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FOR: MARY BROWNE/EMBASSY LONDON

FROM: C. O'SHEA

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BBC Radio Ulster - "Inside Politics"

Interviews with Secretary of State, Sir Patrick Mayhew and Ed Maloney

Saturday, 15 February 1997

Interviewer: Jim Dougal

Mayhew

Interviewer: How do you reflect on the past week, including of course the awful murder by the IRA of Stephen Restorick?

Mayhew: I reflect on it with a mixture of sadness, anger and curiously enough hope. Hope because in the talks process there was a general agreement that parties want to see these talks proceed. I do not think we will see them breaking until quite close to the declaration of a general election, whenever that may be. And there is a very broad agreement that they want to come back afterwards because they rightly perceive, in my view, that this is the positive way forward towards the political comprehensive settlement we all want. So there is a bit of hope from last week. But of course the sadness and the anger come from the murder of Bombardier Restorick. That was callous and grotesque and it has caused an extraordinary amount of anger and revulsion right through Northern Ireland. I never believed that this was a phoney war that these people were conducting over the last weeks and months and I think if

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one had been in a RUC land rover, for example, with a rocket fired at you I do not think there is much chance of your thinking it was phoney when it went past you by a whisker.

Interviewer: How do you assess the IRA now then?

Mayhew: They labour under the same misapprehension, I guess, that they think if you bomb and snipe and mortar the security forces, that will drive the Government off the democratic course that they have held to for so many years, that is to say we want to see everybody in these talks who is committed to exclusively peaceful means and who has shown themselves to abide by the democratic process. We want to see everybody there and that includes Sinn Féin. They have got a share of the elected vote, but not if they are seeking to supplement that by bombs. Nobody is going to sit round that table and negotiate with people who reckon that they will smarten everybody else up by using a bomb or mortar or semtex or whatever.

Interviewer: But do you think that the IRA are trying to bomb Sinn Féin's way to the table or would they like to continue the violence outside while Sinn Féin would be inside?

Mayhew: No they are trying to bomb Sinn Féin into the table, they are trying to get their way, they want to get into the negotiations for the future of this part of our democracy without having the entrance ticket. The entrance ticket is what I have just described, set out in the ground rules, agreed by everybody in these talks and both Governments, the Irish Government and ourselves, that here has to be an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire and then they have to show that they are committed to exclusively peaceful means and abide by the democratic process. And that means there has to be some time when you look to see what is happening on the ground to see whether it matches up to words that are being used.

Interviewer: Do you accept in any way the good faith of Mr Adams, Mr McGuinness and Mr Mitchel McLaughlin who referred to the murder of Stephen Restorick as a tragedy, and who say that they are still trying to restore the peace process, to restore the ceasefire?

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Mayhew: Well frankly I do not. They could do very much more to demonstrate their feelings of revulsion, if that be the case, and to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again, than they are prepared to say, and than they are prepared to do, that is not to say that if they do recognise that there will be no success for the policy which their friends in the IRA are pursuing, that is not to say that if they recognise that, then they cannot fulfill the requirements which both Governments have stipulated.

Interviewer: Do you see any difference between Sinn Féin and the IRA?

Mayhew: They are inextricably linked.

Interviewer: Completely and

Mayhew: Inextricably linked.

Interviewer: What then do they need to do, what does Sinn Féin need to do in your terms to get into those talks?

Mayhew: They have to secure an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire. That has been made clear by both Governments over a long time. And of course after what has been happening there has to be, as we have made clear for a very long time, there has to be a matching up of how they behave with how they express themselves. During a large part of the last ceasefire there was targeting of individuals, police officers, army officers, politicians, there was the building up of arsenals of high explosives, there was the development of mortars, the results of which we are seeing now. That kind of thing in unequivocal with a restoration of the ceasefire, a commitment to peaceful methods and that is why that has to be looked at.

Interviewer: You say you have to look at how they behave and how they express themselves and what happens on the ground if there is a ceasefire, last week on this programme Gerry Adams said that if there was a ceasefire a timeframe for Sinn Féin's

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inclusion in talks could be negotiated taking account of the sensitivities of everyone including the Unionists, do you see any room for movement there?

