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INTERVIEW WITH THE TAOISEACH DR. GARRET FITZGERALD

AND BRIAN WALDON - WEEKEND WORLD 6th *May* 1984.

Mr. Waldon: Prime Minister, that the Constitutional Nationalist Parties of Ireland, both North and South should have come together and agreed in the New ^{Ireland} Forum on a way they feel could end the violence in the North, is by any standards historic, I don't think there is any doubt about that. However, you will have noticed that many people say in Britain 'well yes that's a good thing' however, if this process is to progress, if the ^{Ireland} New/Forum is to lead on to some sort of arrangement, Dr. FitzGerald and the Irish Government have got to make rather more clear and more explicit the concessions they are prepared to make to the Unionists. Now do you accept that that is so?

523. Dr. FitzGerald: Well I think that if the Report is read, it will be seen how open we are to various approaches and how emphatic we are that any solution involving any form of Irish unity must have the consent and agreement of the people of the North as well as of the people of the South. That I think is fundamental and is a fundamentally necessary reassurance, as to the Report itself there are in fact only one set of proposals in the Report in Par. 5.2, proposals for a framework for a resolution to the problem, and these, I would have thought, contain nothing that a British Government would have difficulty in agreeing with, only one of them refers tangentially to the question of Irish unity and it relates to this question of consent ^{the} /essential, the others focus primarily on the need to accommodate and guarantee the identities of the Unionists and the Nationalists and to give them an equal place, equal validity, all the others focus on this issue rather than questions of - territorial questions. I would have thought that if you take these proposals, and they are the only proposals in the Report, everything else is either historic analysis, which is a Nationalists

analysis, we wouldn't necessarily expect the British Government or people or the Northern Unionists to agree with this our own view / ^{our own} historical view or else in the later part of the Report there are an expression of what we would wish to see, what any Irish Nationalists would wish to see and the 'would' is an important condition in addition to the word 'wish' is a unitary Irish state and which the two traditions should interact that's I think ... it would be foolish of us not to state that, dishonest of us not to state it or else to suggest a number of other models and indicate the ways in which they could accommodate these two identities.

Waldon: All right Prime Minister, now let me ask you about those other models because though, of course, I think everyone understands it is bound to be the eventual long-term aspiration an Irish politician to see unity plainly in the ongoing process, you are not meant to have any very great stress on the unitary state at this stage, let me ask you about something that you might want to lay great stress on, because there is very clear evidence that it has attracted some favourable comment in Britain and may have attracted some favourable response within the British Government, and that's the question of joint authority, however, I think people would like to know rather more specifically some further things about this joint authority. For instance, let me ask you this very important question, I think, under joint authority would that mean that Britain would retain the sovereignty of a Northern Ireland?

FitzGerald: Well the question of joint authority and joint sovereignty are different, obviously you could have a joint sovereignty situation in which literally the sovereignty was shared equally it would be certainly unusual almost unprecedented international terms, but you could have that, just

Waldon: I would like to interrupt you Prime Minister, but that's so important, I will at this stage

so you don't mean joint sovereignty when you say joint authority?

r. FitzGerald: Not necessarily, it is one way in which joint authority could be exercised would be ^{through} joint sovereignty, alternatively you could have joint authority exercised with sovereignty vested in the United Kingdom at the present time or in a future Irish state if there were consent to a change of sovereignty in the part of people in Northern Ireland.

c. Waldon: Alright Prime Minister, suppose when there is an ongoing diplomatic process which all sensible people I think hope there will be, suppose the British Government say to you, well Dr. FitzGerald we can't have joint authority except we have joint sovereignty, we can't negotiate from that basis, but we are very interested in this idea and if we can retain sovereignty we are prepared to talk to you about joint authority, would you go forward on that basis?

. FitzGerald: Well I am merely at this stage defining terms, I am not answering to negotiations on television.

. Waldon: Of course.

. FitzGerald: May I just make a point?

Waldon: But would you, because I mean your reaction to it will matter.

