

“Serious About the Process”

Interviewee: Gerry Adams

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Project: William J. Clinton Presidential History

Gerry Adams, president of Northern Ireland’s Sinn Féin Party from 1983 to 2018, recalls the strategic role of the United States in “bring[ing] about progress and change of a positive kind on the island of Ireland.” He describes how President Bill Clinton’s efforts enabled progress on ending the decades-long Northern Ireland conflict.

Gerry Adams: 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.

End of excerpt.

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