

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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S. 186548

Transcript of Press Conference given by the Taoiseach, Mr. John Lynch T.D., after his meeting with the British Prime Minister, Mr. Edward Heath M.P., at Chequers on 6th and 7th September, 1971.

Question: Taoiseach, is there any progress on the political rather than the military alternatives to a solution?

Answer: We discussed the possibility of political initiatives today, Mr. Heath and I, and indeed, yesterday as well. I tried to impress upon him that a military solution, as seems now to be the one sought, would not be adequate to the situation - that political means would have to be pursued, would have to be followed in order to, first of all, cure the present situation and bring about the peace and, I hope, progress towards the reunification of the country. But might I add that Mr. Heath said that what was happening in relation to the reforms were in fact political initiatives. But he did suggest one political initiative himself that he proposed to recommend and that would be that Mr. Maudling, the Home Secretary, would meet with representatives - elected Opposition representatives in the North, and with other representatives of the population there - He mentioned Church representatives, trade union representatives as well as representatives of the Stormont Government itself, invite them to a meeting over which he would chair, and the purpose of the meeting would be to see how the minority could participate more in the administration. I told Mr. Heath that I thought that a suggestion I had put to him already - i.e. a quadri-partite meeting at which I or my representative would be included, would be better suited to achieve the purpose he had in mind. He did not agree with that because he did not agree with my right to be involved in such talks and in such discussions. On the other hand, I maintained my right that I was entitled because I was the elected head of the Government of Ireland. I represented the great mass opinion of the Irish people in so far as the reunification of the country was concerned

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I adhered to that opinion, but Mr. Heath did not agree with me. So Mr. Heath, as he is perfectly entitled to do, is free to go ahead with his initiative, and that would initially be, I suppose, Mr. Maudling's initiative in trying to arrange these meetings.

Q. Has a date been fixed for this meeting?

A. No. Mr. Heath himself will probably be making an announcement about this, if he already has not done so. He told me he would be doing this and I take it that the first steps to be taken will be by Mr. Maudling, making contact with the interests that he hopes to talk to.

Q. Now that Mr. Heath has turned down your suggestion, what do you see as your role and the role of your Government in the future?

A. Well, my role is that I want, and I insist on a right to be involved in any political changes that are likely to take place in the North of Ireland. I cannot force my way in, but nevertheless, I have agreed with Mr. Heath that the meeting which has now been postponed, but which this meeting has not replaced, the meeting in October, will take place later in the year. That in the meantime we two will keep in touch and that if the occasion arises, if the necessity arises to meet earlier than the meeting ~~in~~ whenever it will be, about November, that we are free to get in touch with each other and have further discussions on the situation.

Q. Does that mean that Mr. Heath has in fact given you some sort of guarantee, if not participation in a full scale meeting or at least consultation?

A. No, I have not sought a guarantee or he has not given me any concession or would I seek it or accept it as a concession. But what we have decided was that he would not agree to my proposition of quadripartite talks. He has decided to go ahead with his initiative but irrespective of that I am going to meet Mr. Heath again later in the year and in the meantime if the occasion arises, that is apart altogether from whatever political initiative Mr. Heath will take to Mr. Maudling.

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Q. Were you personally pleased with the outcome of the talks?

A. Well naturally I was not happy when my suggestion of quadripartite talks was not accepted, but nevertheless it would be wrong to say that I was unhappy with the outcome of the talks because I had an opportunity over these several hours of hearing Mr. Heath's point of view and he had the opportunity of hearing mine. I think I put him completely into the picture, he knows exactly what our attitude is towards the position in NI. The attitude being that this is an unnatural situation. The border was imposed 50 years ago in an attempt to democratise it on the lines of democracy in the UK to impose a parliamentary system on it as operates in Westminster. But that was not possible in the kind of community that existed where by reason of the polarisation of the communities only one side will be permanently in Government. I said that was not a healthy democracy, that a Government who saw no fear of being dislodged could not be a good government. Indeed it has turned out to be so, and therefore, I felt that some other means, some other structure of government, as has been devised in other countries where there had been racial, religious, linguistic differences, in fact all three in some cases e.g. Switzerland, places like the Lebanon and Belgium, they have devised forms of government suited to the right kind of community that exists there and I believe that the Stormont Government as a start at least should be reconstructed on these lines.

