

George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland. The convention was entitled the International Labor Organization Convention No. 182, Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

Telephone Interview With Mark Little of RTE and Steve Grimason of the BBC From Seattle

December 2, 1999

President's Possible Visit to Belfast

Mr. Grimason. First of all, Mr. President, thank you very much for joining us. There has been some speculation that with things again moving in the peace process, you may actually be considering making a return trip to Belfast—and we could say that it's safer than Seattle.

The President. [Laughter] Yes, Seattle, the new home of the Troubles.

Well, let me say this. First of all, I am elated about today's events. They are truly historic. Now the people in Northern Ireland have the authority and the power to work together and to shape their own future, and it's wonderful. And you know how much I love to come there, and I would come at the drop of a hat if there is some contribution I can make to the ongoing peace process and the work still to be done. I've told George Mitchell that. I've told Bertie Ahern that, and I've told Tony Blair that. And obviously, the parties know that. All the others know that I would do that. But I have not made a decision to come right now.

Decommissioning of Arms

Mr. Little. If I could ask you, it seems unfortunately, with every victory in the peace process, there are sometimes the seeds of the next crisis, and we have the Ulster Unionist Council coming back in February to consider progress on decommissioning. Are you concerned that the historic development we see today could be collapsed in February? And do you agree with the Republicans who say, this is Unionists setting a new deadline which is not in the Good Friday agreement?

The President. Well, I agree with George Mitchell's assessment that decommissioning is an essential element of the Good Friday

accord, and it has to be achieved in the overall implementation of the agreement. All parties have a collective responsibility here, and I think what we should do is to give the agreed-upon process the chance to work. I have great confidence in General de Chastelain. I believe the parties have great confidence in him. And I don't think you can underestimate the terrific importance of the IRA naming its representative to General de Chastelain's commission, and I hope they do that today. And the Loyalists should do the same.

And all of us on the outside, rather than speculating on this day about what might happen bad, I think we've got a roadmap for the future. We've got a process, and we've got a commission with a leader that the parties respect, and I think we ought to give it a chance to work.

Ulster Unionists Deadline

Mr. Grimason. The problem that we have had with last weekend's events, although today's events are genuinely historic, is that the Ulster Unionists under David Trimble do—have set effectively a deadline. And if by February there is no decommissioning, they will return and all the signs are that they could bring all of this work down.

The President. Well, let me say first of all, you know, I've always tried to help. I've done everything I could to help, and I've worked with David Trimble and his people and with Gerry Adams and the Sinn Fein and with John Hume and Seamus Mallon. And I think on this day the most important thing I should say is to ask people to focus on what they have all agreed on. And what they have all agreed on is to give the de Chastelain commission a chance to work and to participate in that. As long as that is out there, I think it would be a mistake for me, as a friend of the peace process and the people of Ireland and as the President, to do anything that could in any way complicate that. Let's give it a chance to work and find a way forward.

Impact of Cooperation

Mr. Little. Mr. President, you know that there are a significant proportion of Unionists who do not want to see Sinn Fein in government without some form of decommissioning by the IRA. Do you think the IRA have done enough to persuade that group of Unionists? Is it time they set a deadline for themselves for decommissioning, and is it time they said the war is actually over, the day of the bomb and the bullet is gone?

The President. Well, I believe if in fact the IRA names its representatives to the de Chastelain commission, I think that will be a pretty good signal that we're all moving in the right direction and that all parties recognize the truly historic nature of this day. And I think that a lot of people had to make a lot of compromises to get us to this day and to make the political changes necessary to reflect the plain will of the voters in both communities in Northern Ireland.

And let me say, I think you'll see more movement in the right direction—if none of us and none of them do anything that makes it any harder than it is already. So I'm quite hopeful, actually.

And let me say this—I can only tell you this from my experience in other parts of the world as well—I think that there will be an intrinsic benefit to all the parties being in the Government and working together and seeing each other and finding out how many things they actually agree on. I mean, there's really not a Republican or a Unionist way to figure out whether the economy is growing or there's adequate infrastructure. And they both have a common stake in having an excellent education for their children.

