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Transcript of Press Conference given by An Taoiseach
at the Irish Embassy, London, on Wednesday, 30th October

- Q. How long were you with Mr. Wilson?
- A. Well, I went in to him just after 6 o'clock. I had been with Mr. Stewart for some time before that. The location of the appointment with the Prime Minister was changed from Downing Street to the House of Commons. Therefore, it took me a little longer time, so our appointment was a wee bit delayed. It started shortly after six and we kept talking privately up to nearly seven o'clock, and then we invited some of the officials in while we had a cup of tea.
- Q. Could you tell us some of the things you discussed?
- A. As I intended at the outset, I put Mr. Wilson fully into the picture as far as the views of the Irish Government are concerned in relation to the situation of Northern Ireland and, in particular, in relation to the incidents that recently occurred in Derry. We went on to discuss other matters as well - The Common Market, Free-Trade-Area Agreement and the general economic situation in both Countries.
- Q. Did you tell Mr. Wilson that the root cause was Partition you said this morning What was Mr. Wilson's reaction to this?
- A. I did indeed, yes. Mr. Wilson listened to me. He didn't make any comment to that, because, having stated that the root cause of the problems up there was Partition and that all the other difficulties flowed from that, he said that he would be discussing these matters with Captain O'Neill and some of his colleagues when they came to visit him next week here in London.

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Q. He did say that Partition was the root cause of all?

A. No, I said it. And then

He listened to what I had to say, and he said he would take all the matters that I had put to him up with Captain O'Neill and his colleagues.

Q. Did he say when he was going to meet Captain O'Neill.

A. He said next week. I think it's Monday but he wasn't absolutely sure of the day.

Q. Were you aware of Captain O'Neill's reaction to your comments at lunch when you talked to Mr. Wilson?

A. No. I only heard it just as I came into the Embassy here this evening.

Q. How do you feel about that?

A. Well, he charged me with interference in the internal affairs I don't think that's a valid charge. Anywhere where human rights are denied people, I think it's fair for any person who values human rights to comment on a situation like that, and the British Government and we are parties to the Convention of Human Rights which was promulgated by the Council of Europe and therefore, in that context, I think I was perfectly valid in making the the comment I did.

Q. Are you hopeful for the future in relations between North and South as a result of it? Are you hopeful now that the dialogue will continue in view of what Captain O'Neill has said?

A. Partition has always been the problem between North and South. We recognised that when we embarked on our consultations between, first of all, Mr. Lemass and Captain O'Neill and subsequently between myself and Captain O'Neill I would hope that these consultations will continue because at the moment, they have regard to matters economic, for example, tourism, electricity generation, tariffs and so on.

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As long as there are matters like that to discuss, as long as there are problems of that nature to overcome, I don't see any reason why these consultations should not continue.

- Q. Captain O'Neill.....in Derry today. He said this may endanger the friendly relationship between the two countries. Do you.....?
- A. I think people of goodwill can have their differences on fundamental matters. But, if there is sufficient goodwill and if there are matters of a lesser nature that might be discussed between them, I don't think that the fundamental matters should necessarily preclude discussions on these others.
- Q. Taoiseach, any proposal to try seeing Captain O'Neill himself? The argument is between the North and the South.....?
- A. Well, we have no immediate plans for a meeting. Certainly, if it was possible, I would be very anxious to meet Captain O'Neill.
- Q. Would you take the initiative, Taoiseach, in this instance on that?
- A. I'd prefer to wait the outcome of the meeting between Mr. Wilson and Captain O'Neill next week.
- Q. Did you discuss the possibility of a tripartite meeting between.....?
- A. Mr. Wilson himself, at a function here in London about a year ago, it was a function of the Irish Club, made such a suggestion1965 this happened.....I don't think it was received with any great enthusiasm but, nevertheless, if such a meeting was possible, if it was promoted, I wouldn't be the one that would make it impossible.
- Q. Do you think that riots as such could harm relations between the two countries?
- A. Well, any action that exacerbates feelings between two communities certainly harms relations, but these incidents, you call the ©National Archives, Ireland think they were riots, these

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incidents certainly brought into greater focus the problems that are inherent in the situation in the North of Ireland.

Q. Do you think that the only solution is an end to Partition?

A. In the long run, I believe that it is the best possible solution, and I think, in the context of the right of self-determination for nations like Ireland, that it is the just and inevitable solution.

Q. Taoiseach: Do you think that, in the present circumstances, given the reaction of Captain O'Neill, it will continue to be your policy to present Partition as a major factor, rather than concentrating on Civil Rights in the North itself?

A. Partition is, as I said before, the basic problem. I think the Human Rights position will have to be resolved as well, and I hope that, in the wake of the Derry incidents, that there will be a greater realisation in the North of Ireland for the necessity to give fundamental Human Rights to all citizens in that territory.

