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SIR PATRICK MAYHEW - PC - LONDON - 3 FEBRUARY 1993

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cc A/Sec O'Hagan  
Mr Donoghue  
Mr Hennessey  
Mr Hamill

FROM EGMG FOR COI RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICES

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE

GIVEN BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND,

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW

IN LONDON

ON WEDNESDAY, 3 FEBRUARY 1993

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I am not, Ladies and Gentlemen, going to say much by way of an introduction save to say that I think we have had a very successful and congenial first intergovernmental conference with Mr Dick Spring and Mrs Geoghegan-Quinn and we have discussed the matters which the communique has described. I think it has been a comprehensive discussion, it has been one which has been characterised by openness and frankness and I think by realism and I am encouraged by it, the future, and in particular by the evidence that it gives that it really is practical and not just a kind of whimsical hope that talks shall resume and that both governments believe, as they did back in November, that it was a realistic and achievable objective that the governments set their hands to with the constitutional parties, the main constitutional parties, back in November 1991, to set about this process of talks to achieve a new set of relationships within Northern Ireland and in and about Northern Ireland.

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Gallagher

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QUESTION:

Do you sense a new mood on the Irish side?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I sense a realistic mood and a mood of determination and that I think is very welcome and very encouraging.

QUESTION:

You say you sense a new realism, what exactly has changed?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I have not said I sense a new realism, I have said I have been grateful to see a sense of realism and a sense of determination and a shared view with me that it really is practical to get these talks going again and to make progress towards the achievement of the objectives which everybody shared back in November 1991.

QUESTION:

Did you tell Mr Spring of your view that Article 2 and 3 of the Republic's constitution are unhelpful and that perhaps he should take some action on them?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

It was clear to all of us that Articles 2 and 3 would be and had to be among the matters to receive serious consideration. There has been a comprehensive and a realistic review of the matters that are really pretty central to the talks process.

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QUESTION:

Are you any closer to resolving that particular difficulty?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

The Tornishter (Phon) wants to meet the Unionist leaders and indeed the leaders of all the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland because he wants, and I can understand this, if I were in his position I think I would feel the same, a newly appointed Foreign Minister, he wants to hear at first hand from them the nature of their concerns in every respect. And I therefore very much hope that this is an opportunity that will not be let pass by.

QUESTION:

Can you amplify the phrase in paragraph 3 which says that every effort should be made to create conditions under which further talks could take place at an early stage, what are the kind of conditions which would inspire a resumption of those talks and what is an early date?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

An early date is as soon as possible, that is an easy one. The bit about creating the conditions I think really relates to the consultation which we all recognise is both desirable and necessary - that is language taken from the declaration that everybody signed up to back in the middle of November last year when the last talks came to an end.

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Of course it is necessary to consult when you are dealing with problems with such deep roots and of such sensitivity, you are a chump if you do not consult individually and separately with those who are principally concerned, those who have the courage, as the communique also says, to take part in politics in a democratic way. And so I think that passage relates to the lessons that are there to be learnt from the consultation process.

QUESTION:

Do you think that the local elections in May represents a significant obstacle to the talks resuming?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I think that they represent something that may be a distraction from complete concentration on the task of getting talks going, but they will not I think be a dominating distraction and I very much hope they will not because I personally believe that the public in Northern Ireland, right across the Community, have a very strong desire that talks shall resume and I think they would be deeply disappointed if politicians out of an understandable desire to make the best showing in the local government elections were to neglect the opportunities that exist for a better future for Northern Ireland as a whole.

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QUESTION:

... in planning a long programme or an extensive programme for the Anglo/Irish conference meetings, are you in fact saying there will not be a gap for some time?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

No I do not think that that is the intention of the parties or the governments at all, it is not set out in the communique but I think that there is an understanding of what made a gap necessary between April and in the end November last year and for my own part I am quite confident that if it became clear that only a gap in a future series of governmental conferences was needed to permit talks to resume, then I believe that would not prove to be an obstacle.

QUESTION:

In the context of Dick Spring's expressed interest in talks with the Unionists, how important do you see this, is this now part of the game plan, is it something that you think could happen as a matter of urgency in advance of any continuation of the existing process?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I have heard from Mr Spring when I went to see him in Dublin not very long ago, a couple of weeks or so ago, that it was his intention to reach out to the Unionists and to hear from them what they feel, what their hopes are, what their fears, anxieties and



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all the rest. That being the case and since he is newly in post as a Foreign Minister, I wish to encourage my colleagues who are leaders of the constitutional parties in the north to take that invitation, to accept that invitation, I hope very much that they will, I believe that the public hope that they will because the public see great advantage in talking and I do not think they see quite the same advantage in people standing off and saying: 'No I am not going to talk to you'.

QUESTION:

Did you discuss the possibility of a gap in conference meetings with Mr Spring this morning?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

It was envisaged between us that a time might come when it would be appropriate to have a gap in the resumed series of governmental conferences.

QUESTION:

But we might well have 1, 2, 3 more conferences before then?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I think I have said what I wanted to say about that, it will not be an obstacle I believe if that is seen to be what is necessary to allow talks to resume.

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QUESTION:

... when even the leader of the Alliance party recently said that he believed you saw your role in the Province as akin to that of Mr Patten in Hong Kong?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I read that and I thought if anything was whimsical, that was. I had a discussion with Dr Alderdeiss (phon) about that, I will not breach the confidentiality of that occasion.

QUESTION:

The Prime Minister is going to the United States later this month, what do you think about the suggestion that the President might

...

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I read about that of course first when the American Presidential election was on and I reminded myself then, and I remind myself now, that a lot of things are said in the heat of election campaigns which do not necessarily form part of the established programme of the resulting government.

QUESTION:

Would you welcome one?



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SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I think we will wait and see what President Clinton has to say. I will say what I have said previously that the American government is exceptionally well represented in the United Kingdom by its present Ambassador, though of course it may well be that they will choose, as is the American custom, to appoint a new one with an in-coming government, I have nothing to say about that at all. But what we really want is success in these constitutional talks, that is what we want, success in this process in which all the constitutional parties with all their experience of the problems of Northern Ireland, these talks hold the key to a better future for Northern Ireland, that is what we want. We also of course want better jobs, better economic success and if America can help in that regard, and indeed they have done a great deal very generously with the International Fund for Ireland, we want that too.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)