Mayhew: Well by the use of those words it may be that he recognises that words alone cannot be enough after the murder of Bombardier Restorick you cannot then come along and say we now declare an unequivocal restoration of our ceasefire and expect that to be accepted after not only the murder of this young soldier, but all the other attempts that have been made during this year, one every thirty hours throughout every week of this year 1997, the RUC said two days ago, one attack upon the security forces every thirty hours since New Year's day. You cannot expect people to say, oh well that is fine, we will accept you in now that it is all over. Notwithstanding that, however, we want to see Sinn Féin as an elected party on proper terms and carrying the same entrance ticket as everybody else, sitting in their tenth empty chair taking their place on a democratic basis. Now we cannot put a precise time to that because you have got to look at all the circumstances, you have to see whether they still are targeting, whether they still are researching into new weapons and all of that. But if they show by the things that are happening on the ground, and just as importantly the things that are not happening on the ground, that their words are to be relied upon, well then it can be shorter rather than longer.

Interviewer: But that is the big problem isn't it, they say that they would have to be into talks fairly soon after a ceasefire, is there any way for example you could say a month, six weeks?

Mayhew: It has to be put on the basis that I have just described. You cannot say a specific time because you cannot tell what will be happening in that time. Now I recognise that there may be some grounds for suspicion that the British want to spin this out over eighteen months, two years, of course it doesn't. Do you suppose that anybody wants to continue with this attrition, this fight that is going on, the fight by the IRA against democracy? Do you suppose that in a democracy we wish to see a challenge to democracy by force of arms perpetuating through lack of certainty? Of course we do not. But we can be

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certain of the criteria to be applied, it is up to them to determine how long it takes before they can satisfy everybody else that they are for real.

Interviewer: Mr Adams also called for talks between Sinn Féin and Government officials, he faxed the Prime Minister during the week to that effect in order he says to try and bridge the gap between the Government and Sinn Féin, is that a possibility and indeed from what you are saying, wouldn't it help?

Mayhew: The Government has said since the end of the ceasefire in February that if Sinn Féin wishes to have a meeting with British officials, well then depending upon the circumstances and depending upon what is happening on the ground, that will be arranged. But there is no ground really for any doubt about our position and in the light of the events of this week it certainly is not appropriate now. The Irish, as you may remember, throughout most of last year had meetings at official level and, indeed at ministerial level, with Sinn Féin, but they have in recent weeks announced that that is all over. Well they met, as I say, for quite a long time in numerous meetings but they were led to believe that it was useless and fruitless, apparently. So that is why they have said that. If people wish to clarify what the Government's position is, we think it is absolutely clear, they cannot expect to have meetings in the light of what happened this last week. If they want to submit some questions, if they wanted to do that then we would consider what those questions might be and we might reply to those questions but I see no ground for it because our position is absolutely clear, is consistent and will stay so.

Interviewer: So they could send you a list of questions and you would answer them, but in present circumstances i.e. the murder during the week you would not authorise officials to meet them?

Mayhew: Yes that is correct.

Interviewer: So how do you respond to some nationalists, many who blame the Government for the impasse, who say that the ceasefire would be a ceasefire and the

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Government should talk to Republicans in order to consolidate any ceasefire and because they do not the violence is continuing so the Government must share some of the blame if you like?

Mayhew: Well I think that that is sophistry. It is not we who are murdering people it is them. They know that there is a place for them at the table and we have just gone over that. It is not as though they are being excluded forever by reason of what they have done, they are excluding themselves because they will not end their violence and then show that they are committed to peaceful and democratic methods. I think the answer to that criticism was very eloquently provided by Mr Bruton, the Taoiseach, in an article in the Belfast Telegraph this last week when he took head-on this charge of 'you squandered the ceasefire last time, there was no political movement' and he set out with, item after item after item, the moves that were made by the Irish Government and by the British Government. And the point that was made was there was no move whatsoever from the other side. So it is very easy to say, well of course you know you ought to have them round the table the moment they say it is all over. Let me put just one last point to that, if we were to say contrary to both principle and common sense that that is ok, you would find that there would be a lot more empty chairs round the table and they would be the chairs of the people representing most of the people of Northern Ireland. They would not be there.

Interviewer: Do you believe that the Loyalist ceasefire is intact?