Q. Mr. Lynch, do you think that Mr. Heath's initiative, whatever it is going to be is going to contribute materially to the solution of the problem?

A. Well, I don't like to comment on this initiative. Mr. Heath has taken that. I told him that what I suggested would be better, and I would not like in any way to dampen prospects that will bring about a peaceful situation in the North immediately. However, it is a matter for those whom he will invite to take part

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in this meeting. The elected minority representatives ~~and~~ and those other interests, I do not know whether they will come along or not and it is a matter for them, and I have my own views about that as to whether they will or not and I have my own views as to the likely outcome of such a meeting, but I will say this, that what I propose would be better conducive to achieving the results that he wants.

Q. Can we talk about the ^{results} ~~discussion~~ ^{of} your meeting here with Mr. Heath in the last few days. Do you believe it will have any impact on the situation in the North?

A. I believe it will, maybe not an immediate impact because while I met Mr. Heath before I think he has learned more since then, that was last October at the United Nations Anniversary meeting. He has learned much more since then about the situation in NI and to give Mr. Heath his due, he acknowledges the right of people in Ireland and in Northern Ireland to seek reunification, but he says that unless, and until, the majority agree in the North of Ireland to a reunification of the country then he would not accept it. I think that is a very legitimate aspect or attitude from his point of view.

Q. Did Mr. Heath press you at all on the question of what the Republic of Ireland can do to deal with the terrorists?

A. Well, this word terrorist has been used more and more in the British Press. There are IRA activities and they are mainly activities North of the border. There are no terrorist activities south of the border. We have had one or two bombings that have been isolated - bombings of one of the electricity installations and a transformer. But as far as a specific request in relation to any activity south of the border, Mr. Heath made none as such. But I impressed upon Mr. Heath that as far as we were concerned, as far as our government was concerned, we were taking all possible steps to deal with the IRA within our own territory, insofar as our resources, manpower and legal system can operate in that direction.

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Q. When are you proposing constitutional reforms in the South?

A. I have said on a number of occasions that there are laws on our statute books including the Articles in our Constitution that may give offence to the Northern majority if they form part of an all-Ireland community. I have said that we are prepared to give thought to these articles and these legislative enactments to see in what way we could arrange them so as to satisfy all points of view. I do not want to be very specific on this because the point has not yet come when we feel we can examine these things to any useful purpose. But certainly my Government and the people that I represent would be willing to examine all these matters to see in what way we can make it possible for the Northern majority to live in peace with us.

Q. What concessions to the North can you make that might relieve the present situation?

A. Any concession to the North that might relieve the present situation.....

Q. As regards detainees, internees

A. No. I told Mr. Heath that I thought that internment as it was now applied worsened the situation. That has been a fact when I heard it was about to be applied - I only got an hour's notice or something - I told the British Government then that I thought it was a mistake - that it would further polarise the people, would set them further apart - the two communities - that I thought there would be increased violence and that in fact has now been the case. I felt that having been a wrong done, that that wrong ought to be remedied. However, Mr. Heath gave me no indication that any particular action in easement of the situation was about to be taken.

Q. Of possible steps to deal with the IRA, would this include perhaps the arrest of self-confessed IRA leaders who happened to be in the Republic of Ireland. I am thinking particularly of Mr. Cahill who will be returning to Dublin.

A. Mr. Cahill has not committed a crime within our territory. There are what you call self-confessed, I would say people who admit they are members of the IRA within our territory,

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and many of them have been prosecuted for offences on every occasion in which we can discover that they have committed offences and at the present time, there is a prosecution pending against the leader of one wing of the IRA in Ireland. He is on remand at the present time, and on all occasions in which we see offences committed, I can assure you that my Government take action and take action as effectively as we can within the law.

