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6th July, 1970

Text of Press Conference given by Dr. Patrick J. Hillery T.D. Minister for External Affairs, at the Department of External Affairs, Dublin on 6th July, 1970.

This morning the Taoiseach asked me for the purpose of relaxing tension in the North of Ireland, which has been added to greatly by the feeling amongst certain people there - certain large sections of the community - that they were isolated, to visit the North of Ireland and to visit the Falls Road and I did that this afternoon. I was in the Falls Road and I met people there and saw what had happened and the consequences of what happened and talked to people who were not public representatives - those who had survived the week-end. Also because of our grave apprehension about the proposed parades next week-end, the Taoiseach asked me to ensure that every possible diplomatic initiative is taken to make our views known and to try to influence those responsible to stop certain parades.

To-day's activities included requesting the Ambassadors from all the countries which are accredited here and which are friendly to our country and to Britain to come here to be told of our apprehensions and of the sound reasons we feel exist for not having the provocative parades in the North of Ireland next week-end. In my absence in the North of Ireland the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs has been delivering the Government's message to the Ambassadors concerned.

I would be prepared to answer questions. At the same time I work on the basis of instructions from the Taoiseach to continue our policy of not doing anything or saying anything which would exacerbate the situation in the north-eastern part of our country.

Q: Did you meet any official representatives of the Stormont or British Governments in Belfast?

Dr. Hillery: No.

Q: Did the authorities there know you were coming up?

Dr. Hillery: No, unless they have some special intelligence, they didn't know.

Q: Well did you have to cross military lines to get there?

Dr. Hillery: I don't know. I crossed the Border. I passed many military (not lines) but military jeeps, military with guns at the ready, but I hadn't any problem about movement.

Q: What was your impression of the situation in the Falls Road area?

Dr. Hillery: My impressions of the people were that they had a sudden, unexpected and to them quite unwarranted visitation from the British army and I am afraid they don't regard the British army as any longer their friends and protectors. I am speaking now for the number I met.

Q: How many did you meet?

Dr. Hillery: I didn't count them. Not an awful lot, the place was not crowded.

Q: What policies or initiatives do the Eire Government propose to take to assist in uniting the national territory?

Dr. Hillery: Our policy has been based on the knowledge that reunion of the national territory is a reunion of the people living in the territory. We would not impose any plan on any section of the community and we have taken every action to show that we would not force a reunification or bring about in reverse in a unified country the situation which exists - the abnormal situation which exists - in the North of Ireland.

Q: Who accompanied you during the visit?

Dr. Hillery: An official from the Department of External Affairs.

Q: (by Mr. Douglas Gageby Editor, Irish Times). Minister, is this your first visit to Belfast?

Dr. Hillery: No. I know your attitude but its not. I think that Mr. Sagebay is quite right that we should have had much more frequent visits to the people in the North and to Belfast. I found myself totally in sympathy and totally in understanding with the people I met there and as I said last year in August when I was speaking to members of the British Government obviously looking at them they are Irish people not anything else so I take your point that I haven't been there often enough.

Q: Can you give any indication of who you met or the type of people you met?

Dr. Hillery: I think there are people living in the community who are not, if you like, public representatives and perhaps have to continue living there and would better not be named. They are people who represent a variety of views in the minority. When I speak of the minority that is as distinct from the governing majority.

Q: Were you asked for your support?

Dr. Hillery: We were frequently asked for this, but most of the people I met know that what they want from us is no gestures but intense political diplomatic activity with an attempt to form a long-term policy for the final solution of all the troubles they have up there and will have until we have reunification of the country.

Q: Is there any question at this time of approaching the United Nations?

Dr. Hillery: We have made no decision. We have listed the possible approaches which could be made in various committees of the United Nations. These have been made available at the request of the Taoiseach but there has been no decision to take any action at this time.

Q: Did you hear ^{any} Interference on tape ^{at} at the U.N.?

Dr. Hillery: I was travelling at that time but I gathered he spoke of human rights; this is open all the time you see. In fact I think the last speech I made at the U.N. did say that our main interest was for human rights and reform at that time.

Q: Do you have any indication at all on the attitudes towards the parades at the weekend? Is there a likelihood that they will be called off in view of your approach to the Ambassadors?

Dr. Hillery: I am awaiting response. The Ambassadors are as I said before Ambassadors from countries with friendly relations with both us and Great Britain. It would be quite wrong of me to assume that they would take an attitude without communicating with their Governments.

