

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

Reference Code: 2003/17/301

Title: Report in the Irish Times of a press conference given by the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, at the end of his two-day visit to Northern Ireland, in which he discussed constitutional arrangements, a forthcoming referendum, the British Army in Northern Ireland, the mood in Northern Ireland, talks between political parties, and relations between the British and Irish governments.

Creation Date(s): 17 November 1972

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 4 pages

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Access Conditions: Open

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Report in the Irish Times of 18th November 1972 of a press conference given by the British Prime Minister Mr. Edward Heath, at the end of his two-day visit to Northern Ireland

In a short statement, Mr. Heath said: "I last came over here on December 23rd, when I visited the forces, just before Christmas, and this seemed to me to be an appropriate moment to come again. I've always told Parliament that I am very mindful of the burden which is placed on the security forces if I come here to Northern Ireland, and therefore I obviously choose the moment with care.

But, as we have published the discussion paper, this was an appropriate time to come over, because it enabled me to talk to people over here about it and to get their reactions to it, and I can take these into account when we are considering it in the Government before we publish our own White Paper with the substantive proposals for the future internal organisation in Northern Ireland.

It's true that it has been a very full programme. I had 11 substantive engagements yesterday and 10 today. This has given me the opportunity of meeting a very wide representation of people in Northern Ireland, not only those engaged in politics, but those outside politics, and from this point of view it's been very valuable."

Asked if, when people voted in the referendum next year to stay in the United Kingdom, as some of them would, they would be voting just for that, without any further precision, or voting to stay in the UK on the British Government's terms, Mr. Heath said: "The questions which are in the Bill which is now before Parliament are perfectly clear. They vote either to stay as part of the United Kingdom or they wish to become part of a united Ireland.

Now, as far as the internal organisation of Northern Ireland is concerned, that is a matter in which we are going through the separate process of the discussion paper and then the White Paper with substantive proposals. The Referendum itself is obviously not a vote on a particular set of proposals for the internal organisation of Northern Ireland".

Could he ever foresee the day when British troops were withdrawn from the streets of Belfast and Northern Ireland?

"Well, that is what we are working towards, and I have faith and hope that this will come about, but one cannot foresee the time. One knows that, from previous instances in Irish history, it is very often a long haul, but the end comes comparatively quickly. This, I think, has been characteristic in most instances, and this is what we must work towards".

After his two-day visit did he detect optimism or despair in Northern Ireland?

"For myself, I have always said that I don't set out to be an optimist or a pessimist. I set out to be a realist. Certainly in my two days here, if I compare them with my discussions of last Christmas, I certainly don't find despair. In fact, I think I find an improved situation, and this was particularly true of Londonderry this morning and the people I talked to there. I think the situation there has definitely improved - I felt that the atmosphere was better.

And I found, I think, throughout these two days, in talking to a wide variety of people about the proposals put forward in the discussion paper, that there was a very solid welcome for them and that people felt now that, with the Referendum coming forward, with the discussion on the White Paper on Constitutional proposals and with the implementation of the reform of local government, here was substantive progress on the Constitutional, the internal field, which

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would provide a basis for the future, and they all welcomed it, and I think the pressure on me in these two days is that we should implement this as speedily as is practicable."

Could he see a campaign to bring the soldiers home becoming a major issue in the next General Election?

"I never set out to look into the crystal ball. I prefer to deal with the problems of the present, and the next General Election is a long way away, but even so I don't see that particular problem being one of the major issues".

How could he attempt to gauge accurately the opinions of the Northern Ireland people on the White Paper if he did not include a question on it in the Referendum?

I think these are two entirely different things. The Referendum is on a very clear issue of staying inside the United Kingdom or going outside it into a united Ireland. If one is dealing in any form of politics in the United Kingdom with a reform of a particular kind, you do it through a process of discussion and consultation.

"The same thing applies - we have been carrying on discussions, as I have been doing in the last two days and the Secretary of State has done the whole time on the discussion paper, and as a result, of these we have to balance up the various factors, involved and we have to come to a judgment ourselves. When we've done that we put it to Parliament, and it's for Parliament to decide, it's for the Westminster Parliament to decide".

Not the people of Northern Ireland?

"No. It's for the Westminster Parliament to decide, because this lies within our power".

Did he find, in his talks with politicians in Northern Ireland, any willingness to co-operate and make concessions along the terms he had spoken about in his speech?

"I certainly find it over quite a wide area. Of course it would be untrue to say that I found it over the whole area, and I found an absolute willingness to talk openly and frankly and put their views about the various proposals we've made.

"It's true to say that the general reaction which I've received is that the proposals were well thought out, the analysis was thorough. I myself have been surprised at the complete lack of criticism of the historical introduction. I think it's quite remarkable that there has not been criticism of that. The people have said that this was as fair and realistic appraisal of the history leading up to this as you could make. So I think from this point of view the response is satisfactory."

Did he think he might have got a false impression because of his decision not to meet any members of L.A.W., the U.D.A., the Vanguard Movement, Mr. William Craig or any of his supporters?

