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**Statement by the Prime Minister
1 November 1993**

The Prime Minister's statement this afternoon to a well attended House, crowded press gallery and Lords gallery which included, Lord Whitelaw and several other distinguished peers, covered both the EC Summit and his meeting with the Taoiseach - a combination which some members of the lobby told us was designed to cover the lack of positive news on the EC front. The bulk of the questions however were on Northern Ireland. Attached is a copy of the statement made by the Prime Minister. The Leader of the Opposition spoke from notes and no text is available. The PM was flanked on the front bench by Sir Patrick Mayhew, Douglas Hurd and the Leader of the House. Smith was accompanied by the full NI team, by the Deputy Leader, Margaret Beckett, and by the Foreign Affairs spokesman, Jack Cunningham. All the DUP were present, five of the OUP, excluding Molyneaux, and Hume and Hendron for the SDLP.

The Prime Minister led with remarks on the EC Summit. On his meeting with the Taoiseach, he said that the Taoiseach had given him an account of Hume's report and the Irish Government's assessment. He stated that the Taoiseach did not pass the report to him. He acknowledged Hume's courage but said that he and the Taoiseach had agreed that his report was not in itself a basis for further action. He quoted the six principles from the Joint Statement, omitting the word "imaginatively" when he described the response from the two Governments which would follow a cessation of violence. He said that the terrorists' activities would bring them no advantage, only the prospect of long years in prison, and would not alter the constitutional guarantee or defeat the Government from the search for secure and lasting peace. He said the principle of consent was at the heart of any settlement, as the Tanalste made clear last week when he acknowledge the right of Unionist to give or withhold that consent. This clearly points towards constitutional reform in the Irish Republic at the right time and in the right circumstances.

Smith said he would welcome an early resumption of the talks process. There was a moral obligation on the parties to return to the table with no preconditions and on the basis of the three strands and the principle that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed. In the interim, the two Governments have a responsibility to develop their own institutional framework for peace. He urged the Prime Minister to consider carefully the broad thrust of the Tanaiste's principles and warned that the fine balance which they contained between the Nationalist and Unionist aspirations should not be destroyed by treating it selectively. He acknowledged Hume's courageous and imaginative efforts which he had made at personal and political risk. He concluded that, even if talks were reconvened, the Governments of the UK and the Republic must continue to consider ways forward and not hesitate to develop their own proposals.

Hume/Adams

Hume was called relatively early in the debate. He was listened to in total silence. It was the responsibility, he said, of everyone to do everything in their power to resolve this conflict, particularly the Governments. He spoke of the failure of the security forces to bring peace. He had taken the responsibility that was his. He saw real opportunity, and he meant his words, the best opportunity in twenty years. Since the Prime Minister had described him as courageous and imaginative "why has he rejected my proposals before he talked to me about them".

The Prime Minister replied that he had a great deal of admiration for the persistence and courage with which over many years Hume had pursued a settlement, though he had not always agreed with him. He had to make a judgement on the actions which will lead to the consent of every element of the communities in Northern Ireland. He had discussed Hume's report with the Taoiseach and he was happy to meet with Hume. His door was open to all the leaders of the constitutional parties for constructive help from whatever democratic source. But he had to make a judgement, whether in the fashion in which he proposed them, Hume's proposals would lead to a settlement. After being informed by the Taoiseach, he reached the conclusion that it was not the right way to proceed.

Paisley asked the Prime Minister what detail of the Hume/Adam's document had led him to reject it. He said that many were alarmed at point five of the Joint Communiqué. He asked what difference there was between point five and joint sovereignty.

The Prime Minister replied that some action such as a referendum on Articles 2 and 3, will of necessity have to be undertaken by the Government of the Republic. On the Hume/Adams document, he had not read this, but he was aware from the Taoiseach of its contents. He did not think it could lead to consent across Ireland and it should not be proceeded with in that form.

Tony Benn told the Prime Minister there would be great disappointment at his rejection of Hume's proposals and said that the Prime Minister's refusal to talk to everybody was now an obstacle to a peaceful settlement.

The Prime Minister replied that in a democracy, talking to terroriste is not the way to proceed. He respected and admired Hume and he meant that genuinely and did not just say it as a matter of form. But it was not just his view but also the view of the Irish Prime Minister that they could not continue with Hume's proposals.

Hendron said it ill-behoved anyone to be critical of those who wished to end murder and violence. He asked the Prime Minister to use his close relationship with the OUP to ask them to speak directly with the UFF and the UDA to try to persuade them to end the violence.

The Prime Minister stated in a tough near put-down type of reply that he doubted whether constitutional politicians had any authority over these "murdering butchers", who were beyond the pale of civilized behaviour. He was not critical of John Hume but he judged that he could not take his proposals forward in the form in which they are at present.

