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Transcript of Press Conference given by the Taoiseach, Mr. John Lynch, T.D., after the meeting at Chequers on 27th and 28th September between the Taoiseach, the British Prime Minister and the Northern Ireland Prime Minister

Q. Taoiseach, can you clarify one point in the statement in relation to the ending of violence and internment? Can you clarify exactly what that means - were practical measures discussed to bring internment to an end?

A. We discussed internment at great length and Mr. Faulkner put forward the problems he had in relation to it. I mentioned that one of the great difficulties that lay in the way of the path of further progress, and especially to further discussions with the elected representatives of the minority, was the continued operation of internment and their insistence that internment must end; in other words, the charges must be brought or persons released before they can be involved in further discussions. That remains a big problem.

Q. The communique suggested that all three have agreed to bring an end to internment without delay. What exactly does that mean?

A. It means, as far as I am concerned, that it should be done at once if possible; but recognising their difficulties, I believe that they interpret "without delay" as meaning as quickly as ever they can.

Q. But you suggested as you came into the building that you had got nowhere on internment?

A. I said that we had discussed internment. I spoke just a minute ago about the difficulties that lie in the way of Mr. Faulkner and his colleagues about the ending of internment. They, as you know, have an advisory committee set up to examine all cases of all existing internees. The elected leaders of the minority in the North do not accept this as a satisfactory way. They believe that people should be brought before the courts in the ordinary way.

Q. Do you expect there will be an early end to internment?

A. Mr. Faulkner has said that the ending of violence is linked in his mind with the ending of internment. But I believe that the ending of internment in a way that will be satisfactory to the local minority leaders will lead very quickly to the ending of violence.

Q. Do you believe that these talks have led in any way to further the cause of a lasting peace in Northern Ireland?

A. Well, you must recognise that Mr. Faulkner and I are opposed as regards the ultimate ideas. Mr. Faulkner maintains his desire, and those whom he represents, to remain linked with the U.K. My desire remains that we should have a united Ireland. Therefore, these are ideas very far apart. It's important that people, even though they can't reconcile their ideas and their views, should continue to talk about them, and as long as we can talk then there is some hope, as the communique indicates, for a political reconciliation.

Q. Do you see any positive room for compromise as between your two positions?

A. The question of compromise doesn't arise. My conviction is that as soon as the main cause of violence disappears then that's the only way. The violence is a by-product of the division of our country and if we can try to get around bringing people together, and as I have said many, many times, we won't force anyone into a united Ireland against their will. If we can reconcile the two communities in the North with a view to ultimate reconciliation, I think then there will be no need for violence ever again on this basis in our country.

Q. Can you tell us anything about whether you are prepared to bring more control over members of the I.R.A. on the Border with Northern Ireland? Was this discussed at all?

A. This was not discussed at any great length, because I have maintained, and continue to maintain, that we have done, and are doing at the present time, everything that's in our power to control cross-Border activities. I mentioned again today that if there was any doubt about our bona-fides in this context that I would be prepared to ask for a United Nations presence as an observer force along that Border, but, of course, that would involve the British Government's consent as well. Again, there was no response to that suggestion today. But in the meantime our forces, police and military, along the Border have been strengthened. It's impossible to police a 300-mile Border, running over very rough and mountainous terrain in many cases, to police it completely effectively. But I think the presence of U.N. forces would satisfy people that we are doing everything we can, and as well

as that, may I say that, in the debate in the House of Lords last week, Lord Windlesham said, in effect, that the cross-Border activities were minimal in relation to the scale of operation now going on in the North of Ireland.

Q. How would you describe the attitude and feelings between yourself and Mr. Faulkner at this tripartite meeting?

A. I think Mr. Faulkner and I understand each other. We've known each other for some time, because we were Ministers in the same kind of Ministries together; he was Minister of Commerce in Stormont when I was Minister for Industry and Commerce in our Government. At that time we approached everything we had to discuss in a businesslike way. I think we could say the same for the manner in which we approached our task today.

Q. Could you say that your joint resolve in your communique today for the purpose of bringing internment to an end without delay would be enough to justify the Labour Party in the North joining in the process of reconciliation?

A. I think we'll have to take the attitude of the S.D.L.P., and the Nationalist Party, with whom they are associated in this into account. They have said as I indicated at the beginning that they required the freeing of internees or their being charged before ordinary courts, before they would agree to further talks. This is a difficult area, one in which I hope that some means of going forward can be found.

Q. Would you urge them now to reduce the rigidity of that decision?

A. Again I am not their spokesman. I said before that I can present the views of the minority community in the North of Ireland, but I cannot dictate, nor would I try to influence, the S.D.L.P. and the Nationalist elected leaders.

Q. Can you foresee any changes in the law that would guarantee the minority in the North a better share of normal human rights?

A. Mr. Faulkner mentioned publicly some time ago that he had proposals for the extension of Parliament. I think that referred specifically to the increase in membership in the Senate. I believe that these proposals haven't been fully formulated, and I am told that his intentions are that a paper will be published in the near future which

would set out these proposals. These, of course, would have to come before the Stormont Government, but whatever emerges from these I would hope that it would be possible for the minority leaders to achieve a meaningful status in the Senate, and if it means ultimate participation in Government that they achieve that as a right.

