to tell him the UUP was ready to sign up.

I went up to see the Senator with Martin and we thanked him and Martha Pope who had been a consistent and positive influence through all the deliberations. We also thanked all of the staffers. Siobhan and Sue had managed to get a small present for the senator. Actually it wasn't for him. It was a small Aran sweater and an Easter egg for the Senator's son Andrew.

When we returned to our office I pulled our people together. I congratulated them all. As I looked around at the tired, drawn faces I couldn't help but think of all the hard times we had been through together over the years. In prison and out of it. Some of our group had been combatants. Some

had injuries. We had all lost loved ones. A lot of people depended on us in these negotiations. I felt very proud to be part of our effort. Everyone had done their best, including the security ssection and the drivers, the comrades who brought us back and forth every day and hung about for hours on end waiting for us.

Our team had matched the larger, more experienced negotiating teams of our opponents. We had tried to be mindful of the concerns of the unionists while defending our own position. The work begun with the Sagart many years before had culminated in an agreement. Would it provide an alternative way forward to peace with justice? We were too close to the process to make that judgement.

By the time we got to the conference room it was packed. Additional members of all the parties stood together behind their delegations. There was an air of quiet excitement. Television cameras were allowed in and the plenary was broadcast live. Senator Mitchell invited each of the parties to say whether they supported the Agreement. When it was my turn I explained that we would have to bring it back to our party. But I said that our delegation would be urging support for the agreement and that Sinn Féin would democratically debate its content. I said that while everyone had difficulties with the document we hoped it signified a new beginning.

I was flanked by Martin McGuinness, Lucilita and others from our leadership. Joe Cahill was standing behind me. He was 77 years old and had spent his life fighting the British presence. Since the 1970s he had been a key member of our party leadership, helping to develop and promote our peace strategy.

When it came to David Trimble's turn he seemed to hesitate for a split second when Senator Mitchell invited him to speak. He reddened slightly as he used a pencil to stab the microphone button on the table before him.

'Yes,' he said.

There were smiles all round. Even some of the unionists were smiling. When all the leaders had said their piece the Senator closed the proceedings and there was sustained applause. For a few minutes everyone milled around shaking hands. Some people were hugging each other. It took a long time to get from the conference room to the front porch. For a while we were all packed together in the entrance hall waiting to go outside to do the obligatory press conference. Tiredness had really kicked in by this time. I felt slightly deflated by the size of the task that lay before us. George Mitchell had observed that making the Agreement work would test us all as much as getting the Agreement. Even now the unionists would still not talk to any of the Shinnners, let alone shake hands.

The next few hours were spent on a conveyor belt of media interviews. By the time we had finished it was dark. At one point I slipped into the trees for a leak. A prominent Ulster Unionist Dermott Nesbitt was there before me. I stood shoulder to shoulder with him as we watered the shrubs. He studiously ignored me as the steam rose round our ankles.

'This is the pee process,' I slagged him. He had the grace to smile as he zipped up and left me on my own.

In my remarks to the media I said that while there was much in the agreement, much more still had to be done. The equality agenda was paramount. The agreement had to be a vehicle to bring about parity of

esteem, equality of treatment and equality of opportunity for all citizens in all aspects of society. It was now time to draw breath, to reflect and to face the future in hope. Sinn Féin's task was to assess all that had been agreed and to determine, in consultation with our party and supporters, whether the Agreement had the potential to really transform society. Our view was that it was transitional. We had said this from the beginning of the process. We were seeking fundamental, political and constitutional change. We knew from the parameters of the talks laid down by the two governments that Irish unity would not come out of this phase of the negotiations, but we set ourselves the task of weakening the British link while defending Irish national rights.

It was certainly my view that we had dealt the union a severe blow. The inclusion of a clause limiting the life of the union to the will of a majority in the northern state was a bit like a partner in a relationship saying that the relationship is over, but that she or he had to wait until the children have grown up. There was now no absolute commitment, no raft of parliamentary acts to back up an absolute claim, but only an agreement to stay until the majority decided otherwise. This was still not good enough for us but it was a long way from being, as Thatcher had once remarked, as British as Finchley.