Gerald: I am not excluding and the Forum are not excluding any possibility because quite apart from these alternative models that are mentioned, the very last paragraph of chapter 5 states that we are also open to other views so that there are no pre-conditions, what is in the report fundamentally is a set of ten proposals for a framework for discussion, proposals which I believe contain nothing that a British Government would find difficulty with and indeed little with which any reasonable Unionists and there are many reasonable Unionists would find difficult with. May I just turn to

another one of the models also, because the federal/
confederal model is one which some Unionists might regard
ultimately as more attractive even than joint authority.
In joint authority Northern Ireland is operating on a dual
control from outside, in a confederal situation you could
have an Northern Ireland state and an Irish state here,
co-equal and with certain functions devolved permanently defeasibly
upwards, foreign policy, security policy, monetary policy;
for example, or in a federation you could have a federal
government in which .. and in a federal parliament in which
Unionists could play a major role but retaining also a
Northern Ireland state within which they would have and
indeed obviously an even more major role, these are other
possibilities. They are there in the sense by way of
administration and because as we say in the end of Chapter 5
we are open to other views.

Waldon: Sure, now ultimately it may well be Prime Minister that some of
the Unionists would be interested in a confederal state.
Again I bring you back perhaps to a summation on this to the
one that everybody in Britain at the moment takes an interest
in this issue is interested in joint authority, of course
you can't negotiate on television, but let me be absolutely
clear what you are saying because it may be a very promising
thing for you to have said. You are saying, are you not,
that you do not necessarily interpret joint authority to
mean joint sovereignty, that you may be prepared to see a
sort of joint authority but allow the United Kingdom to
retain sovereignty over the North, but at least you are
prepared to talk about that?

FitzGerald: Ah! put it another way. I wouldn't contradict that but another
aspect of that is that you could have a joint authority
in a situation in which your sovereignty changed because a
majority in Northern Ireland at some point agreed to a new
system, a joint authority is something which could, in fact,
continue in the new situation, even for a period of time at
least. These are all possibilities. What we are trying to
do is to open up for discussion a range of possibilities

but above all to set out a framework which could provide common ground for ^{our} two governments.

Waldon: Well Dr. FitzGerald well you don't at least contradict the possibility that it might go in the direction that I put to you in the question, namely joint authority which leaves the sovereignty with Britain. Let me move on from that and ask you something else, because in the Report quite a lot of stress is laid on an assembly on executive that might exist in Ulster and I want to ask you about that, and ask you this. Would the elections to it be held in such a way that would permit the Unionists to attain majority rule?

FitzGerald: Well any election produces a majority, the problem in Northern Ireland is that after a period of 50 years in which the Unionists excluded the minority from any share of power, you need a period, a transitional period during which the minority can play their part in Executive Government before you can get to a stage where ^a normal alternation of majority minority based on economic and social factors rather than the issues of the Border should emerge.

Waldon: So at first you would not want to see anything other than some sort of power-sharing arrangement though eventually you could see what you call yourself, the normal alternation.

FitzGerald: Yes I think that has been in fact the position of Irish Governments and indeed of most Nationalists in the North all along. Nobody will see power-sharing as something which is ideal or something which would go on for ever for centuries, but it is very difficult to see how Nationalists could be expected to accept after 50 years of Unionists rule and 10 years of direct British rule ⁱⁿ which the Unionists really hold the upper hand in many way within the ^{confines} in Northern Ireland, that they would once again, a new model be set up, and once again be excluded for ever, apparently for many a new role. There

has to be a period of normalisation in which they would play a joint role and then as the situation normalise and ordinary politics emerge in Northern Ireland and that may take some time, then you could revert to the normal pattern. But once you reach a stage where it is obvious that if you had a normal majority system, it would alternate and wouldn't remain permanently in the hands of one group.

Waldon: Alright. Now again in the Report you suggest that this new assembly and executive would have major powers, can I ask you is a major power control of the police, would they control their own police force?