Q. Is there any question of you taking action against Mr. Cahill at the request of the British Government?

A. No, any action we take in respect of these people will be taken at our own behest and because we feel the situation within our own territory demands it. We certainly will not take any action at the request of the British Government. We will do it if we think it is right.

Q. Are you saying that apart from everybody understanding each others mind better, nothing has come out of these discussions which will help the situation?

A. Well I cannot say that anything positive has been contributed to that in a way that action can be taken now as between the two of us - between the British Prime Minister and myself. I have indicated that he proposes to take a certain line of action. I believe that if he finds that that kind of action is not bringing results that he wants, he might then consider the proposal that I have made - this quadripartite proposal - even though, as of now he does not acknowledge my right to be involved.

Q. Who do you suggest should take place in the quadripartite talks?

A. I suggest the representatives of the minority and of the majority in Northern Ireland, representatives of my Government and representatives of the United Kingdom Government. These are, I believe, the relevant interested parties.

Q. There have been references recently that the imposition of British troops in Northern Ireland is putting Britain in the same position as the U.S. in Viet-Nam - the escalation of violence, foreign war and never getting out of the quagmire. Did you talk to Mr. Heath about this. What are your views about the continuance of British troops in Northern Ireland?

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Well, my view is that the sooner we can bring about a situation in which these troops are no longer necessary in the North of Ireland, the better. And I think Mr. Heath will agree with me in this respect. The unfortunate position is that when these troops - well they have always been there to a limited extent since 1920, since partition was imposed - but they have been there in increasing numbers since August 1969, and originally they were welcomed because the population there - the minority population - saw in the reinforced British troops helpers from the very partisan police forces that then existed - and I am not making any claims that cannot be well founded in that, because a British report itself has established that these were partisan forces. Unfortunately, since then, the activities of the British Army, the manner in which they have been deployed - its not the individual soldiers fault in many respects, in that they have been ordered to take up arms from one side and not from the other, has given the impression, and I think, with some justification to the minority that the British forces are now against them, and that they are only bolstering up this majority situation - bolstering up the power and privileged situation that the majority people in the Government in Stormont have held for 50 years without a break.

Q. Are you expressing the view of the people up there?

A. I think I am expressing the view of the people up there.

Q. What do you think about it?

A. I think, unfortunately, that in the situation you have in the North of Ireland, you have a Government that cannot be defeated. The only threat to the leaders of that Government is ~~the only~~ the backroom boys, the Orange Order who can change leadership if they like, as they have done. But they do not change policies, and now the minority see, and I think I see myself, and I interpret the minority as seeing the British Army being there to maintain this order - to maintain their Government in power. They have become disillusioned, they feel completely frustrated. I know that, because I have met their elected leaders - they have come to see me - 17 out of 19 of them.

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Q. Taoiseach, did you get any explicit reaction from Mr. Heath about your proposal for a UN patrol on the border, and about such a proposal as the idea of proportional representation being introduced.

A. Well, let me take the last one first. There is a commission sitting, the Crowther Commission, which apparently will consider PR amongst others - not in relation only to the North of Ireland, but to the rest of the United Kingdom. I have told Mr. Heath that PR, if it is introduced, if the Crowther Commission recommends it, or whether it does or not if it is introduced, that it is not going to help in the situation that exists in the North of Ireland. PR is important where people can have a choice of candidates, where they have a choice of parties, where people can make up their minds on their interpretation of policies, social, economic and otherwise. In the situation which exists in the North of Ireland, where you have two communities, there would not be any cross-voting, if there would be to such a limited extent - that PR will make little if any contribution to the present situation. With regard to the second part of your question, or rather the first part of your question, the border patrol. Again, I have had so many interviews, I forget if I said this here. It has been alleged against us, against our security forces along the border. We have both police and army patrols - they act in consultation and cooperation with each other. We believe that they are effective. There is against them that they or we, the Government, are turning a blind eye to large-scale illegal activities across the border. That is completely unfounded insofar as we can detect. And it is not always possible to detect every movement across that border because it is through wild country. So far as we can detect through our security forces, we put down these illegal activities. But in order to establish my bona fides, my belief in what I am saying, I did offer, publicly, and because a newspaper commentator had already referred to it, and more recently to Mr. Heath, the possibility of joint action on our part, on the part of both governments, to have a UN Border patrol along the Northern Ireland Border. However, it did not seem to find favour with Mr. Heath.

