

# Letter to Belfast Telegraph

Conditions of peace - 24th November, 1993

Letters to the Editor,

*Belfast Telegraph,*

122-144 Royal Ave.

Belfast.

Sir,

The main stumbling block to a wider settlement of the Northern Ireland conflict, apart from violence, is at the level of constitutional principle: The British and Unionist position is that there can be no change in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority. The Nationalist view is that respect must be given to the right of the Irish people to self-determination.

However, while these two principles are mutually opposed to each other in theory, in practice the gap may not be that wide. It is perfectly conceivable that the Irish people may choose to exercise the right they claim to self-determination by accepting that Northern Ireland will remain part of the UK as long as the majority of people living in Northern Ireland so choose.

A further problem is the role of the Dublin Government. Unionists fear that some form of Joint Authority will be imposed on them against their will. Nationalists fear that they will end up without the Dublin Government being able to act on its behalf. It is not at all clear what the Dublin Government wants.

The fears of both communities within Northern Ireland exist because of constitutional uncertainty. Both Governments, because their intentions are not fully clear, bear a heavy responsibility for this.

All parties should come to negotiations prepared for costly compromise: there will be no peace without sacrifice. For Unionists this may mean accepting some new relationship with the Dublin Government. For Nationalists it may mean accepting Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom.

For the past six months John Hume and Gerry Adams have been engaged in talks aimed at a total cessation of violence. During that time Gerry Adams, as leader of Sinn Fein, has issued various statements that denote a change in what Republicans are willing to accept by way of settlement. These changes have been considerable, for example, accepting that any agreement must have the consent of Unionists.

However, it is extremely difficult for anyone except those who are part of Sinn Fein to notice such changes against the background of continued atrocities. If Sinn Fein want other parties to take their political pronouncements seriously then they need to withdraw their support for violence.

Even if nationalist violence does not end we believe that John Hume should continue his talks with Gerry Adams, and that others should continue talking to Loyalist paramilitaries, if by so doing they believe that there is some chance of persuading those engaged in violence to end it.

Talking to Sinn Fein does not mean accepting their conditions. It simply means attempting to persuade them to act politically instead of militarily.

There is a deep fear of further bloody atrocities among both communities within NI. That fear is realistic. The choice before us is the same as it has been for the past twenty-five years: either we make peace or we will continue to destroy each other.

Yours, etc.,