And I wouldn't minimize what I think will be the surprising amount of commonality they will find with one another as they assume the jobs they have. I mean, if you just look at the names of the portfolios the ministers have, and ask yourself, in how many of these areas could there legitimately be real differences? And won't the commonalities dwarf the differences? So I think the very process of being in this Government together, in the executive as well as the parliamentary branch, is very, very important. And I think it will have a terrifically positive

impact that will begin, I think, today, and go forward.

President's Analogy

Mr. Grimason. Mr. President, you recently and rather famously described the two sides here as like drunks in a bar who always have to have one more round. A lot of people—you got some criticism, but a lot of people here said you were actually right to draw that analogy. Are these people, in your view, ready to go on the Government wagon?

The President. Yes, I think they are. I did get a lot of criticism, and I probably deserved some of it, because I didn't mean to be making an ethnic slur. Though what I pointed out is, when people have deeply ingrained habits, you know, even if they're bad habits, they're hard to let go of, because you're sort of leaping out into the unknown, and it's a little frightening. And so maybe I should have used a different analogy, but I think that point, the general point, is quite valid.

And they're in the Government now, and they're in there together, which means—they're all saying, "Okay we let go a little." They let go of something to come together. And I think that is, to me, an enormously positive sign.

And so I think that, if the analogy was good at one time, it's less good today than it was, just because they've stood up a government together.

Legacy of Peace Initiatives

Mr. Little. Mr. President, you've been leader of the free world, some would say, in very turbulent times. And you have confronted issues of vital importance to America's national interest. When they write the history books, where does Northern Ireland figure in your legacy?

The President. Well, first of all, I think the credit goes primarily to the people and the leaders of Northern Ireland and to the leaders of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland and, obviously, to George Mitchell for the role he played.

But I do think that the interest that the United States has had in this and the plain commitment we've had to it during my Presidency has made some difference. I hope it has. And all I can tell you is that to me, I

think it's very important. And I think it has enormous significance beyond the borders of the six counties and the Republic. I think the significance around the world is huge.

For example, I just met with the leaders of all the parties in Kosovo. I was in Kosovo, you know, and it's a place that the United States and Great Britain, frankly, took the lead in getting our NATO Allies together to stop a horrible example of ethnic and religious hatred and cleansing. And we had all these parties back together, and their wounds are much fresher and of a great magnitude.

And I could talk to them about the Irish peace process. And I could look them in the eye and say, "You know, you can do this, too. And sooner or later, you're going to have to do it. So you ought to do it."

We're entering a very critical phase of the Middle East peace process, where extremely difficult decisions have to be made, that are not the same as the kind of decisions that have to be made here. But it gives courage to the proponents of peace in a place like the Middle East to know that the Troubles could be laid down, and people could be reconciled and work together.

So you know, to me it's a big part of the legacy of all the peacemakers of the world in this decade who were involved in it, and I am very proud and honored that I had a chance to be a part of it.

Impact of Irish Peace Process

Mr. Grimason. Mr. President, could I ask you, the importance of the Northern Ireland peace process, could it be said that it will be the first really truly—if it works, the first really truly genuine conflict resolution in the sense that neither side will have won? Frequently, we have things ending with people winning or with a transference of power. Will it have that effect in a world sense?

The President. Yes, except I would use a different word. I think you can say that in many ways it is the first true conflict resolution. But instead of saying neither side won, I would say both sides won. And I think that if they didn't think they were winning, they would not have done this.

And I think when you look at the fact that the biggest problem in the world today are these conflicts over racial, ethnic, and reli-

gious differences sweeping the world, the fact that you have set a model here for reconciliation in what has often been a violent and always been a deeply historically embedded struggle, is a profound significance, because this element of people fearing and distrusting and then hating and dehumanizing those who are different from them is at the heart of the problem in the Middle East, the problems in the Balkans, the tribal wars in Africa. You just see it all over the world.

And so I think the people of Northern Ireland and their friends in the Irish Republic, who voted for the necessary changes to implement the Good Friday accord, and in Great Britain—they should know that what they have done is given enormous support and heart to people who are still struggling in very difficult circumstances everywhere in the world. It's just—I can't tell you how important I think it is.