FitzGerald: I think that control of the police is very crucial in Northern Ireland, but I think you would have to go before you really reach the point of talking about who controls the police, you would have to go through a transition period in which you get a policing and security system which is acceptable to both sides in Northern Ireland. The tragedy in Northern Ireland and what lies behind so much of the violence and so much of the alienation there is the fact that, for historical reasons you have a police force, security forces, British Army, Ulster Defence Regiment, the whole system of security built up whose members of which belong to one community and which is seen as the security force of that community. You cannot police without consensus, you have therefore to move to a stage where you get a security system which both sides can accept and which there isn't alienation from on the part of the minority and before you can talk on terms of control being vested locally.

Waldon: I don't in any way P.M. minimize what in practice is a terribly problem but suppose it could be resolved, suppose there was a police force acceptable to both side, would it then be under the control of the Northern Ireland Executive?

Mr. FitzGerald: I suppose that's for consideration but I would have thought that it would need for quite a while in the future to be under the control of if there were a joint authority and if you were talking in that context of the joint authority rather than at local level because of the difficulties of getting consensus on the establishment and reorganisation of a police force and getting it acceptable. But you are moving to a very speculative territory indeed there

Mr. Waldon: Alright!

Mr. FitzGerald: If I hesitate to answer it, it is partly because I don't think any of us has thought things through to that extent.

Mr. Waldon: I can quite understand. Let to move to something that is perhaps rather more fundamental. Under joint authority could the Northern Irish electorate still send members of Parliament to the British House of Commons?

Mr. FitzGerald: I don't see that that would necessarily be excluded.

Mr. Waldon: You would expect that to happen in other words?

Mr. FitzGerald: It depends on which particular system you adopt and it isn't excluded abroad when you system nor indeed would you exclude a priori the possibility of people coming from Northern Ireland to a parliament in Dublin.

Mr. Waldon: Though the same people couldn't sit in both, of course, could they?

Mr. FitzGerald: Well considering the multiplication of bodies they sit in, with Ian Paisley, for example, in the assembly in Strasbourg and in the European Parliament

Mr. Waldon: But Dr. FitzGerald he doesn't have to swear allegiance to two different states, does he? I mean you couldn't

sit in the Dail and swear allegiance to the Irish Constitution, go to the House of Commons and swear allegiance to the Queen, could you?

FitzGerald: Oh! I think is that this allegiance thing is somewhat overrated in fact, in a word in a Europe where we all owe allegiance to Europe and nobody says we are traitors because we joined the European Community

Waldon: you slightly ^{me} surprise, obviously you leave open the possibility if they can sit in the British House of Commons but you would have them in the Dail as well, would you

FitzGerald: Who?

Waldon: The same people.

FitzGerald: I am only saying, why close up, any options, why get involved in details of this kind, let us see what kind of response the British Government finds possible to make, can they find common ground with us along the lines of the framework we have set out

Waldon: ^{just} Can I push you/a little bit way beyond the final thing I want to ask you about joint authority itself. You have been in the game a long time, you are an old realist, equal joint authority would bound to create problems because who would resolve a dispute at the end of the day. So in the joint authority as between Ireland and England, who in fact, I ought to say United Kingdom, who in fact will have the final say if there is a dispute? Do you expect it to be Ireland or do you expect it to be the U.K.?

FitzGerald: ^{perhaps} Well I think that is the most difficult problem of all in relation to this, and I don't have an answer to that, that is something we would certainly have to talk about, even if we were talking about joint authority that would be the most difficult bit probably to resolve I suspect.

Prime Minister

Waldon: Well/I will say straight out that it is a joy to talk to a politician who says I don't have an answer, and is thinking,

and he admits it is a very important problem. Can I swing on now to the question of priorities in all this. Of course, as you stressed again and again, your eventual aspiration and hope would be to have a united Ireland. But suppose it becomes quite clear to you that there is no immediate prospect or even mid-term prospect of that at all, will you accept joint authority, will you say O.K. that's it, now lets see what the generations will do to bring all the Irish people together. Are you prepared to do that?