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- Q. Taoiseach, were you given any indication of what the agenda might be if Mr. Maudling persuades both sides to talk together?
- A. No, I was given no indication except I was given an indication of the kind of structure they had in mind.
- Q. Will you encourage the minority to take part in these talks?
- A. No, I will leave that to the minority themselves. They will be in the best position to judge whether the participation they seek in administration in the North can be achieved in that way - whether the position they want to hold as the moderate leaders of the minority can be best held in that way. I think ⁱⁿ they are/the best position to judge that.
- Q. Do you still encourage the civil disobedience campaign?
- A. I have never said that I encourage civil disobedience. I did say that unless political means were employed to find a solution to the problem that I would be forced to support the passive resistance proposals of the minority leaders.
- Q. What I was trying to get at was ^{whether} ~~is~~ participation in these talks by these people would be consistent with maintaining civil disobedience. Do they keep up their campaign and still talk to Mr. Maudling?
- A. Well, I believe one of the purposes of these talks is to avoid if possible the civil disobedience campaign. That is an obvious purpose in them.
- Q. Taoiseach, if your Government is sincere in its policy, why have the Irish Government not removed those articles which are offensive to Protestants in the Republic - such as Art.44 of the Irish Constitution, the Contraception Laws, and Divorce Laws which are discriminating against Protestants in the Republic. Why have your Government not removed these laws?
- A. The reunification of Ireland is not yet at hand and there's always merit in choosing one's ground and one's time for doing things. Nevertheless, I am not going to say that the things you suggest are easily done. There are some articles of the Constitution that we will find it easy to change, but on the other hand, as far as some of them are concerned, they make no difference at the present time to any community. Some of them

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perhaps may be unpalatable to a minority within our country, but they were enacted by the people and only the people can change the constitution. But the time comes, I think it will be time enough for the Government of the day, whether it will be our Government, or another Government to decide what will be done.

Q. Is that true in the North as well. Why are the Protestants in the North free to modify their constitution and their structure of Government in a situation where you say it is politically inexpedient for you to do so.

A. I am not talking about political inexpedience. The constitutional position in the North of Ireland is not a constitution as such. It is an Act of Parliament of 1920, which has been reinforced by an Act of Parliament of 1949. That Act of 1920 divided our country into two - it cut one part of our country away from the other - and divided in such a way as to maintain a permanent majority, permanent authority, permanent power for one section of the community, and one-third of the population had been cut away from the rest of the people whom they wanted to be with. I want to say that I am not going to impose any constitutional change on the North of Ireland. I am not going to coerce the majority in the North to come in with us. I want to persuade them, I want to achieve this by peaceful means, by agreement. I think that is legitimate.

Q. But you say you will not coerce the majority in the South, but you are asking the British to coerce the majority in the North?

A. I am asking the British to be realistic. I am not legalistic in this respect. Ireland is a small country - 312 miles long by 150 miles wide. It has always been one country - one nation - one people. There have been different migrations, different points of view. But I think we are small enough and big enough to live together. I do not see any reason why it is not a legitimate desire to seek the reunification of the country that has been one for centuries and has been divided only in the last 50 years.

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Q. Do you think Mr. Heath is a realistic or legalistic man?

A. I would say he is both realistic and legalistic in this respect. I think he is being more legalistic than realistic.

Q. What proposals will go before these meetings that Mr. Maudling will organise. Are they just "What do you think about the situation in Northern Ireland" or are there issues being put before them, and what are these?

A. I have been given no indication of what these proposals are, except that in a general way - to give elected representatives of the Opposition an opportunity of greater participation in administration. I did not get, although I think I asked for some clarification of that but I did not get it.