Our first big test of public and especially republican reaction to the Agreement came two days later on Easter Sunday. I was speaking in Carrickmore, in County Tyrone. It was a cold, but beautifully clear day as we walked through the town to the republican memorial. It is an impressive monument set in its own grounds. Several broadcast companies had sent satellite trucks to carry my remarks live, probably the first time ever that this was done at an Easter commemoration. The crowd was larger than usual, and indeed, this was true of the commemorations everywhere that year. As I looked around the crowd, at many of the faces I recognised, I knew I was talking to Sinn Féin activists, republicans who had struggled over the decades, relatives of our patriot dead and undoubtedly IRA volunteers as well.

I paid tribute to the IRA for providing the opportunity for peace. I appealed to everyone to read and study the Agreement carefully. In the context of our future strategy, policy and objectives, could the Agreement advance our struggle? That was the crucial question republicans had to answer. The conclusion of the talks had ended one phase of struggle but the one opening up would present many new challenges. I believed the impetus we had generated would move us towards unity and independence.

When the ceremony was over I was surrounded by many well-wishers. Among them were the mothers of some young IRA men who had been killed in Tyrone not long before at Loughgall and Cappagh. I particularly remember Mrs. Arthurs, mother of volunteer Paul Arthurs and Mrs Quinn, mother of John Quinn. They both hugged me. I felt a huge sense of relief. We had taken the republican struggle and republicans generally on a huge roller coaster of emotions. That Easter Sunday in Carrickmore, when these two fine women demonstrated that they supported what we were doing, I felt validated.

On the other side Ted Kennedy and three Democratic Senate colleagues, Chris Dodd, John Kerry and Daniel Moynihan wrote to President Clinton backing the visa. Others on Capitol Hill and in Irish America rallied to the issue.

On January 30th 1994 President Clinton decided to give me a restricted visa for New York, for two days. It was a courageous decision. But it was not his last. The following year he agreed to allow US Citizens to raise funds for Sinn Féin and to invite me to the White House St. Patrick's Day event. The British were furious. Consequently, for five days, the British Prime Minister refused to take a telephone call from the President of the United States.

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President Clinton's decision to appoint George Mitchell as his special envoy to the North of Ireland and then later to the Chair of the peace negotiations, significantly contributed to their success and to the achievement of the Good Friday Agreement. Throughout that process President Clinton was at the end of the telephone, especially on the last night. I have no doubt that his engagement helped to get the Agreement over the line.

His contribution to navigating the peace process through the difficulties of ending conflict, reaching agreement and creating a new peaceful environment, was hugely important. His willingness to listen to the concerns and advice of Irish America leaders; the political initiatives he took, including the visa; his willingness to enter into dialogue while others were still refusing to talk; his subsequent visits to Ireland and encouragement of political agreement and progress; as well as investment by both the US government through the International Fund for Ireland, and business leaders, all contributed to the stability and success of the peace process.

Of course, that process still requires constant attention. A quarter of a century since the IRA's courageous 'complete cessation of military operations', rights are still being denied to citizens, the power sharing government at Stormont has collapsed and Brexit threatens the Good Friday Agreement and it

seems that a hard border will once again be established on our island.

So, we must remain perpetually vigilant and protective of all that has been hard won. Making peace is never a single action, although single actions can advance or set back progress. Making peace is a process.

Gerry Adams is a fairly regular visitor to the USA. Once again he was there for a Presidential election result. He Wrote about his observation of the situation there in Village Magazine on November 13th 2004.

Amid changes, US parties have Ireland in common

The USA is a complex country with many contradictions. How could it be otherwise? In other land masses as vast as this regional or national rivalries are taken for granted. But here despite ethnic or racial background, all share a common nationality – one flag – one President – one United States.