You should have seen the look on the people's faces in Kosovo, the party leaders, who are still so fresh from their struggles, when I just was, in effect, hammering them with the decisions that the people and the leaders in Northern Ireland had made and the kind of accommodation that they had made to one another and how sooner or later people who shared the same piece of land had to work through—not necessarily identical decisions but the same sorts of decisions in the same sort of way. So it is a matter of truly historic proportions—not because nobody won, but because everybody won.

End of Ireland's Claim on Ulster

Mr. Little. Sir, today the Irish Republic did give up a very tangible expression of its identity, as it says, its right to have control over those six counties in Northern Ireland. Some Republicans will say they've given up a birthright today. What do you say to them?

The President. I would say to them, they gave up something quite significant, but they gave it up to the principle of democracy, of majority rule—the principle of consent, in the words that you have used there—and that in return they got not only peace but the chance for guaranteed representation, a guaranteed voice in their own affairs immediately, and a guaranteed role in shaping their children's future.

So I think the Irish Republic did a noble thing here. And they ennobled the people who agree with them and who still support the concept of a united Ireland, because they gave them the only chance they could ever have to achieve their dreams, and even more importantly, they gave them the only chance they could have to have a full life along the way.

The principle of consent and shared decisionmaking and guaranteed representation and now a renewed focus on the real challenges that real people face every day—I think it was a fine bargain, and a noble one.

Mr. Little. Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. Grimson. Mr. President, thank you very much. We hope you are here soon.

The President. Thank you.

Mr. Little. Maybe for the turning on of the Christmas lights, we'll be there. [*Laughter*]

The President. You know, if it were up to me, I'd come once every two weeks. [*Laughter*]

Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 10:55 a.m. from the supervisor's office at the King's County International Airport at Boeing Field. In his remarks, the President referred to former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the Multiparty talks in Northern Ireland; Prime Minister John Bruton of Ireland; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Gen. John de Chastelain, Canadian Defense Forces, chair, Independent International Commission on Decommissioning; Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble; Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams; John Hume and Seamus Mallon, members, Social Democratic and Labor Party. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks at a Dinner Honoring Mayor Edward Rendell in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

December 2, 1999

Thank you so much. Thank you, David, Bill, Mr. Mayor, ladies and gentlemen. It's a great honor for me to be here tonight. You know, I'm preparing for what it will be like a year from now when I am just a member of the Senate spouses club—[*laughter*]—when I have to know my place more. And

I thought that there could be no better preparation than to come be the warm-up act for Ed Rendell tonight. [*Laughter*]

Let me say, in all seriousness, I am profoundly honored to be here. I'll never forget the first time I met Mayor Rendell here in Philadelphia in 1992 when I was running for President. And we were walking down the streets of a neighborhood where he had an anti-crime program going. And we shot a few baskets. We made very few, but we shot more. [*Laughter*]

And I thought that this—I have met a kindred spirit, because not only did we agree on so many of the same philosophies on crime, on welfare, on the economy, but we agreed on how public life should be conducted. I have thought about it so many times since, but I got into the political race for President in 1991 at a time when not just Philadelphia but the whole country was facing economic distress and social division, political drift, and then kind of the whole discrediting of the enterprise of government.

And I was really frustrated, as the Governor of what my distinguished predecessor used to refer to as a—of a small Southern State, when I would see all these people in Washington just sort of throwing brickbats at each other and, you know, struggling to get their 15 seconds on the evening news, which they know they could always get if they repeated the same thing over and over again and made sure there was a real wedge dividing the American people in all kinds of ways.

And it struck me that if we ran our business life or our family lives or our personal lives the way we were running our national political lives, the country would just run off the tracks entirely. And I was determined to try to go to the American people with a unifying theory of how we ought to do our common work, to create opportunity for everybody responsible enough to work for it, to build a community of all Americans amidst all the differences among us, and mostly, to get to work on our common challenges. And I went to Philadelphia.

I had no idea how I'd do here or whether I would be embraced here, but I liked it, and I liked Ed Rendell, and I knew that he was committed to turning this city around and to moving it forward. And we're walking