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Interviewer:

A crucial week-end for Northern Ireland, according to the British Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees. Officially the provisional I.R.A. ceasefire ended last Thursday at midnight after 25 days of peace in the North and Britain. In fact it seems the I.R.A., for whatever reason has decided to stay its hand, temporarily at least. Officials of Stormont Castle have been meeting members of the I.R.A.'s political ring, Sinn Fein Kevin Street today at a secret venue and the talks give rise to hope that an extension of the peace may be achieved. But is there any formula short of surrender by either side which could bring a permanent end to violence in the North? Would the release of even 100 internees or even the complete closure of Long Kesh cause an end to the provisional campaign? These are some of the questions people are asking this morning. Of course one of the main parties to the debate is the Irish Government and its members have been unusually silent since the ceasefire began before Christmas. A statement was issued on Friday indicating regret at what seemed then the end of the ceasefire. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. FitzGerald this morning has been talking to me about the situation as he sees it now.

Dr. FitzGerald:

I can't give you any more of a notion than anybody else following things from outside, because what's going on is something that's going on inside the I.R.A. I have said on previous occasions, not necessarily well and immediately informed on their thought processes, but it is clear that they were unhappy of what they saw as the British response, but there does seem to be divisions on this subject understandably and it may be that there have been misunderstandings. The Rees statement was very carefully worded and carefully drafted and it may be that there may have been on their part, they didn't understand what was intended by it but what is going on now is a process of seeking to clarify that, and it is important at least that there should be an understanding of what is meant and intended.

Interviewer:

Do you know anything of reports that Mr. Wilson personally intervened to order the release of a substantial number of internees inside the next week?

Dr. FitzGerald:

No, I don't. I have been at a meeting during the week-end and therefore I am not up to date on all the details, beyond what I read.

Interviewer:

Taking the events over the past 27/28 days when there was a ceasefire I'd like to ask you if you felt the Irish Government at that time did anything to help that ceasefire to last. What was its posture in your view?

Dr. FitzGerald:

Its posture is the one which I am afraid the media always find hard to accept, that is saying as little as possible lest by saying anything we would damage the prospects of a continuation of peace in Northern Ireland, and I think we were right in that respect.

Interviewer:

Dr. O'Brien has said that silence shouldn't be confused with inactivity. What does that mean?

Dr. FitzGerald:

In a situation like this, naturally we are in contact with the British Government about it all the time and making sure that our views are known on the different aspects of it, then we inform ourselves fully of their views and intentions, but these are contacts that go on all the time but you don't every time you have such a contact, talk about it, and in a case like the ceasefire there was obviously nothing to be gained by our expressing views which might be used in one way or another for propoganda purposes by one side or another with an interest, whoever they might be, in doing damage to the possibility of the ceasefire continuing.

Interviewer:

Well, would you say the Government was active in trying to keep the ceasefire going?

- Dr. FitzGerald: The ceasefire was a unilateral act by the I.R.A. which was related to questions that are in ^{the}provenance of the British Government such as the question of releasing of Internees for example. They are not areas in which the Irish Government has a function but of course you can, even if you have no function in the matter, you can interfere or damage it by talking out of turn. Our main concern is not to do that.
- Interviewer: Have you in fact been kept fully informed on British thinking over the past month?
- Dr. FitzGerald: We have been kept informed of their views throughout this period.
- Interviewer: And what was that thinking? What has the thinking been on the ceasefire can you tell us?
- Dr. FitzGerald: No, I don't think it would be appropriate for me to say what the British Government think especially on the ceasefire. It wouldn't be much point in our having it a Governmental contacts if every time they said anything to us we then proceeded to tell the world about it. That would make ^{for} a rather curious relationship between Governments.
- Interviewer: Have you been offering them advice then over the past month on the appropriate course of action as you saw it?
- Dr. FitzGerald: I think they are aware of our views and have been aware of our views on some of these issues for a very long time. In particular for example in relation to the question of internment.
- Interviewer: And your view on Internment is at the moment what?
- Dr. FitzGerald: The Government's view has in the beginning been that internment in the way it was introduced and the way it operated was a serious political blunder and that the continuation of internment in the form which it was continued ^{has} made it more difficult to find a political solution.
- Interviewer: Have you been urging them to end internment this past month?
- Dr. FitzGerald: We have ^{made known our views and} / the question of internment has come up in discussions with the British Government throughout the whole period that I have been Minister.
- Interviewer: The S.D.L.P. for example have felt that this ceasefire perhaps was an opportunity for the British to end Internment at a stroke. Was that the view of the Irish Government?
- Dr. FitzGerald: When you come to the details of whether you do it at a stage or whether you do it by stroke, ^{that} is something that has to be decided by the responsible authorities who are in much more close contact with the situation than we are. In relation to the detail tactics I don't think that our views would necessarily be as well informed as theirs would be because they are dealing with a situation in Northern Ireland on the spot.
- Interviewer: In general you have been favourable to the release of large numbers of detainees, in general could one say that?
- Dr. FitzGerald: We have. In the beginning we thought it was a mistake and we have favoured the phasing out of internment. The pace at which that is to be done is a tactical matter if you like, because it involves security and security is a word which has ^{been} a bad meaning nowadays. It means trying to stop people being murdered and it is a matter for the British Government in its judgement to decide whether in a particular situation the balance of advantage in terms of preventing further lives being lost would lie with a sudden release of all, in the hopes that that would create a whole new climate, or the release of people gradually, bearing in mind that there are many people interned in respect of which there clearly is reason to believe that they have been responsible for very serious crimes indeed, and if they

