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SECRETARY OF STATE'S INTERVIEW ON THE PANORAMA PROGRAMME ON
GERRY ADAMS - 22/11/82

Q:

Aren't you worried that we have essentially no defences against people deeply involved with the IRA, manipulating our normal democratic processes, some of them by advocating having an armalite rifle in one hand and going to the ballot box in the other?

A:

A number of these people are bad men and of course it is one of the great problems that we have. They are bad men and they are known to be bad men and they haven't much support; yet when it comes to an election people are prepared to support them. Now this is one of the great difficulties of the Northern Ireland situation. When you say we have no defences we do everything that we can by democratic means to prevent terrorism and prevent bad people getting to positions where they can intimidate others. But, it's very difficult in a democratic society. Once you move out of the proper methods of conducting a democracy you play even more into their hands.

Q:

Yes. I see the point but given that this party, has passed a resolution calling for **unambivalent** support for the arms struggle - murdering the British people in Northern Ireland and British soldiers, why don't we simply ban them?

A:

They are banned. The Provisional IRA are banned.

Q:

No, but the party that calls for that

A:

No, because you can't ban a party if they are showing signs - the party itself, is showing signs of moving away from violence.

Alright you ban provisional Sinn Fein, they will then stand as something else. In the local elections of last year they stood as anti-H-Block campaigners. They will always find some means of making their protest known. It's far better actually that we should know who

they are and what they are doing than that there should be these under-currents of suspicion the whole time. I believe that one of the good things in this election is actually to bring out the real problems that we have. Now we know what we've got to face and try and deal with it.

Q: How much support does Gerry Adams have?

A:

I think that he has a degree of support particularly from the younger element in the West Belfast area. I don't think that his support is wholehearted and I think a lot of people are frightened of him and frightened of the Provisional IRA. We have to do all we can to wean these people away from violence. That means a whole series of social and economic measures as well as doing all we can on the security front.

Q:

How is it that a man with his record and nobody better than you I imagine knows what his record is - how can he get so many votes?

A:

I think it is much more a protest vote. They are getting votes because of high unemployment and because they've never known anything else but pretty violent conditions in West Belfast. These are all circumstances that we have to take into account. But I think there is within the minority community and within those who voted Provisional Sinn Fein a strong deterrence and utter condemnation of violence but they are very strongly nationalist people. They dislike the British **intensely** and therefore they tend to vote that way.

Q:

But they could have voted for the other Catholic nationalist parties?

A:

I think they felt as far as the other Catholic party was concerned - the SDLP - that if they were going to vote for a party of abstention, they would vote for a party which was in no way connected with the constitution.

Q:

So even if they voted for Sinn Fein you'd be encouraged to think that they are moving away from violence?

A:

Well certainly the view of people that I respect and that would be Catholic Priests who live in West Belfast, and places, they tell me, don't think that because people voted for Provisional Sinn Fein they were voting for violence - they weren't. They were voting very strongly against what you're trying to do against the economic situation or against the general attitude which they feel the security forces may have operated against them over the past few years but they were not voting for violence. They were not voting for the armalite rifle and if those candidates were put up, even though they may themselves have committed themselves to the armalite rifle in one hand and the ballot box in the other, it was the ballot box that the vast majority of provisional Sinn Fein people were voting for.

Q:

That's what you've been told. You don't think it's wishful thinking?

A:

Well, I had very frank discussions with these people. They come and hammer me from all sides whether it be unionists or whether it be nationalists. They don't pull their punches and this was the very firm impression that I got in recent talks with them.

Q:

Some of your critics particularly at Westminster say that in fact you'd have been better leaving the whole thing just where it was and simply soldiered on with Direct Rule. What do you say to that?

A:

Well of course I thought about that. It was an option that was open to me but I decided in conjunction with the Cabinet, that to do that doesn't necessarily mean to say that things remain as they are. You create a vacuum and into that vacuum wild men and violent men and other things happen and in NI, you have to try and fill that vacuum. I've tried to fill it with democracy, something that the Northern Irish appreciate and understand and which they haven't had for a number of years in a true form; that's what

I'm trying to get back to. It'll take time but to go on just as we
are with the policy of despair