Q: How many Ambassadors were interviewed?

Dr. Hillery: I don't know how many were interviewed in my absence but we intend to interview and to explain to all Ambassadors accredited here and this will take to-morrow as well I think. I can get you a list.

Q: Did you call in the British Ambassador?

Dr. Hillery: I spoke to Mr. Evans (Counsellor at the British Embassy) myself. I think the whole idea of diplomacy has nothing to do with shouting from the roof tops, but I have made it quite clear what our thinking is at this time and asked him to make this known to his Government.

Q: Why Mr. Evans?

Dr. Hillery: The Ambassador is away at the moment. He is in London.

Q: In practical terms what do you think your visit to Belfast achieved?

Dr. Hillery: It is very hard to answer that. We want to demonstrate to the people that we are there, that they are not isolated. I had already been fully informed by people from there and as the Taoiseach said last night he has very full information and has no intention of acting without full information. He did say to me this morning "make sure that you have a good look at the place yourself so that you can guarantee to me that the information we are getting is clear and accurate".

Q: Do you want the parades banned?

Dr. Hillery: Well it would be what we would seek, yes, in sensitive areas.

Q: What would your attitude be to counter demonstrations?

Dr. Hillery: Counter to what?

Q: Counter to Northern Ireland.

Dr. Hillery: I don't understand what you mean - would we stop them - is that what you mean?

Q: Would you take any preventive action?

Dr. Hillery: No I don't think so. The thing is to protect lives and property.

Q: How long altogether did you stay in the Falls Area.

Dr. Hillery: I didn't time it, I suppose about an hour and a half.

Q: Were you surprised by anything you saw?

Dr. Hillery: Well not after reading the very adequate descriptions in the newspapers, but it did bring to life what I had been told as a child happened; you know you saw the army in charge whether they liked to be or not, armed men the soldiers with guns ever ready. You saw the damage done not alone last week-end but last August, the relics of that damage. I would much prefer if it wasn't there to be seen.

Q: Did people ask for help?

Dr. Hillery: They didn't ask for any material aid, I mean in the line of food or that kind of thing, they seemed to be fully supplied that way.

Q: Are the field hospitals still operating?

Dr. Hillery: There are centres there still and we will help anybody that needs help.

Q: Is there any direct approach by either the Taoiseach or yourself to the British Government at this stage?

Dr. Hillery: Yes I expect to be in London on Wednesday.

Q: Who are you going to meet?

Dr. Hillery: I have arranged to meet Mr. Barber and after that I presume he will speak with all the authority necessary for a spokesman of the British Government in this situation but it may be that there will be other people present.

Q: Will you be embarrassed?

Dr. Hillery: Well it would be an awful thing if we had to regard a visit by me to Northern Ireland as something to be embarrassed about. After all they come to the Horse Show and we say nothing.

Q: Do you see this situation as a Protestant/Catholic confrontation.

Dr. Hillery: I'd say there is very little Christianity involved if that is what you mean. The division lines may be on religious grounds but they are not fighting about religion.

Q: Are you meeting Mr. Paddy Kennedy M.P., this evening?

Dr. Hillery: Well he is to meet me after I meet you; would you like him to come in after?

Q: Will the President speak on this crisis?

Dr. Hillery: I wouldn't like to have people think that we were in a state of irremediable crisis. I think what we have to do now is to establish fully that the law of reason should be accepted by all concerned. The President's duties are definitely laid down in the constitution and at this time I don't think there is a particular role for him to play in this.

Q: Did you meet Protestants? or I.R.A. men?

Dr. Hillery: I didn't ask people about their religion or their organisation. I didn't meet them by appointment; in fact nobody knew I was there and in fact nobody knew I was back until a few minutes ago. I didn't attempt to meet a wide cross section of leaders of groups. The people I met I met by chance.

Q: Did anyone recognise you?

Dr. Hillery: I was recognised by a few people.

Q: Did they show any surprise?

Dr. Hillery: No. I said I was interested in finding out what was going on.

Q: They didn't say any words, of recognition?

Dr. Hillery: A few people who recognised me addressed me by name. I didn't feel it necessary to introduce myself to the individual people I spoke to in doorways, I was more interested in finding out what they felt about what was going on rather than what they would like to tell the Minister for External Affairs.

Q: Did you meet Paddy Devlin?

Dr. Hillery: Not Mr. Devlin. Mr. Kennedy, I was to meet him. I had to postpone my appointment with him but I will be meeting him soon.