"I don't think so, No., They've expressed their views, and I can read them".

What did he think of Mr. Craig's present position in Northern Ireland politics?

"That's a matter for him".

As the Chief Executive of the State of which Mr. Craig was a member, had he ever considered whether Mr. Craig should be pursued under the Special Powers Act for anything he had said or done?

"Well, if we had decided to take action, obviously you would know what that action is. So we haven't decided to take action on that".

Questioned further on whether the people of Northern Ireland would be given a chance to vote on any proposals which might come forward, Mr. Heath repeated that this was a matter for the Westminster Parliament to implement. Under the British system, it was eventually for the Cabinet to make up its mind as to what proposals were to be put to Parliament, and for Parliament to decide whether these were right for any part of the United Kingdom.

"There is no obligation anywhere in statute to have a referendum about internal arrangements for Northern Ireland. I'm responsible for introducing the Referendum as to whether people want to stay in the United Kingdom or to leave it. It never existed before, and I made it in the statement when I announced direct rule. But the obligation goes no further than that, and it does not happen in the rest of the United Kingdom, and, if Northern Ireland is to be part of the United Kingdom, then it has exactly the same arrangements as the rest of the United Kingdom - Wales or Scotland",

If the result of the Referendum was a foregone conclusion, why was he going to have it?

"First of all, it may in your judgment be a foregone conclusion - it may in everybody's judgment be a foregone conclusion - but those who want Northern Ireland to stay in the United Kingdom want to have the reassurance of voting for this matter.

"The second point is that this is not a single Referendum. When I announced it at the time of direct rule, I said "at periodic intervals it would be possible to have a plebiscite, and this would enable any change of views among the people in Northern Ireland to make itself felt."

"The third thing which I have always hoped would come from it would be that it would, for those periods between plebiscites, take the Border out of politics, and you would then have politics developing along more normal, non-sectarian lines, as you have in the rest of the United Kingdom, and people would be voting in their political elections on what we would normally call bread and butter politics. I think it's very important that you should get a development of politics in Northern Ireland along these lines."

In reply to a further question, Mr. Heath said that he believed one thing was basic and fundamental: "If Northern Ireland is going to remain part of the United Kingdom, then it must be the same as the United Kingdom, and we shall have the same standards as we have in the rest of the United Kingdom, and we shall have the same impartiality and lack of discrimination as we have in the United Kingdom, and the same standards as we have in the rest of the United Kingdom and the same respect for law and order as we have in the rest of the United Kingdom, and this is absolutely basic."

Mr. Heath was asked whether he thought that his firm speech, in which he had ruled out U.D.I. for Northern Ireland would have an impact on the people who were advocating such a course.

He said that he was not sure what impact his speech would have on political leaders who were advocating such a course: "I would have thought it would have a considerable impact on the great majority of sensible and moderate people in Northern Ireland. I just wanted them to know the facts so that they weren't going to be misled by anybody else."

He was asked whether he thought that Protestants were now a greater threat than the I.R.A. He did not answer the question directly, but

referring to his speech, in which he had spoken strongly against any U.D.I. thoughts there might be, he said: "I just wanted everybody to know that the policy of the British Government is to ensure that law and order is maintained, whoever is affected. And it's not a question of one community or the other. It's the same for everybody, and I thought it right to emphasise that."

Mr. Heath was asked why he had made no reference to the "Irish Dimension" which had been referred to in the Green Paper, and he was also asked if he would expand on how the "Irish Dimension" would be brought into play by his Government.

"I didn't mention the 'Irish Dimension' yesterday for the simple reason that you can't say everything, every time, everywhere. As far as the Irish Dimension is concerned, I told Mr. Lynch when I became Prime Minister and we met that I would welcome normal relations between our two countries, which meant that he and I would both discuss things affecting the Republic and the United Kingdom. This is the normal position in relationships between States, and I never refuse to discuss matters which affect the United Kingdom and any other country. This is the way one conducts relations. On the other hand, I have never acknowledged that the Republic of Ireland has the right to say what is going to happen on the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, and I as Prime Minister am responsible, and so I discuss these matters with Mr. Lynch. We have had many meetings, and also discuss these things on this basis, and when we talk of the 'Irish Dimension' this is what we mean - that we will discuss things affecting the United Kingdom, of which Northern Ireland is part. And there are obviously many things which for a long time now have been discussed between the Republic and ourselves which affect Northern Ireland and the Republic, particularly the whole question of power supply, of transport, tourist arrangements and so on. And these questions are going to become more numerous and more important as we enter the Common Market. We both go in on January 1st next, and we have both in our discussions been thinking forward to that time, and this is what we mean by the 'Irish Dimension', and we hope these things will develop, and we welcome them."

Would he ever negotiate an independence system with the North apart from a full U.D.I.?

"I cannot foresee that happening, no."

Mr. Heath said that his visit had reinforced his admiration for the resilience of the people of Northern Ireland.

He said that no decision had been taken on which would come first, the Referendum or the White Paper.