itzGerald: Well it is one of the options in the Report which we put there, it is not put there conditionally, it is put there as one possible approach. I think that I would say this, that ^{any} solution we adopt must have durability if it is to work, on the other hand no solution can say never to a future evolution. No solution can exclude a further development and I think myself that if one could get a solution, could get stability, could get people working together constructively, would bring an end to violence and restore peace and stability. History has shown that attitudes that seemed totally intransigent at a certain point in time can change much more rapidly and in less years and less decades less generations, then people at that the time imagine if you get over the initial hurdle.

aldon: I accept that. Can I move you on to a really crucial question, because one must not keep talking as if it was only a question of the Irish and the British Government. Obviously, in this the Unionists matter enormously. Can I ask you about them, and ask you one quite straight question. Again and again you say, reports say, it must be done with Unionists agreement, now can you put some flesh on those bones, if the British and the Irish Government made some joint authority package which they agreed on, would you be prepared to see that it be put to a referendum in the North?

itzGerald: I make a distinction here, and I think is one which is fundamental, and which the Report makes an important point, there is what is called the British guarantee that is the

statement in the Act 1973 but it can't be changed in the sovereignty a transfer/^{of}sovereignty of Northern Ireland, a united Ireland without the consent of the majority in Northern Ireland. We have always been insistent upon that, it is essential that there should be the sense of security, that Northern Ireland can't be forced into a United Ireland against the will of the majority of its people. What has happened however, has been that in some curious way that has come to be used, in a veto on how Northern Ireland is governed within the existing situation in the United Kingdom at the present time, and that I don't think makes sense at all. There is a sovereign British Government which must decide how any part of the United Kingdom is governed as long as it is part of the United Kingdom, the question of unity is one that essentially involves consent, unconstrained consent, consent freely arrived at. In relation to the method of Government in Northern Ireland is something for the British Government to decide but on the basis it is most likely to produce peace and stability.

Waldon: Now Prime Minister as you yourself will know that is a very important but a very subtle distinction so could I put this back to you to be sure that I have understood it properly.

you saying to me, yes the Unionists in the North can retain a voting veto on sovereignty because that is an absolutely crucial issue to them, but in terms of joint authority, now there is no reason that they should have a referendum on that, because that is a matter that could legitimately be settled by the British and Irish Governments because it doesn't involve their ultimate sovereignty. Is that what you are saying?

FitzGerald: Yes having said that, it is very desirable that any solution we arrive^{at}/is one that can secure^a/consensus for the people affected and I don't want in any way to suggest that once you seek to impose solutions, on the other hand I don't think that a continuing veto on any political progress in Northern Ireland is in anyone's interest. But the fact/^{is}that we do face a

situation which is deteriorating and degrading all the time, in 15 years of violence, ^{there} are people in their young 20's have never know anything but violence, family life has broken down, the community life has broken down, there is a total alienation from the state, from the security forces. If that continues further, the dangers to the survival of Northern Ireland, in any kind of society that people can live in, and indeed the dangers of ^{that} spreading beyond to us and to Britain are very great. We have to at this stage break out of old moulds, that's what we have tried to do in the Forum, we have to appeal to Unionists in Northern Ireland, in their interest so that some kind of society can be salvaged for them and their children, that they too will break out of old moulds without being asked to accept what they can't at the present time accept. if they are prepared to a United ^{Ireland} at this moment, fair enough we have to accept that fact.

aldon: Prime Minister can I ask you this as a final question. You have made some major statements this morning, quite explicitly, and where you haven't been able to be explicitly you said quite frankly that you couldn't or that you hadn't made your mind up yet. What will you say to that body of opinion in Britian which says, 'O yes FitzGerald is alright but the greens will over throw him, FitzGerald sincerely means all this but he can't deliver, there is no point in talking to him, he can't deliver at the end of the day' what do you say to that?

zGerald: Try me!

aldon: That's a marvellous answer, you are that confident, are you?

zGerald: I think that our people now are very concerned to have this problem resolved, they see the tragedy of Northern Ireland getting worse and worse, they see the dangers of that spreading and I don't think that any solution which meets the essential requirements set out in the ten items in the framework will be turned down by our people.

aldon: Prime Minister thank you very much indeed.