at a moment

were to be released at a time when there was still violent conflict in process or likely to resume you could be making the situation potentially worse, for example amongst those interned there were the people responsible for the bombings in Dublin for example and if they were to be released at a time when there was continuing tension and conflict in the North the effect might be

Interviewer: Of course it is not legally proven that anyone is responsible.

Dr. FitzGerald: *Yes but,* We are concerned not with what is legally proven, I am talking now about ^{the} practical effect if in fact there is a moral certainty that amongst the 100's of people there there are people who have been responsible for appalling crimes and I think that moral certainty existed amongst them. There are some though of course, there are some of them who may not have been, if that moral certainty exists the responsible authority has to decide what is the method of release that will minimise the likelihood that they would repeat those crimes, whether that is best done by the sharp effect or sudden release at a moment of time when there is a possibility, a strong possibility that might end the conflict and make it very improbable to renew, that is one possibility. At another period it might be more appropriate to release gradually, to build up a climate of confidence before you come to releasing those in respect of whom the moral certainty is greatest and that is a matter which must be in the judgement of those who have to take the decision and who have the maximum of information.

Interviewer: Presumably the Irish Government has an opinion on that, for example the view that this was an opportunity to end internment while there was a ceasefire of whatever strength?

Dr. FitzGerald: That is a matter of judgement and if each member of the whole government has an opinion on that, each individual opinions will be based on a varying perception and knowledge of the facts and it isn't a thing of which a collective view of the government which has not got access to all the facts should necessarily be formed. To tell other people their business, when they have more access to the facts than you have and when you might be telling them to do the things which in fact turn out to have been the worst things to do in term of loss of lives could be irresponsible. Therefore we have confined ourselves to making it clear, we thought in terms in the beginning as a mistake and it should be phased out as rapidly as possible. The particular technique of phasing out is a practical matter which must be within the complicity of the people who have the decisions to take.

Interviewer: So no particular advice over the past month while the ceasefire was on?

Dr. FitzGerald: On the practical detailed question of the method of release, no, but our view on the question of ending internment is well known and has been known. I am sure the previous government made their views known and we have certainly done so since we have been in government from the very beginning.

Interviewer: Is there a collective view on talks with the Sinn Fein, Kevin Street organisation by the British?

Dr. FitzGerald: Here is a question of what kind of talks about what, what role is being played. In order for the ceasefire originally to take place it was clearly useful that some people should make certain contacts the result of which the attitude of the I.R.A. changed ^{to} the point that they decided that having heard arguments put to them it would be to their advantage and it was the right thing to do that they should ceasefire for a period at least. Those contacts clearly were useful and the ceasefire might not have happened had it not taken place. Therefore in the circumstances there can be a role for people to go and argue a case and try to persuade people engaged in this kind of campaign to end it. I am not clear what the role of Provisional Sinn Fein in the matter is, whether they are people