Q. I don't suppose you were particularly surprised knowing Mr. Heath's mind in advance that your proposals for quadripartite talks were turned down. If we could look at it a little more broadly, could you give us a feeling of the talks insofar as they may have affected the hitherto deterioration in Anglo-Irish relations, whether you think it has stopped the rot or lowered the temperature, whether in fact you are reasonably happy, or whether you are going away feeling worse than when you came?

A. Well, I do not think a rot had set in. Perhaps there was a little blot on the copy book. But I think that has been erased. I think we understand each other better, and as far as we are concerned, we made no point one against the other about our recent messages between us. But I think now that he understands me better and I understand him better. I think we have established a better rapport than we had before. It has been the longest meeting that I have ever had with another Prime Minister. Therefore, for that alone, it was useful.

Q. Did you repeat to Mr. Heath the invitation you made to him on 11th July that some actual end to partition should be held out in 10 years or 20 years time.

A. Yes. What I said in July was that the kind of guarantee that the 1949 Ireland Act contained should be reformulated. Because in that Act, I think it was stated that as long as the Stormont Government did not agree with

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the reunification of the country, the British Government would accept the status quo. I said then that I thought that was giving the Northern majority a comfort - giving them a guarantee of being permanently in power, and therefore, was giving them the opportunity of being arrogant - and if not arrogant, at least unmindful of the reasonable demands of the minority in the North.

Q. You say that only people in the North of Ireland would be invited to these meetings. But people in the South, in the Republic, would be able to give their point of view as to what changes should be made in the North, in the way of consultations with, say, representatives of the Catholics in the North. Presuming that, would you give some support to the ideas of these talks?

A. Well, I think in that way, in the way you suggest, whereby I could, either through the elected representatives of the minority, or through some other suitable source convey my views to such a meeting - that could be done, certainly. But again, it is not for me to decide whether those who would be invited, more particularly the elected minority representatives are willing to go along with this idea. I am leaving it to them to make up their minds.

Q. Are you saying that in the whole of these two days, Mr. Heath gave no indication whatever of the kind of changes in Northern Ireland he would like to see.

A. No. He did not talk about any specific changes. He did say that within a democratic system that democracy ought to work towards these changes. But I tried to point out to him that this was not a normal democratic situation, because democracy does not exist as such. But he did not give me any particular indication of what changes he thought were necessary, whether he thought any were necessary for that matter. What he has said was that if it is possible for the minority representatives to get more say in administration, then he could give them the opportunity in this way.

Q. Did you raise the question of gun licences, Prime Minister?

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A. I did. There was no response. I pointed out that there were almost twice as many licensed guns in the North. In fact, there are twice as many licensed guns in the North as there are in the South, for a population of about half our population. So, in effect, the ratio is four to one. I pointed this out to Mr. Heath. I said there were licensed guns in the hands, 102,000 licensed guns and God knows how many unlicensed guns in the hands of the majority. I felt that it was important that and it was a function of the British Government to ensure that this situation should be controlled.

Q. Did Mr. Heath give any indication that he may be considering extending the powers of internment to include the UVF?

A. No, he did not.

Q.the Protestant backlash.

A. The Protestant backlash was mentioned, but again, I want to say that the Protestant backlash, if it is there, is there because it is permitted to be there by those who can control it. And those who can control it are the British Government. They could call in those 102,000 licensed guns, they could go after the unlicensed guns - as they have done against the other sections of the community. I know they will not get them all in. But at least, if the 102,000 guns were called in, they could perhaps redistribute the ones genuinely required for vermin elimination or things like that.

Q. How do you view Mr. Heath's lack of response to your request?

A. Well, when I say he did not respond, it may be that he will consider it. I don't know. He did not undertake that he would. But, I mentioned the fact to him. I thought that it ought to be considered.

Q. Prime Minister, did you get the impression that Mr. Heath was going to put any specific proposal to this conference over which the Home Secretary is going to preside, or is he just leaving it to throw up ideas?