Q. Were your views on the eventual ending of Partition received with sympathy by Mr. Wilson?

A. I'm satisfied that the British Government has no particular interest in the continuation of Partition, and I believe that, if Irishmen North and South can come to a peaceful and equitable solution, that the British Government will have no special interest in opposing the solution that could be come to.

Q. Do you think, Taoiseach, that the suggestion in the Queen's speech for a Commission to look at the Constitution
.....(not clear) the situation in the North?

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A. I was'nt aware of the contents of the Prime Minister's speech when I went to see him first except a reference from him to it. But the commission that he proposed, apparently, would embrace other countries like Wales, Scotland, and the Channel Islands. I think he specifically referred to..... that certain administrative problems in these areas would have to be looked into, but I think the Prime Minister also said that action in relation to particular areas - I think he referred particularly to the North of Ireland - would not be precluded by the setting up of the Commission or need not necessarily await its findings, but that the Commission would have to take account of any action that might be taken immediately. I would hope from that that some action may be taken in relation to the position in the North of Ireland.

Q. Taoiseach(not clear).....
Wales, Scotland etc., remember the speech by one of your Ministers which advised the Scottish not to take the Nationalist line - not to hive off from England.....
would you give us your views upon the Nationalist.....?

A. Well, I understand from the Minister who made that speech that he was misinterpreted to this extent that he said the achievement of national Government alone would not solve all the problems that are inherent in these particular areas - Scotland and Wales-but I believe myself that, so far as Scotland and Wales can be each a viable community, that if there is a will within each of these territories to achieve National Government, then that there is no object in its way except, of course, that there may be interim economic difficulties as indeed we have experienced in our country.

Q. Taoiseach, Is there any special issue to which you feel priority should be given in Northern Ireland? Is there

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something which you feel should be done immediately looking at the Northern Ireland situation?

A. I can answer that very frankly. That there should be a fair franchise given in all parts of Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to local elections, in relation to elections to Stormont and in relation to elections to Westminster and, more particularly, in relation to the situation in Derry City itself. Well, there are in the wake of these problems, of course, the discrimination of housing in Derry and other areas, that we have heard about, which apparently have been very objectively proved, and these are situations, first of all, fair franchise, housing, discrimination in relation to jobs in public and other authorities.

Q. Taoiseach: Do you share Mr. Wilson's attitude that Terence O'Neill is convicted.....I mean he is devoted to this liberalisation from conviction rather than necessity?

A. I have said before, and I repeat again now, that I believe that Captain Terence O'Neill is a reasonable man and he would like to see fair play given all round.

Q. From conviction?

A. From conviction as a human being. I am not suggesting, of course, that in any way that he would approve the abolition of Partition but I believe that he would want to see discrimination eliminated within the territory of his jurisdiction.

Q. Do you think personally he should have had an inquiry into the allegations of police brutality in Derry?

A. Well, these allegations have been made, people in Ireland and in Britain have seen the television telecasts, and I think people have drawn their own conclusions. If the facts have been established, then these are facts and an inquiry won't establish them any more than they are.

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- Q. Did Mr. Wilson comment at all on the Londonderry incidents?
- A. He commented in reply to a supplementary question from Captain Orr in the House of Commons a couple of weeks ago, and he said too that the people of Britain had seen for themselves on television what the situation was.
- Q. Did he say anything more to you today about them?
- A. No. He mentioned the fact that he had commented upon them in Westminster.
- Q. In your meeting with Mr. Stewart, Taoiseach, did you discuss the Biafran situation?
- A. We did, yes.
- Q. Did you raise the matter about sending arms to Nigeria?
- A. Well, we mentioned that, in the course of our talks.
- Q. Could you tell us what the Prime Minister's reaction was?
- A. I didn't discuss Biafra particularly with the Prime Minister.
- Q. Do you think that the points you put to Mr. Stewart on Biafra were received favourably?
- A. They were certainly received sympathetically because I gave him a fairly clear indication as to how Ireland was involved, not as a Government but as a people, in the situation in Biafra, telling him clearly that we had an interest in both sides, in the federal Nigerian side and in Biafra. But I recognised the difficulties that are involved for the British Government in that respect, as well.
- Q. Did you ask Mr. Wilson for any assurance as to what he might do? Did you ask him to do anything at all to ensure Human Rights in Ulster?

