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CONFIDENTIALNOTE OF DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH AND MR. HEATH  
ON 6 DECEMBER 1971

The meeting started in the Prime Minister's Office in the House of Commons around 3.30 p.m. and lasted approximately twenty-five minutes. The Prime Minister had with him his Principal Private Secretary, Mr. Robert Armstrong, and the Taoiseach was accompanied by the Ambassador.

At the outset, the Taoiseach said he was anxious that the Prime Minister and he should continue to keep talking about the Northern situation. Because of the effects of internment, Dublin is losing influence over the situation and some of the developments in the North such as the cratering of roads have proved to be counter-productive.

Mr. Heath said he realised that the cratering of roads must have caused inconvenience to residents along the Border and went on to say that, given the circumstances of the situation, Westminster and Stormont will have to see to it that security along the Border is made more effective still. The Taoiseach observed that he could understand the British Forces coming as far as the indeterminate Border but it was regrettable and dangerous that there should be some incidents of firing into the territory of the Republic. He was sorry to hear the Prime Minister say that it will be necessary to intensify security action on the Northern side.

Mr. Heath then said that some of those engaged in violence in the North are finding refuge in the South and he wondered whether there was any possibility of extraditing some of these people. The Taoiseach replied that whatever about one's attitude to extradition it was a matter for the Courts. Even if an extradition order was backed, the subject of it would straightaway seek an order of habeas corpus which, under the terms of our agreement and most other such agreements would be granted.



The Taoiseach continued by stressing that the influence of the Dublin Government on the Northern situation is waning. He mentioned the pressure to which he had been subjected, following publication of the Compton Report and the receipt of other information, to seek recourse to the Commission on Human Rights in Strasbourg. Mr Heath's only comment on this was "you resisted as long as you could."

The Taoiseach then stressed the great need for an urgent initiative in the political field and he asked Mr Heath if there is to be any such initiative immediately. Mr Heath replied that talks are to take place with the different political parties here and it will be necessary to see how far it will be possible to go in these talks. He described the recent Debate in the House of Commons as "not bad". While he praised Mr Wilson's initiative, he said it could hardly be regarded as a blue print. Certain parts of the Wilson proposal would not be acceptable to Dublin. The important thing is to get the talks under way as quickly as possible.

Mr Heath continued by saying that the attitude being taken by some organs of the Press in this country is not helpful and here he instanced the attitude of the Telegraph. It is, he said, unfortunate that every mention of any initiative seems to bring a fresh outbreak of violence. If the IRA explode every time there is a mention of constructive talks, this is certainly not helpful. Again, he stressed that the important thing is to get the talks going as quickly as possible.

The Taoiseach asked Mr Heath how soon he saw the inter-party talks getting under way. The Taoiseach went on to remark that when one enters the inter-party sphere there are limitations. He himself has been moving in the direction



of inter-party consultations at home as a helpful parallel to what would be happening here. While inter-party talks may lead to helpful results, the great difficulty in the present situation is that these talks may overlook the pressing need for some urgent solution of the problem.

Mr Heath said that he did not see anything substantial happening before Christmas. Indeed, he doubted whether the inter-party talks would effectively get under way before then. The Taoiseach mentioned that he had suggested some easing of security before Christmas and some withdrawal of troops from the problem areas. He thought that a psychological move of this nature at this time might be of some help. He went on to refer to Mr Wilson's proposal in relation to reunification and added that, if the British people could be encouraged to think that reunification is the only ultimate solution and if this idea could be more positively supported by the British Government, then the Unionists in the North might tend to fall into line. If the grip of the Unionists could be loosened, then the Dublin Government might find it easier to move in their direction.

Mr Heath said that he had dealt with the question of reunification in his Guildhall speech. He had made clear on that occasion that reunification is a rightful aspiration to hold. He was, however, not prepared to tell others what they ought to want. Where Ireland is unrealistic is in thinking that one million Unionists want a united Ireland. The Taoiseach observed that there seemed to be some indications that even Mr Paisley is prepared to think in terms of a United Ireland and Mr Heath's comment on this was "you know my views on Paisley".

The Taoiseach again urged the need for a very early breakthrough. He stressed that, unless there is a move in this direction, the situation in the North will go from bad to worse. Mr Heath said he fully appreciated the seriousness of the situation and he was as anxious as the Taoiseach to find an early way out of the present impasse. It was, he said, important that talks between them should continue.

This concluded the discussion on the North. There was a brief reference to the signing of the EEC membership agreements and Mr Heath indicated that the signing would not now take place before early January.

The Taoiseach had a ten minute meeting subsequently with Mr Wilson in the course of which much the same ground was covered. Mr Wilson assured the Taoiseach that he is fully conscious of the urgency attaching to the Northern problem and said that he is determined to do everything possible to make headway at the earliest possible date with the inter-party talks. There could, in Mr Wilson's view, be no question of allowing these talks to go on for several months without some positive outcome.

*G. O'J*

December 7th 1971