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A. I should imagine that the latter part of your question would just about represent the position. I should imagine they would seek ideas from those people, from those who would come to the conference if it ever takes place.

Q. He does not have any proposals at all?

A. Well, if he does, he did not indicate that he had to me.

Q. Did Mr. Heath ask you to give your blessing to this Maudling meeting?

A. No. He just told me that he proposed to do this.

Q. Do you not feel that the fact that you have said today that you have your own feelings about whether people will go or not. Do you not think that this will be taken as an indication by you that you do not think that they ought to bother?

A. No, what I say is this - that my proposal is a better one. And, if there is a better of two alternatives available, well, it ought to be taken.

Q. Do you think, Mr. Lynch, that Mr. Heath could get those 102,000 guns that you were talking about without a fight?

A. There may well be opposition. I do not know. But, well, he has the forces to do it.

Q. On the question of an understanding between yourself and Mr. Heath, what else emerged?

A. Well, the confirmation of the further meeting that he proposed - i.e. the meeting for 21.22 October. That was going to be a more broadly based meeting. We were going to discuss other matters of mutual interest - for example, Common Market membership, the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement, and other matters of that nature. It was intended, as well, that other members of the Government would be involved in that further meeting. My coming to see Mr. Heath this week does not in any way replace the meeting that was planned for 21st October, but will now take place at a later date. But the other matter is, and I have said this already, that we have agreed to keep in constant touch, and at any time to come together if he and I think the occasion demands.

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Q. Were any economic matters discussed?

A. During a short lull in the conversation (laughter). Well, a little lapse from the talk about the North of Ireland. We touched broadly on it and I gave him an indication of the legislative proposals that we would have to put through before we could have a referendum. I just explained what we would have to do in that respect and gave him the broad pattern of our preparation until such time as we can bring a referendum in. Otherwise than that, we did not discuss it to any great extent.

Q. Was there any fundamental matter of consequence on which you and Mr. Heath are agreed that you were not agreed on before? Were you able to give him any insights that he received?

A. Well, I don't know. When you talk to a man for seven or eight hours you say a lot of things. You don't know whether he knows some of the things you say already, and Mr. Heath is not a man who says "Yes, I did not hear that one before". He just listens and makes his own observations. I don't know whether I told him anything more; I think I did. I think I gave him a better background of the situation in Ireland.

Q. Did you agree on what the immediate central issue in Northern Ireland is?

A. Well, I told him that what I thought was the immediate central issue was the restoration of the authority of the moderate elected leaders; that it was important to put them back into a position, whereby they could influence those who elected them, rather than that they should give their support or their encouragement to those who have no mandate for them - those who are using guns. I wanted to - I impressed upon Mr. Heath the importance of making sure that these moderate men, even though they have withdrawn from Stormont should be put in the position of leadership, should be put in a position of authority and of influence, so that it is to them rather than to violence that the minority population will look. I think that is very important.

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Q. Does he agree that that is the immediate settlement?

A. Well, he agreed on the importance of that, certainly.

Q. Taoiseach, despite the political deadlock, do you see any possibility of economic cooperation with Stormont - or further cooperation?

A. Well, I think that what has been arranged already is going ahead. Civil servants have been seeking out areas where we can work together and up to quite recently there was a meeting of civil servants. There may not be - it may be some time before we can have a ministerial meeting again because of the current situation, but insofar as economic cooperation has been established, it will continue and new methods will be sought all the time.

Q. In what areas?

A. Well, its very difficult to know because things change. We were talking about possible establishment of joint industrial enterprizes. I don't know how far this has got now, but, nevertheless, the suggestion still remains.

Q. After nine hours of talking, Taoiseach, do you see any more hope now of a return of peace to the North than you saw two days ago?

A. I think so. I think there is more hope. I think that people will realise that I am still in there seeking for a peaceful solution. I am still in there with, I won't say access, but, I say in there with Mr. Heath available to me and I available to him and, I think as long as that is there, there is hope for a de-escalation of the violence.

