

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2008/148/727
Creation Date(s):	9 January 1978
Extent and medium:	5 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
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STATEMENT BY THE TAOISEACH, MR. J. LYNCH, T.D.

INTERVIEW ON R.T.E., SUNDAY 9th JANUARY, 1978.

The reaction to the straightforward and factual answers I gave to questions on Northern Ireland that were put to me in a Radio interview on RTE's "This Week" programme last Sunday, was surprising and unexpected.

On the subject of a possible amnesty, I made it clear to the interviewer that I was dealing with a hypothetical question and emphasised that amnesty or mitigation of sentences could be considered by the Government of the day exercising their collective responsibility only in circumstances where violence and hostilities ceased and were not likely to break out afterwards.

I want to emphasise that my Government have given no consideration to an amnesty for anyone, especially for those who have been convicted of crimes of violence against the people or offences against the State.

The Government are committed to pursuing to the fullest possible extent those who are engaged in violence or other activities for illegal and subversive purposes.

On the subject of security, the communique issued after my meeting with the British Prime Minister, Mr. Callaghan, last September, said

"The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister emphasised the importance which they attached to security co-operation between the authorities on the two sides of the Border and expressed satisfaction at the degree of co-operation under the present arrangements".

These arrangements have not changed. Since we assumed office, our security personnel and equipment have been considerably increased.

On power sharing, I said nothing new or nothing that did not reflect the stated policies of British Governments and Opposition over the last five years and the policies of the Fianna Fail and Coalition Governments in the same period. To reiterate what is factual and truthful is apparently considered unhelpful. I consider that to be helpful in the situation that obtains in Northern Ireland is to keep it on proper perspective.

I agree with the view expressed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Mason, that at last year's meeting between Mr. Callaghan and myself, each Government's position was established. Mr. Callaghan and Mr. Mason frequently state their Government's position. In my interview on Sunday, I was reiterating my Government's position.

To paper over cracks can cause them to become chasms.

I was being factual when I said in the Radio interview that at my meeting on September 29th with Mr. Callaghan, I got from him "a firm undertaking that there would be no devolved Government without power-sharing." In saying this on Sunday last I was repeating what I said at a Press Conference in the Irish Embassy in London immediately after my talks with Mr. Callaghan. There was a wide representation of British Press, Radio and Television present at that Press Conference.

The following is what the agreed communique of that meeting said on devolved government:

"The Taoiseach welcomed the Prime Minister's statement that the British Government's policy was to work towards a devolved system of Government in which all sections of the community could participate on a fair basis and in which the rights of all citizens are fully safeguarded".

When I reported on the 12th October to the Dail on my meeting with Mr. Callaghan I said:

I obtained a firm assurance from the Prime Minister that there was not a scintilla of a move towards integration. He was emphatic in his view that the British people would not, in fact, agree to such a move".

Mr. Molyneaux, Leader of the Unionist M.P.s at Westminster, may not have been aware of this when he said on television on Monday that it was his information that I did not even raise "integration". My Dail statement went on to say:

I was also happy to receive from the Prime Minister the further assurance that it was and remained the policy of the British Government to have devolved Government with power-sharing in Northern Ireland and that there would be no devolved government without power-sharing"

(Official Report Dail Debates 12th Oct. 1977
Col. 224).

On the same day in the Dail, in commenting on the statement and on the agreed communique, the Leader of Fine Gael Party, Deputy Garret FitzGerald, referred to a discussion he had with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State less than a month before the general election when, on 26th May last, he

"secured from him agreement that he would continue to make it clear that the basic objective is that of a devolved executive government based on power-sharing and that any interim council that might be

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be established would be without significant executive powers and would be part of a two-stage process leading to self-government with power-sharing."

When these statements were made and published only three short months ago there was no outcry such as we have seen in the last two days.

I share the belief with the vast majority of Irish people, North and South, that the first priority must be to achieve peace in every part of our island. In order to achieve this end, it is of paramount importance, in the words of the communique of September 28th 1977,

"to work towards a devolved system of Government in which all sections of the community could participate on a fair basis and in which the rights of all citizens are fully safeguarded".

No progress can ever be made in containing violence and establishing peace if we always look for the mote in our neighbour's eye and are continuously suspicious of his every utterance.