In my 10 years or so of dipping into the USA there have been many changes. I came to New York for the first time during the early days of the Clinton era. Those were ebullient hopeful times. The mood in the White House on St Patrick's Day, as the Irish cheerfully, triumphally crowded into every nook and cranny of that historic building, seemed to match the mood outside.

The economy was buoyant. America was in good form. Or most of America was.

Clinton was excellent on Ireland, but he and I had different views on other foreign policy issues during our many meetings.

None of these issues, whether Rwanda, Cuba, the plight of the Third World countries crippled by foreign debt, genocide in the emerging Balkan states or famine in Africa seemed to penetrate the mass media here. Except for the Middle East.

I heard little criticism of the president on any of these issues from the Americans I met and worked with. In fact the first criticism I heard was over his pro-abortion stance and then later over allegations around the Lewinsky affair.

I was in New York for the 2000 election result. When I went to bed Al Gore was in the lead. I awoke to the extraordinary developments in Florida. For the rest of that visit I was witness to the arguments which that episode kicked off. People everywhere were galvanised by the election controversy. And then Al Gore conceded and the debate subsided.

George Bush became president. The style was different on Ireland but the substance was the same. And despite the lampooning the president receives in the media I always found him to be a man able to connect with his constituents – especially after 11 September.

In New York a month or so afterwards the trauma was obvious. Here was a city in shock. People were gloomy, frightened, worried. American flags and proclamations of defiance against Bin Laden were everywhere.

Everyone I met knew someone who had perished in the Twin Towers. I knew a number of people myself. Some were Sinn Féin supporters.

Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Governor George Pataki and President Bush led the fightback to restore public morale. It was Bush's finest hour. However, from outside the USA concerns began to be raised about the direction of the "War on Terror". There appeared to have been no real debate here about the invasion of Afghanistan. Much of the rest of the world was debating and criticising these actions. Some American friends of mine spoke bitterly of "anti-American feeling", particularly in Ireland.

Others worried about how their country was perceived internationally. By the time of the invasion of Iraq the debate was much less muted in the USA. For the first time my American friends were arguing about foreign policy. In some cases Sinn Féin's opposition to the war in Iraq was the spur for such comment but mostly it was just because this was the talking point of the time. Americans cared. But yet there was no national focus.

The Democrats were betwixt and between – as unsure on the war as their fellow citizens – supportive of their troops, and not wanting to seem unpatriotic.

Then the primaries and the run-in to the conventions started. One day on Capitol Hill I noticed a difference. There was a buzz in the corridors and elevators and on the little underground railroad that ferries people from one part of the Hill to the other. The Republicans were galvanised. The Democrats were coming awake. There was talk of Hillary Clinton as a contender. And then John Kerry emerged as the democratic front-runner.

On Tuesday evening 2 November as I left Ireland the media speculation was of a high turnout favouring the Democrats. But later George Bush's second term as US president was announced by the pilot of our American Airlines plane as it flew high over Portland, Maine, on the last leg into JFK airport.

As I sat in the immigration hall, a victim of Homeland Security and – apart from Richard McAuley – the only white person in a large crowd of slightly apprehensive black and Asian men, women and children, it was obvious that things are still changing here.

Since then Richard and I have endured a city-a-day leapfrog from New York to San Francisco. Our events are organised by both Republicans and Democrats. The Democrats are on a downer, the Republicans justifiably pleased. Their election success was overseen by one Karl Rove. I have heard him described by Democrats as a "genius".

The Republicans successfully tapped into traditional feelings against abortion, same gender marriages, stem cell experimentations, as well as patriotic feelings engendered by the "War against Terror". Bush exuded a sense of conviction and certainty.

Many outside the USA will see this Republican victory simply as a mandate for the war in Iraq. But it's much more complex than that. It is America – mainly white America – forming its wagon train in a circle around traditional domestic values as much as anything else.

