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MR. PETER BROOKE - PC - DUBLIN - 6 MARCH 1992

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FROM JAMES LEE FOR COI RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICES

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE

GIVEN BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, MR. PETER BROOKE,

IN DUBLIN

ON FRIDAY, 6 MARCH 1992

Handwritten notes:
~~Mr. P. Brooke~~
10-5-92
J. Lee
9/3

MR. BROOKE:

As I think everyone is aware from the many previous occasions on which we have all met, I fear I don't give you a dissertation on what the communique contains - I afford you the opportunity of reading it. We would be delighted to take any questions that you have.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

QUESTION:

Secretary of State, when are you going to be meeting with the political leaders in Northern Ireland?

MR. BROOKE:

We have now obviously got the ability to go ahead and meet them and I would look forward to meeting them next week.

QUESTION:

Monday?

MR. BROOKE:

Monday is clearly one of the days when we might meet. If we were to get through Monday then one would be able to see whether there was an alternative day later in the week.

QUESTION:

Secretary of State, is it generally accepted now that you will be sitting round a table at Stormont with the political leaders on Monday to discuss talks? Is that the situation?

MR. BROOKE:

If that is the assumption, I think that is a very good assumption for everybody to have. I am not talking about the date but the fact that we have got the ability to sit down is, I think, now agreed.

QUESTION:

Many people have described the talks as symbolic. Would you agree with that description, Mr. Brooke?

MR. BROOKE:

The talks which we are about to embark on, the length of time they take will of course be affected by when the election is announced. I think the particular significance of the talks which we are

about to have is that they are a very clear index that the parties are expecting to return to talks as soon as the election is over.

QUESTION:

What can be done this side of the election?

MR. BROOKE:

I think on the basis of past experience you can do significant business in the early stages of the process.

QUESTION:

Secretary of State, you must be at least pleasantly surprised that you managed to achieve any talks before the election as earlier this year you had accepted that that would not happen.

MR. BROOKE:

Again, I think looking back over conversations of this sort which we have had for two-and-a-half years, nothing much has surprised me in the past two-and-a-half years but I am of course pleased that they are taking place.

QUESTION:

Secretary of State, for the first time since you have chaired one of these meetings, the communique specifically refers to extradition. Have they moved it up the agenda?

MR. BROOKE:

I would not want in any way to be argumentative but I think extradition has in fact come into the communiques on a whole series of occasions in the last two-and-a-half years.

QUESTION:

No significance in this particular reference?

MR. BROOKE:

No. The very fact that it has occurred on a whole series of occasions before means that the fact it appears today is not significant.

QUESTION:

How long do you expect these talks will be able to proceed before the general election takes place?

MR. BROOKE:

That is very much a function of when the general election is called. What we have got the ability to do arising out of today's agreement is to go on talking up to the moment till the election is called.

QUESTION:

Do you anticipate one day of talks, two days of talks or maybe even three days of talks?

MR. BROOKE:

Well, were the election not to be called till June, I would have called that a disappointing outcome.

QUESTION:

How would you describe these talks, Secretary of State? They have been variously described as peace talks, which the politicians always deny. What would you see them achieving?

MR. BROOKE:

The purpose of the talks was announced on March 26 last year. They are talks aiming at a political resolution of arrangements within Northern Ireland, arrangements between Northern Ireland and the Republic and any consequential changes in arrangements between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom so I think that describing them as "political talks" is a very sensible way to describe them.

QUESTION:

But they would erode the basis of support for terrorism, wouldn't they?

MR. BROOKE:

In the event of all those constitutionally involved in democratic politics in these islands, if all those so involved come to an agreement which everyone can endorse and support then by definition the terrorist will have been wholly to the margin of what is going on.

QUESTION:

Mr. Brooke, is there not a lot of going on in the sense that you have got Monday these talks taking place, you have got a ... coming up and then you have got a possible announcement about an election. How do you interweave various in all these exchanges?

MR. BROOKE:

My experience of many such exchanges is that you are always much better informed than I am about future events and if there is going to be a possible announcement of an election then of course there is not much that we would be able to do but I think I will wait until we know when the election is actually going to be called.

QUESTION:

.... amongst the politicians in Northern Ireland to try and make some progress this time around.

MR. BROOKE:

I was very struck in the debate last night in the House of Commons that Mr. Molyneux on behalf of the Official Unionists said he thought that inter-party tensions were actually at the lowest point that he could remember over a twenty-year period and I thought that was a very encouraging remark.

QUESTION:

Turning to today's conference, Secretary of State, this is the first opportunity you have had to meet with and David Andrews after a lengthy period.... How would you characterise the conference today?