there are reports this morning of talks with the Provisional Sinn Fein

who hold the view that ~~whether~~ it would be desirable that the ^{conflict} should end, are seeking to persuade the I.R.A. of this, and it may be useful they should do so and there should be some contact with them. ~~A~~ whether they are holding themselves out to represent the I.R.A. and in that event whether the British Government are in a sense negotiating with them. ~~A~~ lot depends on that, but obviously, we in the Republic, our elected representatives and our government, in Northern Ireland, we alone represent the people of Ireland and no British Government could ever deal over our heads with people who claim the right to represent the people of Ireland but ~~whom~~ the people of Ireland have never been willing to elect and have never been prepared to put themselves forward for election. It's one thing to have intermediaries seeking to persuade towards the ending of violence, it's ~~not~~ ^{another} matter for the British Government for example to deal directly over the heads of the elected ~~representatives~~ ^{of the people} into the Irish people, ~~with any~~ ^{with any} body who ~~alleged~~ ^{alleged} themselves to speak in our name, ~~I~~ ^{we} would hope that that would not happen at any point.

Interviewer: Has your government had any contact this past month with Sinn Fein Kevin Street either direct or indirect.

Dr. FitzGerald: No.

Interviewer: You have made no effort to find out what the thinking is inside the provisional I.R.A. movement, provisional Sinn Féin. There have been T.D.s, who it's been reported have been involved in some talks, but the Government has had no contacts?

Dr. FitzGerald: Right through the whole ^{period} various people often come along and say look I've been talking to so and so and he says such and such; one always listens to such information with interest sometimes with doubt, sometimes with more confidence that it reflects what at least what was said to the people concerned and any information from anybody, views of the attitudes of the I.R.A. is always obviously useful. ~~But that's not a question of entering into contact with them~~ ^{we're always happy, naturally, if anyone tells us what's going on, but that's a different thing}

Interviewer: Did the British Government tell you what the peace proposals were which were put to them after the Feakle conference in a document which apparently the churchmen transmitted?

Dr. FitzGerald: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you tell us what those proposals were?

Dr. FitzGerald: There have been such a series of events and proposals I hesitate to answer from a recollection without checking.

Interviewer: The B.B.C. Northern correspondent has reported that the proposals were for a 32-county constitution with 32 county elections in this country.

Dr. FitzGerald: I thought these had been published, I may be wrong, I may be thinking of a different document.

Interviewer: No, this has not been published but it has been reported by the BBC

Dr. FitzGerald: Well I would hesitate then to comment, my recollection may be confused between different documents at different stages.

Interviewer: As reported, involving 32 county elections the peace proposals of the I.R.A. would directly involve your government in that no elections could be held in 32 counties unless you are a party.

Dr. FitzGerald: What we are concerned with, if the I.R.A. can be persuaded to cease their violence so that politics can proceed and if they wish to present themselves for election North and South then their members are elected, and it is possible that in the North at least some small number might be, then politics can proceed and we can seek to negotiate a solution to the Northern Ireland problem. But the question they are telling us, the people of Ireland how our affairs should be run and dictating this

and purporting to negotiate the British Government over the heads of the Irish people, that would be the ultimate betrayal of Ireland if that were to be done or accepted. The only way our affairs can be decided is by the people who have been elected in the two parts of the country discussing these matters together and with the British Government, and the I.R.A. have no role in that, although if they in fact put forward people for elections for a political party associated with them and people were elected from them they would of course have the appropriate role to play in that. A role with whatever strength the people of Ireland wish to give them in those discussions.

Interviewer: The point I am trying to make is that the proposition as reported that has been put to the British Government is one on which your Government would have a veto, so I am asking you were you informed that such a proposal was in front of the British Government and did you respond to it?

Dr. FitzGerald: Well, as I said I am not quite certain of the particular document you are talking about and certainly a proposal of that kind is not one which you would take ~~any~~ seriously. We are concerned ~~as with~~ finding a solution here between those who have been chosen by the Irish people ~~to~~ represent them and the British Government. In regard to that if any proposals come forward which have the support of elected representatives in any part of Ireland are ones which ~~would~~ obviously have to be considered.

Interviewer: Do you have a general view at this stage of prospects of the ceasefire, has it been a chance to avert civil war in the North? How in general do you see the situation?

Dr. FitzGerald: Yes, I think that the situation was getting worse, I think that if violence continues you could get a situation where there could be a full scale civil war in Northern Ireland and I think also obviously if there is an ending to violence there is the possibility of more constructive political discussions, ones in which people will be less committed to hanging on to inherited positions and more willing to talk more openly to each other and to try to find a solution together and therefore clearly the ending of violence, if it can be achieved, is something that can make a major contribution, and if it, of course, continues and if we get back to the kind of situation we were in before the dangers are very great.