Q: What was your reaction to the Falls Road Curfew?

Dr. Hillery: You could take it my first reaction on hearing of the raid in the Falls was that here was a raid in an area easily identified as nationalist in which nothing has happened since last August not even a touch of what people describe as hooliganism. Last August they had been attacked by armed mobs when they were undefended and since then they haven't done anything to warrant any attention from the forces of law and order who ever they may be. The type of armoury found is about 105 guns for 50,000 people, one for every 500, outdated guns, nothing at all to make anybody fear for the State. Here they are now suddenly disarmed and my feeling is if people are going to be suddenly disarmed in a part of the city in which nothing has happened since last August and the last thing which happened was an attack by armed mobs on themselves then I think that the British Government will have to balance that. They will have to balance that by making sure that those who attacked them before and those who might attack them again are disarmed too.

Q: Are you suggesting that the Shankhill Road should also have been curfewed?

Dr. Hillery: Yes. the Falls Road action should have been balanced quickly by a similar action in relation to other people, other areas, and should be followed up almost immediately by full reassurances in so far as they can be given, of protection for the people and for the reforms which were guaranteed last year.

Are you hopeful that certain parades will be banned?

Dr. Hillery: Expressions of hope - you know they mean nothing until you hear from the people responsible. I would like to hope it. I must say it is causing great apprehension to the Taoiseach that these parades are going on.

Q: What will you do if they are not banned?

Dr. Hillery: How do you mean? Do we take some awful action? This is a test of democracy, it is a test of the democratic people, the faith of people in promises made.

Q: Do you think Unionists will be angered by your visit to the Falls Road?

Dr. Hillery: Oh I suppose from their point of view and from the point of view of the Stormont Government it would be wiser if we never said or did anything at all but from our point of view it is much wiser to stop bloodshed death in the North of Ireland than it is to give peace of mind to those who won't take responsible action.

Q: What was your purpose in going there?

Dr. Hillery: As I started off I said the Taoiseach asked me to go to reduce tension caused by recent events and caused by the feeling of people there that they are isolated.

Q: What is your message to the people of the Falls Road?

Dr. Hillery: Certainly I would like them to know that there is solidarity here and also I would like them to know that there will be an approach by me direct to the British Government on their behalf.

Q: Were you recognised crossing the border?

Dr. Hillery: I don't know whether I was noticed going there or not but certainly there was no prior information from here.

Q: What do you think of the present status of reforms?

Dr. Hillery: This is something that we have been dealing with ever since the promise of the reforms. The man in the street in the North sees no reforms. The vote for every man is there but he won't be able to use it until 1972. The R.U.C. have been disarmed but there is talk of rearming them again; the Special Powers Acts are there and you can be arrested and afterwards told that what you were doing was an offence even if was not an offence before you did it you can also be detained indefinitely without trial. The Local Government reforms have not taken place and the Central Housing Executives has not been created. So the man in the street does not see the reforms.

Q: I understand you were to be on Panorama programme to-night.

Dr. Hillery: I was. I recorded it this morning.

6th July 1970

Text of interview with the Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Patrick J. Hillery T.D., broadcast on BBC TV programme "Panorama" on 6th July, 1970 (Interviewer - Andrew Mullican)

Q: Minister, what is your assessment of what happened in Belfast over these past two week-ends?

Dr. Hillery: Last week-end the Falls area, which had been savagely attacked by armed mobs last year led by B Specials and police, burnt out, people killed, were suddenly, stunningly unexpectedly raided by British Army. There hasn't been anything at all even hooliganism in the Falls since last year, and this raid took place and we find they were disarmed totally and left naked to their opponents again this year. Now when I say disarmed, what was found was, I think 105 guns, out-dated guns, that's one for every 500 people in the area. Compared with that - 30 B Specials would have had that many guns and modern ones, so you can take it that these arms were there because of last year's savage attack on them, they are to protect themselves now that they are no longer protected.

Q: But wasn't that in a sense a reprisal against the shooting of Protestants the previous week-end?

Dr. Hillery: I don't know that the British Army would be entitled to take reprisals for shooting at anybody, certainly there was no action in the Falls road the previous week-end. The people killed the previous week-end were killed in the vicinity of St. Matthew's Catholic Church, and they were Protestants and the sextons house was burned. One wonders what they were doing at a Catholic church, or near it. But I certainly don't believe the British Army would be expected to take reprisals in a quiet area for that.