The USA is polarised. Some will argue it was always so. But never so obviously or at a time of such international discord and uncertainty. In the meantime there's work for the Irish American lobby. One Republican friend complains that the two Irish papers here The Voice and The Echo supported Kerry – so did most of the activist groups. My friend feels vindicated for his support for Bush but worried about how all of this will affect the Irish lobby. I tell him not to worry. Ireland is the one thing many Republicans and Democrats have in common.

President Bush is now mapping out his administration and strategies and priorities for the next four years. Our task, along with Irish America, is to ensure that the Irish peace process remains a priority, despite the many other pressing issues.

October 2nd 09

At the Clinton Global Initiative

I was in New York last week for the first two days of the 5th annual gathering of the Clinton Global Initiative. The CGI was held, as usual in the Sheraton Hotel and Towers on 7th Avenue. As regular readers will know I spend a lot of my life in one hotel or another but the Sheraton is one I have grown quite familiar with. It also has an early link with the Clinton Presidency and the Irish peace process.

In January 1994, and after torturous negotiations, President Clinton gave me a 48 hour visa to visit New York to participate in a conference on Ireland being organised by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy. There was uproar from the British. Their hysterical handling of the issue guaranteed that my visit made the headlines everywhere!

For my part I wanted to ensure in the limited time available to me that I had an opportunity to meet Irish America. An event, sponsored by 'Americans for a New Irish Agenda', was held in the Sheraton Hotel and Towers. It was my first public meeting with Irish America and it was packed with an enthusiastic and excited capacity crowd.

Since then the annual New York Friends of Sinn Féin fund raisers have been held in the Sheraton each autumn. So I have become very familiar with the twists and turns and nooks and crannies of this large establishment.

President Bill Clinton established the CGI in 2005. But to make it more than another conference talking shop its primary focus is to 'turn ideas into action'.

The conferences are action orientated. Every session concludes with action proposals aimed at bringing together NGOs, senior figures in the business sector, political leaders and government officials, and those concerned at the many problems facing the people of the world today. Sometimes the amounts of money involved are colossal, sometimes they are very small or are commitments of time and energy.

This year the CGI concentrated on four main areas of concern; Financing an Equitable Future; Building Human Capital; Strengthening Infrastructure and Harnessing Innovation for

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Development. I was especially impressed by the sessions that were held on empowering women and girls.

At its close on Friday President Clinton was able to announce that the CGI had secured another 284 commitments with a value of \$9.4 billion. This brings the total value of the commitments generated by the CGI since 2005 to \$57 billion.

The affect of all of this is expected to result in:

- 30 million children will gain access to education.
- 2 million girls will be reached through school enrollment efforts.
- 7 million people will be reached with clean energy.
- 83 million people will have increased access to health services.
- 4.7 million children will benefit from malnutrition interventions.
- 18 million people will have increased access to safe drinking water.

Because of the Lisbon Referendum campaign I had initially thought that participating this year would be impractical but after some discussion with colleagues it was agreed that I would spend two days at the conference.

I find the conferences personally very educational. There is a huge amount of information provided, as well as an opportunity to meet a wide range of people.

In hindsight it was fortunate that we decided that I should go because it allowed me at opportunity to meet President Clinton and brief him on the current situation in the political institutions and the failures of the British and Irish government in implementing their commitments under the Good Friday Agreement.

It also allowed me to be present at the special session President Clinton organised involving Peter Robinson, the First Minister, Martin McGuinness the deputy First Minister, Declan Kelly the newly appointed US Economic Envoy to Ireland; Michael Martin the Irish Government's Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Shaun Woodward the British Secretary of State.

The focus on the session, which was packed, was the need for economic investment to underpin the progress that has been made

and to ensure that those who have been worst affected by decades of inequality and conflict feel the benefits of peace.

It was a good meeting. An optimistic meeting. However, and Peter Robinson is bound to know this, there will be no significant or substantial inward investment in the absence of stable, efficient political institutions which are delivering on their remit.

So, the delay in the transfer of powers on policing and justice cannot go on indefinitely.

