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*Mr Mc Carthy
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Interview with Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, T.D., Minister for ~~the~~ Posts and Telegraphs. R.T.É. (Radio) Sunday, 4 May, 1975. 5.5.75

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Interviewer: Well, what of the view of the Irish Government? Its policy over the past months has been to try and avoid a Loyalist majority in the Convention and it's clear this weekend that that policy has not been singularly successful. I asked the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, this morning if he could see any possible area of agreement in the Convention.

Minister: Well I see no possibility of agreement on an Executive at the present time. The Loyalist majority clearly exclude a power-sharing Executive and the S.D.L.P. will of course not accept any other form of Executive, and of course the Government here would be opposed to an exclusively Loyalist Executive in Northern Ireland because of the history of the past. So I think agreement on an Executive is not available; it remains to be seen whether there is any other ground on which there could be a kind of ^a meeting of minds, for example in relation to a legislative assembly. I do not know whether that will be possible, I do not know whether there will be an attempt to hold this thing together.

Interviewer: Do you see any possibility of agreement on an Irish dimension, the other main plank of your policy?

Minister: Well, the Irish dimension is a fact whether Loyalists or anybody else wants it to go away. It won't go away - it's there. I see no possibility of agreement in this Convention on an institutionalised Irish dimension; no there is no such possibility.

Interviewer: And those are the two main planks of the Irish Government's policy and the policy of the S.D.L.P., isn't that true?

Minister: Yes, that's so. This Convention will not, on these matters, give an acceptable outcome there, that's certain, but, the dangers now are very great, in that this kind of majority has a momentum of its own, and I think it's very important now that the Convention has come into being; many of us thought that it was a mistake to have a Convention at all, but now that it's there I think there has to be discussion, there has to be some gaining at least of time, and I hope that these discussions will now continue.

Interviewer: You would not support the argument that there is really no point in going ahead with this Convention, that it is bound to fail? and that it would be better to forget about it right away?

Minister: That is a possible point of view, but I think that the existence of the Convention has its own momentum. I think the thing was a mistake; we thought so, but now that it is there, simply to dissolve that Convention now would be fraught with its own dangers too.

Interviewer: Dr. O'Brien there's been almost an avalanche of S.D.L.P. comment this weekend after the election, a lot of it directed at the Dublin Government, asking that the Government, the Irish Government now press determinedly the British, so that there will be full ministerial power-sharing in the North and that there will be an Irish dimension. Now you seem to be saying to the S.D.L.P. and to everyone else that really this isn't on any longer?

Minister:

Well, I think it's not on. In fact I mean I think there isn't going to be a power-sharing Executive and that it's not in the power of Dublin or London to bring it into being. This is a fact. It's very frustrating for a lot of people, but I don't see how the blame can be rightly put on the shoulders of Dublin. No Dublin Government can bring into being power-sharing, when it is rejected by a majority in Northern Ireland. There can't be such an Executive in these conditions. In fact the alternative is the continuance of direct rule. Everybody knows that. You can't make people share power. That's not possible. I understand the feelings of frustration which the S.D.L.P. have but I'd like them to show us how we can oblige London to oblige the Loyalists to share power when they have said that they reject that and when they are in a very large majority in the Convention. There are certain things that are simply not possible. We would like them but they are not possible, and I think there should be more facing up to reality even when the reality is extremely unpleasant as it is, than there is.

Interviewer: Your view is that the Irish Government is effectively helpless in this sort of situation?

Minister: How can any Irish Government oblige London to oblige the Loyalists to enter into a power-sharing Executive which they reject. How can they? The proposition is meaningless.

Interviewer: Well one of the main concerns presumably of the Government now will be to try to remind the British of their obligations in Northern Ireland and to avoid a situation where the British might decide to leave.

Minister:

Yes, it's not a question now of reaching a power-sharing Executive, it's a question of excluding the emergence of a non-powersharing Executive and also excluding the emergence of UDI. These are the dangers, very pressing dangers, both of them. And we would be in full agreement with the representatives of the minority in seeking to exclude those now pressing dangers but it doesn't help to urge us to attempt the impossible.

Interviewer:

The only outcome presumably then, from what you are saying is continued direct rule from Westminster.

Minister:

That's right, yes.

Interviewer:

Dr. O'Brien, in that sort of situation would your Government trust the British, if I can use that word, it's an emotive word, but in a sense with the background of Irish history it's perhaps not an inappropriate one, trust the British to stay in the North under those sort of conditions and perhaps with continued violence.

Minister:

Well, let's put it this way. Both the British Government and the British Opposition the Tories, both fully understand what the consequences would be of a British pull-out from Northern Ireland in present circumstances; - that would be civil war and casualties on a very large scale. I don't believe that a British Government is likely to do that in present conditions and conditions of this part of this century. I think the international reaction to that would be extremely bad, I think they know that, I also think that there would be a very large movement of opinion in Britain against it once they saw what the consequences were likely to be. I know that a lot of people in Britain are heartily fed up with the Northern Ireland question, I can understand that but I don't think that they would accept the dreadful consequences of a pull-out in present circumstances, no.

Interviewer: You think they will stay in short, even if the Convention does break down?

Minister: I think they will, yes but it's not a certainty. There is the danger of a pull-out and there is the danger of the consequences of a pull-out. And I think these dangers are increased by the Convention elections, - yes, and I think anyone who is looking at this situation at all has to have their eye on that danger. This may happen. And this is the catastrophe that we must all seek by all means to avoid, and I think recriminations amongst ourselves don't help to avoid them.

Interviewer: Can you tell us, Dr. O'Brien, then finally what is going to be the positive direction of the Irish Government's policy in the next few weeks and months towards the S.D.L.P. and towards the Loyalist majority up here.

Minister: Well I think I made that fairly clear. The Irish Government, any Irish Government, would be and this Government is, greatly concerned for the position of the minority which is at the moment, precarious and difficult and we will seek in all our discussions, with the British Government to see that the minority is not imperilled either by the setting up of a non-powersharing Executive or by consent to UDI, excluding those alternatives, that is, that has to be the main focus of our concern, but we cannot achieve the impossible, that is that we cannot make the British produce a power-sharing Executive in present conditions in Northern Ireland.