

**February 20, 1993: Speech by Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle member
Martin Mc Guinness to Sinn Féin Ard Fheis.**

The British government representative later claimed that it was this speech by Martin Mc Guinness which 'triggered' British government action. This speech and the presidential address by Gerry Adams were forwarded to the British government.

"When British Secretary of State Peter Brooke began the inter party talks process little did he realise that three years later this long running and boring saga would collapse in confusion and recrimination as each of the participants blamed everyone else for the failure.

Mr Brooke must surely have expected that a partitionist agreement on the future government of what the British call Northern Ireland would have emerged.

Well, last year, after three years of discussion which proved lucrative for the participants and worthless to everyone else, the inter-party talks ground to a predictable halt. Furthermore, even though it was to become a grave embarrassment to the British, Sinn Féin was undemocratically excluded from those discussions.

Democracy, British style, dictated that the Alliance Party, with less support than Sinn Féin, were there, the Democratic Unionists, who publicly advocate the killing of republicans, were also there, as were the Official Unionists whose track record includes the exclusion and repression of the nationalist community since partition. The British government was represented by Sir Patrick Mayhew. He has recently taken to describing his government's role as a facilitator. How right he is. The British government has indeed facilitated the persecution of the nationalist people of the six counties since partition.

Meanwhile, scores of thousands to our supporters were excluded, chastised and penalised because they voted for the party of their choice. This fact conveniently guaranteed the absence of any criticisms of the British government's role in a conflict which they created and have dismally failed to resolve in the decades since they partitioned Ireland and divided the Irish people.

Instead the endless discussions yielded no imaginative solutions which would end the injustice of partition and bridge the divisions between our people.

The rocks on which the talks foundered were of course unionist suspicion that they were being gently inched towards an all-Ireland settlement and SDLP reservations about agreeing a partitionist settlement. Through it all Peter Brooke and Patrick Mayhew behaved as though they were dithering Wimbledon umpires watching the ball fly over the net but unable to decide who should win the point. The British of course are not referees in this dispute and we repudiate any attempts to portray them as neutral.

The British government's policy is crucial if there is to be a just settlement on this island. The other parties to the debate can have but a limited influence on the situation and it is essential if there is to be any hope of peace that the British government lead the way by outlining its plan for a final solution of the problem. Britain cannot be allowed to abdicate its responsibility by standing by like Pontius Pilate washing its hands off a problem it created.

If they continue with their present policies there will be no settlement, no peace. Britain must also publicly accept, as I believe they now privately do, that an essential ingredient in the search for a solution is the acceptance of the need for inclusive dialogue as a vehicle towards a final settlement.

Following Peter Brooke's earlier example Patrick Mayhew has recently addressed us on this issue. Contradicting himself he says that Sinn Féin will not be involved in talks until the IRA calls a ceasefire yet implicit in everything else he says is an acceptance that republicans must be part of the solution.

In the wake of the suspension of the Stormont talks there is increasing acceptance that the British government must now speak to Sinn Féin. Numerous editorials and one of the architects of the London/Dublin agreement have added their voices to those who now accept we must be involved. The concept of inclusive dialogue as the way forward is gathering momentum.

With the election of a new government in Dublin there is to be a further attempt to resume the talks process. We are told these will initially take the form of bi-lateral meetings rather than round table discussions. This actually provides both the British and Dublin governments with an opportunity to bring Sinn Féin into a talks process. If both governments have the courage of their private convictions they should now finally meet with Sinn Féin. For our part we recognise that such a scenario would place a great responsibility on us.

We would approach any serious talks accepting that we haven't got all the answers but we most certainly believe we have some of them.

The British government and others demand dramatic initiatives from us before we can be involved in talks. Whilst rejecting any preconditions on our participation we are quite prepared to be open and flexible to serious proposals which can lead to a realistic agreement.

Years of struggle have not diminished the determination of the republican people to end British interference in Ireland. We are as determined as ever. No one can argue that a democratic resolution would be a simple matter. All involved in the conflict, all those who are affected by it, would have to be prepared to a dramatic and imaginative initiative. Republicans are willing to engage in the search for a democratic settlement with courage and flexibility.

We must all allow each other room to manoeuvre if there is to be any hope that the misery, injustice and death of the past twenty five years are to be finally ended.

We have, all of us, Irish and British, been hurt by this conflict. We have all suffered and if we all share responsibility for that, then surely, only when we are all included in a healing process which honestly and seriously seeks to remove the root causes of our trouble, will there be the slimmest chance of peace

In recent weeks Patrick Mayhew agreed with Dick Spring that the demand of unionists for constitutional change would require an examination of the root causes of the conflict. This coming as it does from Mr. Mayhew was an interesting and important admission.

Since the ending of the talks a new government had been formed in Dublin. Its stated policy is that change in the constitution can take place in the context of an overall agreement. Dublin should be under no illusion about this issue. The nationalist community in the six counties and I believe the overwhelming majority of Irish people in this island are bitterly opposed to any change which would dilute the sovereign rights of the people of Ireland to nationhood.

Sinn Féin recognises the dismay and confusion which exists within the unionist community. Many fear that the British government are looking for a way out and they believe its only a matter of time before this happens. This places a considerable onus on everyone including ourselves as Irish republicans to apply a new and radical thinking to the predicament unionists find themselves in. The plight of unionists is requiring particular consideration to guarantee and protect their interests in any new arrangements which will be needed to resolve the conflict.

The British portray republicans as the cause of the conflict. The British are dishonest. We are not the cause of this conflict we are the victims of it. We are the product of decades of British tyranny and misrule.

In his Coleraine speech Mr Mayhew in the understatement of the year said, "You will not find me seeking to argue that Britain's role in this island has only ever been associated with what has been uplifting. On the contrary, there is much in the long and often tragic history of Ireland for deep regret and the British government for its part shares in that regret to the full".

Regret alone will not solve our problems. What is needed is a plan to establish agreed democratic institutions to redress the damage done to Ireland and its people by successive British governments. Both Dublin and the SDLP should join with us in placing this reality before the British government.

Until this happens the struggle will continue until justice is done and freedom is ours.

NOTE: The British government version opens with a message which it claims was sent by Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle member Martin Mc Guinness.

THE BLUE PAPER

The message begins; "The conflict is over but we need your advice on how to bring it to a close...."

No such message was sent. This was written by the British government. It is bogus.

20/2/93

MG. makes speech to 93

And Theirs,

Included here,
Full text to be found in
S.F. version pp 20-22.

Summary

- 1) Demand for S.F. inclusion in talks.
- 2) Rep. willing to engage in the search for a democratic settlement with courage + flexibility.
- 3) Onus on everyone (including S.F.) to apply a new + radical thinking to the predicament we're in (and ourselves in).

SF. version pp 27 say that the
Brit. Gov rep said that the speech
was read and had triggered
government action.

NB