MR. BROOKE:

It was my first opportunity of meeting him in conference. Of course, I had the opportunity of meeting him in London last week when the Taoiseach came to see the Prime Minister. I much enjoyed the meetings which Mr. Collins chaired but he chaired the meeting admirably, we did excellent business and I very much welcome the spirit in which the exchanges took place.

QUESTION:

Was it a different spirit? Could you detect a different attitude or tone?

MR. BROOKE:

I think all human beings are different. If the Minister of State were to be chairing in my place, it would be somewhat different from the way it goes so yes, there was a difference but I don't think that it was a remarkable difference; it is the sort of difference that you have as a result of different people doing it.

QUESTION:

In the event of a hung Parliament, what are the implications for the talks process in such a situation, say the Democrats had warned that any deal struck in such an event would perhaps harm the talks process, what is your particular feeling on this matter?

MR. BROOKE:

I say diffidently I think there are at least three hypotheses contained in that question and I find it quite difficult to deal with only a single one.

I will simply remark that I am very struck by the frequency with which the Leader of the Liberal Democrats refers to the possibility of a hung Parliament and I can only assume that that is his particular objective but it is not an objective which either of the other two major parties share.

QUESTION:

Secretary of State, how soon do you think the to these talks will get going? Before the election?

MR. BROOKE:

Again, that has to be hypothetical in the context of not knowing when the election is going to be called.

QUESTION:

(inaudible but re economic and social damage being broken down into figures)

ANSWER (MR. MAWHINNEY?)

We didn't talk about figures or amounts of money. We did talk about the effect on the potential for investment in terms of jobs, in terms of tourism, in terms of the selling of goods and services abroad, a variety of things but it wasn't a totally negative discussion because we also discussed the measures which both governments are taking to stimulate economic growth and also to focus it not least in Northern Ireland in those areas where the need is greatest.

QUESTION:

Secretary of State, for the benefit perhaps of our radio audience and perhaps also for television, could you briefly outline for us what you have agreed in relation to a gap?

MR. BROOKE:

What we determined today was that there would not be a further meeting of the Conference until after the British general election was called. That, of course, affords the opportunity for meetings of the political talks to take place.

We have then agreed that there will be a conference very shortly after the election and at that conference it will be decided how long a gap there is going to be before the next meeting which would again afford the opportunity for talks to resume. In the interim, between now and that next conference, there is the opportunity for us to consult the party leaders in Northern Ireland to take account of their views on what arrangements we might reach.

QUESTION:

For the benefit of people who might, again, not quite understand the significance of this, how important an agreement is this in your view in terms of allowing the process to continue?

MR. BROOKE:

What we have agreed today is admirably flexible because it affords us the opportunity of making the major decision at the conference after the election but what we have got in the meantime is the flexibility to get on with things.

QUESTION:

Secretary of State, do you share the Irish Government's belief that the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 should be on the table in any talks that take place?

MR. BROOKE:

The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 was not mentioned at the conference which has just taken place.

QUESTION:

But do you believe it should be part of any future talks that take place with the Irish Government?

MR. BROOKE:

That is a slightly different question. As I am answering questions on a conference meeting, I think the sensible thing to do is to wait and see whether the Irish Government do raise it as a subject which they want to raise. I have indicated in the past that I don't see its immediate relevance to what we are about.

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

MR. BROOKE:

I am conscious that you will be having the opportunity of interviewing Irish Ministers in a moment and I certainly would not want to make matters complicated for them. The issue was raised

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in Downing Street last week. It was not raised today and I making an inference that the exchanges which occurred in Downing Street last week may have made it unnecessary for it to be raised today but we will wait and see if it comes up again in the future.

QUESTION:

... on the table in the future?

MR. BROOKE:

That is taking us into a whole series of questions which today's meeting wasn't about.

QUESTION:

On the question of the Nelson case what were you able to tell the Irish Government?

MR. BROOKE:

It was reported after the Nelson case was concluded that the British Government would obviously be seeking to learn any lessons that arose out of the case and certainly we discussed matters along those lines.

QUESTION:

Coal(phon) Island, was that raised at all?

MR. BROOKE:

Coal Island is a case where there is obviously an RUC investigation currently taking place. It was mentioned together with a number of other cases that there is an RUC investigation happening.

QUESTION:

...raises apparent uncertainties about some cases in the British justice system?

MR. BROOKE:

That is a somewhat elliptical question. We took a number of cases that related to Northern Ireland and, as I say, we dealt with each of those on its merits.

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

MR. BROOKE:

The implication of the debate last night in the House - I can't quote the precise words that were used but the indication was that the assurances which they had sought from the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition had been afforded them and therefore we were looking forward to talks that would carry on after the election.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)