Q. What proportion would you regard, and Mr. Faulkner regard, as meaningful participation in the Senate.

A. Well again, perhaps in relation to the existing strength of the two communities in the North, it roughly represents 60 to 40. I mentioned some time ago when I suggested that perhaps some form of commission might be set up instead of Stormont that there might be 50-50 representation. I said that at the time because in the original Government of Ireland Act in 1920 there was provision for a Council of Ireland, in which the people in the South and the people in the North would be equally represented. It was on that basis I suggested that there might be a 50-50 sharing of power. I recognise that there is a difficulty in respect to the strength of numbers of the respective communities. It is again a matter for the elected leaders in the North of Ireland to state their case and requirements in that respect.

Q. As you say that compromise is out of the question what was really the point to the talks you've just had at Chequers?

A. There have always been situations in history ~~in~~ which ~~there~~ would appear to permit of no reconciliation, and people ultimately got down to talk about them. We have now, after 50 years, got together, the Prime Minister of the Government of Westminster, myself as Prime Minister of Ireland and Mr. Faulkner in his capacity as Premier in the North. This is the first time that this has happened in 50 years. I think it's a good thing. Nobody expected, I believe, any dramatic results from today's meeting. But the fact that we were able to discuss our relative positions and hear each other's points of view, I think that's a good thing and sooner or later I hope that my point of view will prevail.

Q. Will there be another tripartite meeting?

A. None has been arranged. As you will probably have observed in the communique, we are looking forward to the meeting which I will have with Mr. Heath which will be more broadly based. It's likely that this will perhaps be arranged first but if tripartite meetings seem to be desirable in the future, certainly I will have no objection to attending them.

Q. Did Mr. Faulkner say that he considered another tripartite meeting would be a good thing?

A. He didn't mention that specifically but I think I can say on his behalf, though I can't say very much on his behalf, that he would not object to a further tripartite meeting.

Q. Prime Minister, are you saying that if internment ends, violence will cease?

A. What I am saying is that I believe, then, the elected representatives of the minority would see their way to take part in discussions about the future political development and structural changes in Northern Ireland. In that way the people they represent would see them to be effective on their behalf. I believe that this would mean that they would have more influence in present circumstances in Northern Ireland and that whatever influence is now exercised by the I.R.A., whatever support the ordinary people in the minority give to the I.R.A., would go to the elected representatives and that they would pursue and be happy to pursue political means to gain their end.

Q. You imply, Prime Minister, that there was disagreement between you and Mr. Faulkner - Mr. Faulkner taking the view that violence must end and then he would think about internment, and your view is that internment should go and then talks, that violence would end?

A. I urged Mr. Faulkner very strongly that he ought to try to take account as much as he can of the views of the elected minority leaders. I hope he can do that. Unless he does that, the minority leaders will find it difficult to come and talk to him. I think it is necessary that they must be brought into the picture, because they do represent one-third of the population - 500,000 people, and if they can be seen to effectively represent the minority, then I think there will be a prospect of a breakthrough.

Q. The British Government and the Northern Ireland Government say they introduced internment because of the growing violence during the last few months...

A. Well, that is what they claim. But, the fact is that after internment was introduced, violence increased, and I think it is being maintained on the increased scale. So, in the circumstances, I think internment was a mistake.

Q. Mr. Lynch, are you satisfied that Mr. Faulkner is committed to bringing about minority representation in Stormont?

A. I don't know whether he is committed to that, but I do know from what I read, and from what he indicated to me today, in a general way, that he has certain structural changes in mind which would involve wider representation. I only hope that in whatever will emerge, that the minority leaders will have effective representation, and, possibly, positions in Government.

Q. What do you think was the most significant result of the two days of talks?

A. Well, in the first place, you will remember that the Downing Street Declaration of over two years ago mentioned equality of treatment irrespective of political or religious views. Today's statement includes me in the desire to resume economic, social and cultural progress, and also, includes me in the desire for a continuation of the process of political reconciliation, that we hope will be the successful outcome of our meeting and that is important. There is an acknowledgement of my role as head of the Irish Government in this process.

Q. Was the Border, as an issue, discussed at any great length at the meeting?

A. I made my position perfectly clear on the Border. I refer back to the statement. They acknowledge my position. I acknowledge theirs'. But, nevertheless, not in anyway yielding on the position I hold.

Q. Was the question of a Protestant backlash discussed at the meeting?

A. Yes, that was discussed. Nobody put forward views as to the extent of that danger. I said it was important to take it into account, and I think the British Premier and Mr. Faulkner do not want a third force outside the legal forces that at present exist.

Q. Mr. Lynch, you said earlier that if the elected representatives of the minority could be brought into these discussions about the future of the province, the influence of the IRA might lessen. Do you think the IRA will wait that long?

A. Well, that's the point. I would like to see that achieved very, very quickly. I think it would be very, very serious if for any reason, the bringing in of these elected representatives will be delayed, because it would seem to me that that would tend to gain support for the IRA. Unless and until, the elected leaders are seen to be effective, and their role is acknowledged, there is a great danger that the IRA would gain increased influence.