Q. When he agreed, or when he said, that this was the immediate central issue.....

A. Oh, he did not. I am not saying that. He recognised the importance of it. But I want to be quite fair to him. I might be misquoting him if I said that that was the immediate central issue. But he did give an indication that it was important, and he was going to give them a chance to do this, he said, through this committee that Mr. Maudling proposes.

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Q. How do you view Mr. Wilson's statement on the Irish situation, and, such Labour Party initiatives as this meeting involving Labour Party people from Northern Ireland and from the Republic?

A. I am prepared to talk about meetings between heads of Government. Our Opposition was involved with the British Opposition. I am not going to get in on that act.

Q. Mr. Lynch, during this entire period just now, I think you have devoted about 30 seconds to a hopeful approach to the situation. You sounded very disappointed and discouraged. Is that the way you feel?

A. Oh, on the contrary. I am not disappointed. I don't know how you can get that impression from what I have said. I am always hopeful. I am always conscious of the rights of our cause, and I believe that the situation is so bad that it must improve, even from that point of view. I still think that the fact that I am talking to Mr. Heath, that our Government's are still in consultation in this manner, and in any other ways that we consider appropriate. I think that is a hopeful sign. One could have envisaged a situation where I might have walked out from Mr. Heath. That would probably have been a cause of disappointment. It did not arise. There was never any danger of it arising.

Q. Would you use your good offices to encourage the Opposition members at Stormont to return?

A. No. There again, that is a matter entirely for themselves. They have already stated that there are three conditions under which they will cooperate again. One is the release of all internees, or otherwise bringing charges against them. Secondly, the restructuring of Stormont or its replacement by a commission, and thirdly by the quadripartite talks to which I referred. These are their conditions. It is a matter for them to impose them, or to draw away from them as they wish.

Q. Do you have any idea of the political will of the British Government in relation to the North?

A. I think that the situation has been brought much further now than it ever was because, two years ago, we were almost told it was none of our business to be talking about the

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conditions and the developments in Northern Ireland. Now, its acknowledged that at least we have an interest and it is our business and Dr. Hillery has established that through many meetings with Sir Alec Douglas-Home and his predecessor. The fact that I have come here today and yesterday for the first time to talk exclusively, even though we touched on other matters very lightly, on the position in Northern Ireland, I think is an advance on the situation and the fact that Mr. Heath has said that 'as far as I am concerned I see the reunification as a genuine political aspiration and as long as it is achieved with the consent of the majority in the North of Ireland that is all right'.

Q. What did he say?

A. He said that he saw the aspiration for the reunification of Ireland as a genuine political objective. He said that, yes. But that he is a democrat. He said that unless the majority of the people in the North of Ireland wanted it that way, they were entitled to have it otherwise.

Q. Was there any reference made at all about the Irish community in Britain? I ask this because first, its getting unpopular for the Irish in Britain, and secondly to know.....the committee formed last week to influence and instruct British liberal opinion towards your kind of choice.

A. No. There were no discussions about the Irish community in the United Kingdom.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Taoiseach has a very heavy programme. He has had a very long and I think, detailed press conference. I am sure you will appreciate that there is not very much more that he can answer at this stage.....

Could I ask one more....

One question, then.

Q. In making this somewhat remarkable statement about the genuine political aspirations, was Mr. Heath hinting at all that he might somehow text opinion anywhere about this issue?

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A. No, No. He did not. But he recognised this. If people want a reunited Ireland they were entitled to want it. It is an absolutely genuine political aspiration. But he wants that achieved within the system as it obtains in the North of Ireland.

Q. Which leaves you still outside?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Its not illegal.

A. Its not illegal, yes.

Q. When can you expect the reunification of the country?

A. I'm afraid I did not bring my crystal ball on this occasion. I wish I could give you a date - but it wont be soon.

Q. In your lifetime?

A. Well, I hope it would. I'm in my early fifties. Its possible. I can't decide how long I will live.

Q. Do you recognise the possibility of any permanent solution in Northern Ireland that does not involve reunification?

A. No. I can't see that being acceptable to the vast majority of the Irish people.