31 July 2019

To Nancy Soderberg

From Gerry Adams TD

25 years ago on August 31st 1994 a statement from the Irish Republican Army (IRA) announced a "*complete cessation of military operations*". It said that "*an opportunity to secure a just and lasting settlement has been created... A solution will only be found as a result of inclusive negotiations.*"

It was as Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney said at the time "*a space in which hope can grow*".

Many people, in Ireland, in Britain, in Irish America and elsewhere contributed to creating the opportunity for that initiative. The bi-partisan approach by Republican and Democratic representatives in the Congress played a central role.

Foremost among those who contributed to the efforts to achieve an agreement was President Bill Clinton who engaged in the search for peace even before he was elected President, and stayed with it throughout his Presidency and in the years since.

President Clinton's positive approach to the creation of an Irish peace process was first evident in April 1992. That month a forum was held in Manhattan on Irish issues for the then democratic Presidential hopefuls, Jerry Brown and Bill Clinton. It was organised by Irish American John Dearie. Asked by one of the panellists if he would appoint a peace envoy for the north Clinton said he would. Asked if he would authorise a visa for me and other Sinn Féin representatives to visit the USA. Clinton said yes. As President he honoured these commitments.

In a letter published later that year Bill Clinton acknowledged that; "*A permanent and peaceful solution to the crisis in Northern Ireland can only be achieved if the underlying cause of the strife and instability is dealt with vigorously, fairly and within a time frame that guarantees genuine, substantial and steady progress...*"

At the end of January 1994, I applied for a visa to attend a conference organised by Bill Flynn's National Committee on American Foreign Policy. There was huge resistance to this from the British government and also from senior people within President Clinton's Cabinet. The British Embassy claimed that a visa for me would be a diplomatic catastrophe.

On the other side Ted Kennedy and three Democratic Senate colleagues, Chris Dodd, John Kerry and Daniel Moynihan wrote to President Clinton backing the visa. Others on Capitol Hill and in Irish America rallied to the issue.

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Nov 2nd 2016

An old friend of mine Paddy McGeady and I spent a few minutes together every night for over twenty years during the summer holidays. We stood or sat, if it wasn't raining too much - listening to the birdsong, discussing the weather and celebrating the day. Paddy was a happy man. A bachelor, a native Irish speaker and a good neighbour. He was a gentleman, a scholar and a fine judge of Irish whiskey. Paddy lived in Donegal. In the western highlands. Close to the wild Atlantic.

Paddy was independently minded. He had a flag pole in his front garden. He would fly the tri colour there on special occasions. He had a thoughtful world view. A few years ago at the height of the Israeli assault on Gaza Paddy got a large piece of canvas and painted his own Palestinian flag on it. Hardly anyone knew but that wasn't the point. He flew his homemade Palestinian flag on his flag pole in the highlands of west Donegal in solidarity with the people of Palestine. He was equally against the war in Iraq.

One day Hillary and Bill Clinton were in Belfast and asked to meet with me. This was when the Irish political and peace process was on a go slow. I asked could Paddy come with me. They immediately agreed. So Paddy and I travelled to meet Bill and Hillary.

When we had finished our business I introduced Paddy to them both. He was a very shy man, unused to meeting famous world leaders. They made him feel completely comfortable. Hillary in particular took a few minutes to chat very warmly to Paddy,

Paddy thanked them both for their work on the Irish peace process. He then quietly asked them to do the same thing in the Middle East. They listened quietly and respectfully to his views. Hillary in particular helped this little Irishman to find his voice. He from west Donegal and she - one of the most powerful women in the world - explored the possibility of peace in the Middle East.

I have seen her do the same thing many times with many, many people especially women. Putting folks at ease. Being interested in them and their views. Engaging. Listening. Reaching out.

That brief engagement with Paddy McGeady was hugely important for Paddy. Hillary knew that, and Paddy knew she knew it. How? Because she took him seriously. She gave him his place. She respected his views. That goes deeper than learned political skills. That's what people who care do. Paddy McGeady went home that night knowing he was listened to. Because Hillary wanted to hear what he had to say.