Q. Can you tell us anything of what you will be saying to the elected leaders of the minority?

A. I will give them a broad account of what was discussed today. I won't, naturally, talk in any great detail because if these talks are to be useful, any details that is discussed between us must be left as we agreed, between ourselves. But I will give a broad account of the attitude of Mr. Faulkner in particular, and of Mr. Heath.

Q. Did anything happen at these talks that, in your opinion, might hasten their return to participation?

A. I couldn't put my finger specifically on any single factor. But nevertheless, I think I have convinced, or at least impressed upon, both Mr. Heath and Mr. Faulkner, the need for hastening this process.

Q. would it be your wish for the Opposition Parties in the North to join in the Maudling talks?

A. I would like to see them joining talks that can bring their situation forward. Again as to whether they would come without the immediate or imminent ending of internment is a matter for them. But I think it is important that we get them talking to people. In the meantime, they can talk to me. I hope they can talk to other people

as well and that other people will be able to make the situation such as will facilitate their talking to them.

Q. You put an emphasis on a meeting between you and Mr. Heath rather than tripartite talks. Would you elaborate on that please?

A. The meeting I had three weeks ago with Mr. Heath was an advance of a meeting already arranged for the 21st and 22nd October. We said at the time that the meeting would be put back till later in the year, because we had already met. In the meantime, we have met again, with Mr. Faulkner present on this occasion. So that meeting is, in any event, still on. I wanted to ensure that there was continuity of our contact, not only in connection with Anglo-Irish relations, but because of the imminence of our application for membership of the Common Market being determined.

Q. How soon would you see further tripartite talks in the offing?

A. I couldn't put a date on that, and I don't think there is any time limit. Whether it is long or short, I would be prepared to come and attend these talks at short notice, if I saw that there was anything likely to come out of them - anything that would bring the position forward somewhat.

Q. Prime Minister, will you be returning to Dublin tonight?

A. Yes. I'll be leaving for Dublin in about an hour and a half.

Q. Did Mr. Faulkner ask you to give up support of civil disobedience?

A. I have never stated that I would give support for civil disobedience. I have never given support for civil disobedience. Civil disobedience takes the form - many forms - for example, the withholding of rents. We have that kind of thing in our part of the country as well - though not for the same reasons. Therefore, if I can't condone something in my part of the country, I couldn't condone it in another part of the country. But what I have said is that unless political initiatives were taken, rather than the military solutions that were now being applied, then I would support the passive resistance of the minority, and there has been ~~nowhere~~ one instance at least of passive resistance.

Q. Is there anything that the two Governments can do to end the civil disobedience campaign?

A. Well, the British Government, and the Stormont Government can do it very quickly if they would do something which would meet the views of the minority leaders on the internment issue. For my part, I can't dictate to, or negotiate on behalf of the minority leaders. I think it is a matter mainly for the British and Stormont Governments to facilitate the minority leaders there.

Q. Do you believe that the Irish problem is a religious problem?

A. Well, there has been a religious content in it. The fact is that these two communities have been brought together by an artificial boundary in the North of Ireland - the problem goes back much longer than the 50 years since the partition was imposed, but it's been there for three or four hundred years now. Religion has played a part in it, but I think it is mainly a political problem at the present time.

Q. Taoiseach, at the last meeting with Mr. Heath, you proposed the idea of quadripartite talks, but it appears that Mr. Heath was against the idea of quadripartite talks. Did you press it again on this occasion?

A. I didn't press it, knowing his mind on this. But I was hoping that if we can find a way whereby we can involve the minority leaders, that the possibility of quadripartite talks can then be opened.

Q. How long can the situation in Northern Ireland continue?

A. In the situation which now exists, where no immediate solution appears to be on the horizon, nobody can put a time-table on when all this will end. But I think it will only end ultimately when there is reconciliation between the two communities in the North, and between those in the North and the South of Ireland. Otherwise, I fear that what is happening now, even if it ends soon, and I hope it does, could occur again and again. It has broken out on a number of occasions in the last 50 years, and with the desire, and the right I should say, of the majority of the people of Ireland to a united Ireland, I think the situation could arise on many occasions in the future, unless and until that problem has been solved.

Q. Did you stress the importance of having the minority leaders involved in political discussion with Mr. Faulkner?

A. I tried to impress upon him the need to accommodate the minority leaders in this respect. I think this is of crucial importance, and unless they are accommodated in some way - so that they can take part in further negotiations and further discussions about political and other developments in the North, I think it would be very dangerous for everybody in the North of Ireland. I think I have impressed on him, and on Mr. Heath, for that matter, the seriousness of the situation.

Q. How did they respond?

A. Well, they did not respond in a way that one could interpret their views, except to say that they had a difficulty about internment as it was now imposed. There is a set procedure on the statute - that is the advisory committee procedure, which unfortunately, the minority elected leaders do not find satisfactory, as indeed do some of those who would be involved in the proceedings, for example, lawyers. The difficulty is that the proceedings are very limited from a legal point of view, and certainly not satisfactory from the internees point of view.