Q: Now your Government has said that to allow provocative parades to take place in the present climate is wholly indefensible. Now would you care to comment on that?

Dr. Hillery: Well three times in 18 months we have warned the British Government of the effect of having these provocative parades, because they are provocative by the dominating people - they are - and three times we were right, twice there was death and bloodshed, and I think this time the British Government must listen to us. We've again warned them that on the 13th of July if the parades are not - some of them banned, some derouted - we have great apprehension about what will happen.

Q: What do you think of the progress of reform in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Hillery: The man-in-the-street doesn't see any progress. There have been the disbanding of the B Specials and the disarming of the police; but, again, Sir Arthur Young says that may rearm the police at this stage; there will be the vote for everybody - when the voting time comes around, which is 1972. But the real discrimination - the Special Powers Act, which means that you can be arrested on anything which can be declared to be an offence after you're arrested. You can be detained indefinitely without being charged. In the question of jobs, even the legislation for local authority jobs or housing - there's no sign of action there. The man-in-the-street sees no reform, all he sees is exactly the opposite.

Q: Given a worsening of the position of Northern conditions will you be able to continue a non-intervention moderate policy?

Dr. Hillery: This is-has been-the policy of our governments through the years, since the very foundation of this State, that we do not attac these people, they are our people. Certainly what we have done so far is regarded as intervention. From the beginning I thought that the British Government should have observers. I think we must have them too in the case of these hostages in the Falls road, I think the press - the world press should be there. We wanted British observers in Derry for the Apprentice Boys' parade, they didn't think it was necessary. We thought later we should have U.N. observers. I went to the British Government several times. They thought I was talking about something which was within their competence only. I took the matter to the U.N. to the Security Council, and again I think the British Government's attitude was, this is intervention. So we have been intervening in the situation because we regard these as our people - all the people of Northern Ireland as our people.

Q: Do you feel that the situation has in any way changed as a result of the Conservative victory?

Dr. Hillery: The attitude of some of the people in the minority - many of the people in the minority - is one of apprehension now. They had the Downing street guarantees, they had the guarantees repeated by Lord Caradon at the U.N., when I was there, they felt that even though the tempo was slow that these reforms would come. They also feel that they would not be attacked by the forces of law and order, which are now represented by the British Army.

I'm afraid their faith in the Conservative Government is not as much as it would be in others, because of the link with the Ulster Unionists.

Q: There does appear to have been a revival of I.R.A. activity and there is a danger, I think, that Northern Catholics might turn to them in a crisis. What do you think about that?

Dr. Hillery: I said yesterday on the radio that nobody is entitled to take any action based on the assumption that our method has failed. we're doing it the way it can be effective and certainly I think that the British Government - the British people - will have to soon and adequately reassure the minority in the North that they're not being exposed to their enemies; that they're not being attacked by the forces of law and order.

Q: Now that the case against Mr. Blaney has been dismissed isn't Mr. Lynch's leadership in greater danger than ever - especially in the light of the Northern problems?

Dr. Hillery: I don't think so. I think that he is very well established. He is in leadership at a terribly difficult time for this country, because of the way the North has been handled,. If it were being handled in a modern way by a modern Government then Mr. Lynch would have no problems of leadership. But at this time any leader would have a very rough ride in this part of the country.

Q: Lord O'Neill suggested that if British troops leave the North they would leave civil war behind them. Now what do you think of that assessment?

Dr. Hillery: I think that what I said the first day, I think it was to Lord Chalfont, put your troops in there, disarm those who have a police State there. Disarm the lot, and then take away your troops and we can have a peaceful Ireland. But what has been done is to disarm those who have brought in these ancient weapons to protect themselves

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against those whose arms have not been searched for at all.

Q: Mr. Chichester-Clark excludes the possibility of tri-partite talks. And he said that he had no truck with any talks on the changing of Ulster's relationship with the U.K. What do you feel about that?

Dr. Hillery: You'll always find trouble in Ireland until we have our final reunification - whatever form it takes. We're quite prepared to examine any type of reunification; we do not want to impose any one culture on another. Certainly he's totally wrong to think that in the modern world you can with force of arms and force of British money keep a State which is quite unnatural. and depends on tyranny at times.

Q: Do you have a final word to say?

Dr. Hillery: I would hope the British public would help in this case to make sure that the behaviour in the North of Ireland is not that of 1960. Remember that this is 1970, and the form of being British that they **boast** about in the North is not the **type** of being British that the normal man in the street in England would want, nor in Scotland or Wales.