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- A. I wouldn't like to ~~again~~ disclose the details of this private conversation except to repeat that I put everything that I thought was necessary to put before him.
- Q. Did he promise to take these points up with Captain O'Neill?
- A. He promised to take these points up with Captain O'Neill, yes.
- Q. (Not clear)
- A. Well I know that Mr. Wilson is concerned about discrimination of any kind, and I am sure that he would be very happy, in fact anxious, to eliminate discrimination.
- Q. You described Captain O'Neill as a reasonable or fair man. Would you think it was reasonable of him to say that "a policy of 'Ulster's difficulty is Eire's opportunity' may make sense as a slogan in the Republic's domestic politics but, in the long term, it can only have a negative effect both on the cross-Border relations and community relations within Northern Ireland"? Do you think that was a fair comment for him to make?
- A. This is the first I have heard of that comment. However, I take it that it is an accurate comment from the text of his speech. I wouldn't like to let anybody believe that we would like to take advantage of the situation in the North of Ireland in order to make political capital. Our whole purpose is to ensure that the situation in Ireland will be restored satisfactorily, and I am sorry that Captain O'Neill alleged to me that I was taking advantage of the situation that has arisen recently. I certainly wasn't. I was simply re-stating what our attitude was to the position in the Six Counties and expressing the hope that these symptoms, as well as the root cause, could be eliminated in time. I think that's fair comment because, after all, we have never wavered from our desire for the reunification of the country as a whole. Captain O'Neill knows that, and I know his attitude as well, and we

respect our attitudes in that context.

- Q. Do you, after your comments on the Partition problems or the ending of itdo you seriously believe that it would.....be possible to unite Ireland?
- A. Yes, I seriously believe that. Otherwise, I wouldn't be taking up the attitude I am. After all, Ireland is a small island in itself. It has been united right down through the centuries up to 1921. I assert its homogeneous population, there are stresses and strains within the community, as there are in any community, and I think it's unjust to conceive the continuation of Partition in an island like our small country.
- Q. It has been suggested, Taoiseach, that the British Government paid something like £180 million a year to keep the Six Counties in Northern Ireland. Would the Twenty-Six Counties economy stand that sort of subvention?
- A. I don't know what the actual figure is. It could be half that or as you say, but this is a situation that we will be prepared to face up to, and we recognise that, apart from the political difficulties involved, there will be certain difficulties - economic problems to be overcome, as well. But I think these can be solved in time, with goodwill. And remember that we in the Southern part of Ireland are moving very fast towards an economic situation which equates fairly well the situation in the Six Counties and in Britain.
- Q. The situation in Northern Ireland was the main subject of your conversation with Mr. Wilson, was it? I mean it took up most of the time when you were with him.
- A. That's right.
- Q. But did you raise it, or did he raise it first?

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- A. No, I raised it because I met him specifically to discuss this situation, and he was aware in advance of my intention to do so.
- Q. Would you agree with Captain O'Neill's statement, in referring to your statement, that this cannot do other than make the future development of the friendly relationship on a basis of mutual respect more difficult? Would you agree now that the situation between both sides is likely to be more difficult or is difficult already?
- A. I hope it isn't. If people feel things and people on the other side know that people feel these things, there is nothing to be gained by not saying them. I think it is better that they should be said.
- Q. Knowing his re-action to your comments today, what do you think the situation now is, in the light of his re-action?
- A. Well, I think the situation will calm down and that we can resume - I hope we can resume - the friendly contacts which we have been having over the past four years.
- Q. Would you agree then that relations are at the moment slightly strained?
- A. Well, it would not be frank of me to say that they are not. They are, but there is no reason why we should not restore the position. And that can be restored very quickly by certain measures being taken by the Stormont Government.
- Q. Taoiseach, you said that the setting up of the Commission would not preclude any other action or requirement by Northern Ireland. Did you get any reason to believe that any other action might be forthcoming?
- A. Well, I said that, but I was interpreting as well as I could do so the speech made by Mr. Wilson today in the Commons. I certainly hope that, as the result of the meeting next week between Mr. Wilson and Captain O'Neill, some action could be taken in advance of the setting up, or even of the findings, of the Commission.

- Q. For instance?
- A. Well, there is this franchise reform to which I have referred .
- Q. Do you think that a meeting could be arranged between yourself and Captain O'Neill after he has had talks with Mr. Wilson?
- A. Very hard to say that because we would have, first of all, to await the outcome of whatever action will be taken as a result of the outcome of the talks between Captain O'Neill and Mr. Wilson. I wouldn't like to prognosticate on when the meeting could take place.
- Q. Did you have any time in mind for the uniting of Ireland? You said in the future. Did you have any number of years particularly in mind?
- A. Well, I am afraid that I would not like to put myself in the prophet category.
- Q. Was the Seán Bourke situation mentioned at all today?
- A. Not at all. I have no responsibility for Mr. Bourke. I have enough problems without taking him.
- Q. Taoiseach, at your meeting with Mr. Stewart, did you discuss the case of joining the E.E.C.?
- A. Yes, we did. I might say, first of all, that my meeting with Mr. Stewart was primarily a courtesy call because, as you know, hitherto we had contact with the Commonwealth Relations Office in so far as any matters to be discussed between our two countries were concerned. The Commonwealth Relations Office having been dissolved or eliminated, Mr. Stewart now takes over responsibility for Irish affairs as Foreign Secretary. Therefore that was my main purpose. Naturally, I spoke about matters of mutual interest, and the E.E.C. was one of the items that we discussed. We discussed, in particular, the Belgian