Mayhew: You have to ask them. I know why it should be intact. Let us suppose that they were moved by this brutal murder of a member of the security forces to resume their own violence it would not make sense would it? Because they would then distract the security forces from their task in combatting the IRA they would oblige them to face in the other direction and deal with the violence of the Loyalists. On top of that, you would find that they would have to leave the talks process, where their presence has gained greatly in stature, their influence and standing has greatly increased through the contributions of the parties associated with them. It would be crazy in their own interests, it would be evil in

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itself and it would not make sense if they wish to support the security forces and not distract them from dealing with the IRA

Interviewer: You met the SDLP leader yesterday, John Hume, to talk about bloody Sunday, now essentially what it seems to me that the people want is some kind of an apology from the Government, this seems to be what Mr Hume would like to see, on the basis that the Government believes that those people were innocent of carrying bombs or weapons on that day, what is wrong with an apology?

Mayhew: An apology is an apology for criminal wrongdoing. There is nothing in the Widgery Report to support that, there is nothing in the evidence that is available to support that. And therefore it would be wrong, it would be unjust to those who took part in the tragic events, and they were tragic events, whatever fault there may be they were tragic events. It would be wrong to those who took part in them to imply that everybody behaved in a way, because there would be no specifying it, we do not know who it would be appropriate to, because there is no evidence as yet. To apologise therefore would be unjust to them and would not be appropriate, right, or proper, or sensible. That said, I want to say again what the Prime Minister said many years ago now to Mr Hume, that this was a terrible tragedy and we all have got to learn the lessons from it. I said yesterday that we regretted that the events of that dreadful day ever occurred. That seems to me to be common humanity to say that. I can understand that there is a call for an apology, you can see why that cannot be given. Again though just let me say this, that if there is evidence and some evidence was produced yesterday which we have not had a chance yet to scrutinise by representatives of the relatives when they came to see me with Mr Hume, if there is evidence that is substantial and is new, then that will be considered by our authorities and the appropriate action will be taken.

Interviewer: Has the Prime Minister told you when the election is going to be?

Mayhew: No he has not but we have a lot of work to do and when you are elected to do a job it is quite a good principle to carry on until that job is done or until the clock says that is the end.

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Northern Editor of the Sunday Tribune newspaper, Ed Maloney

Interviewer: What does the murder of Stephen Restorick say about what is happening in the IRA?

Maloney: I think what is happening in the Republican movement as a whole is very interesting because the strategy that they have adopted since the Army Convention and which we started to see on the streets in terms of violence from the end of November beginning of December onwards, strikes me and I think it strikes other people as an uneasy compromise between two almost distinct wings of the organisation now. A compromise between those who wanted all-out war and those who wanted to keep to the pathway of peace as it were and particularly not to have violence in the run up to a general election in which Sinn Féin stands to do very well indeed and the only risk to that I see is in terms of IRA violence getting out of control. So it looks like an uneasy compromise which could get out of control for Gerry Adams and his colleagues. If it gets out of control it could threaten their entire strategy, but at the moment you look at the way the IRA has been behaving throughout most of Northern Ireland and some aspects are quite striking at the use of home-made weaponry which was not very good. They have not opened up their big dumps of Libyan weapons. And the South Armagh shooting is almost a counterpoint to the inadequacy of the campaign elsewhere.

Interviewer: Are Mr Adams, and Mr McGuinness, and Mr Mitchell McLaughlin trying to stop this?

Maloney: I do not think they can. I think that the fact that this campaign is extant at the moment is indicative of their inability to stop the IRA. Their preferred strategy would have been to have virtually no violence in the run up to the general election, but they were forced to make a deal, or at least it looks as if they were forced to make a deal with the hard men and this is what we have.

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Interviewer: While all this is going on Mr Adams was faxing the Prime Minister in Downing Street seeking a meeting between Sinn Féin and officials, now surely in present circumstances, as Sir Patrick Mayhew has said today, this would not happen?

Maloney: Well of course he is not going to get a meeting or he is not going to get what he is looking for for sure. But I think if you look at what Gerry Adams is doing in the context of an election campaign, that as far as Sinn Féin is concerned has already started, then Mr Adams is presenting himself once again as he did in the May Forum election last year as the leader of the peace party in Sinn Féin. And this is sending out a subliminal message to the same element that gave him such a good vote last May that if they want to strengthen his peace camp against the IRA, then give him a vote and once he is elected to Westminster and, indeed there could be more than one Sinn Féin MP after May, then the British will find it very difficult to refuse to talk to Sinn Féin. Gerry Adams can go to the IRA and say, there you are violence is now truly obsolete, call a ceasefire and you are back into the peace process. So he is presenting himself I think quite shrewdly to the public and to his own broad pan-nationalist constituency as the leader of this tendency within Sinn Féin.

END