John Howe Robertson, Labour MP for East Lothian and a prominent member of the Inter-Parliamentary Body, accused the PM of nit-picking over the terms of Hume's proposals which he hadn't even seen and asked him not to allow his dependence on the OUP for votes in the House to influence him.

The Prime Minister called this a low and juvenile remark and reminded him that the Taoiseach also took the same position as he did over Hume's proposals. He added there were not special agreements or deals with any other parties in the House.

In response to a question from Dennis Skinner, the Prime Minister replied, "if he is suggesting that I sit down and talk with Mr Adams and the IRA then that would turn my stomach over, as it would most people in this House". He said if there was an end to violence established over a considerable period of time, then the Government would talk to those constitutional parties who have people elected in their name.

The Talks

The Prime Minister replying to Smith said he too would welcome the early resumption of the talks on the basis of the three strands, though he was less concerned with the format of the talks than with the fact of them taking place.

Asked by Jim Marshall, Labour MP for Leicester and one of the authors of the controversial joint sovereignty document, whether the talks would be reconvened on the basis of the three strands and that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed, the Prime Minister replied, "Yes".

Tánaiste's Six Principles

On the Tánaiste's six principles the Prime Minister in response to Smith's comments said there was a great deal he could agree with though not all. They were a very helpful contribution to the debate and he was happy to acknowledge that that was the case. He said that the Government would be willing to bring forward proposals to give focus and direction when new talks begin, if that would be helpful.

Paddy Ashdown asked if this was the moment when the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach could take personal charge of the talks. He said that the Tánaiste's six principles provided not just an appropriate way forward, but also reassurance to the Unionists cause. He called on Unionists politicians to utter some welcome, however guarded and however partial to those principles.

The Prime Minister replied that he and the Taoiseach proposed to take a very close interest in the development of the discussion. He acknowledged again the important principles enunciated by the Tánaiste which seemed to suggest that Articles 2 and 3 would be put to a referendum in the Republic. This was very reassuring and a considerable contribution for a search for peace.

Subsequently in a lobby briefing Gus O'Donnell, the Government Press Secretary, told journalists that "the Prime Minister had concrete proposals to put to the parties." He was asked by a number of those present if the Prime Minister would convene a meeting of the parties. He avoided a direct answer, simply repeating that they had concrete proposals. As you will be aware, this story is now running with some prominence (PA are calling it Major's peace package) on evening news bulletins but informed journalists point to the fact that in the House the Prime Minister had nothing new to say other than restating the Government's intention to give focus and direction to the talks, something which Mayhew has said publicly on a number of occasions previously.

NI Select Committee

To the considerable annoyance of the Labour Front Bench, Kate Hoey asked the Prime Minister if he had raised the establishment of an NI Select Committee with the Taoiseach, adding that many members of the House supported its establishment as they were concerned about the democratic deficit.

The Prime Minister replied that he certainly hadn't discussed the setting up of a Select Committee of this House with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland. This was a matter for the House and the Procedure Committee, whose recommendations the Government would consider.

Internment

Asked by Willie Ross to give careful consideration to selective detention, the Prime Minister said he had noted the public debate on internment. This option remained open for the Government but it wouldn't be appropriate for him to comment now on the circumstances in which that option would be used. "It is there and I don't rule it out", he said.

Dennis Canavan, Chairman of the Labour Committee on Northern Ireland, also raised the question of internment which he said would almost certainly be counter-productive and would act as an effective recruiting sergeant for the para-militaries. The Prime Minister replied that he has nothing to add to what he had said earlier on internment but then went on to note that many lessons had been learned from the last time. Questioned by Andrew Hunter, the Prime Minister agreed that it was important to ensure that the security response was commensurate with the increased risk of terrorism.

Asked by Norman Lamont whether there would be any question of an amnesty for terrorists, the Prime Minister replied that as there were no political prisoners anywhere in the UK, the question of amnesty did not arise.

Comment

This was an articulate and confident performance from the Prime Minister in a well attended, sombre and well behaved House. There was however, an air of surrealism about the mixture of topics.

As was the case with the debate on the Secretary of State's statement on 25 October, the focus this afternoon was again very clearly on John Hume and his talks with Gerry Adams. The clear impression among back-benchers was that the Prime Minister's responses made abundantly clear that both Governments now wish to put daylight between themselves and the Hume/Adams dialogue. In his replies, Mr Major stressed the point that the Taoiseach shared his view, while emphasising his strong personal regard for Mr Hume. (We should report to you for what it is worth, the remarks of Frank Millar who said "he thought he would never see the day that a British Prime Minister and the Leader of the Conservative and Unionist party would use the words of the Taoiseach to counter the Leader of constitutional nationalism in Northern Ireland".)

Immediately after the debate, Hume went to call on John Smith and we were not therefore able to talk to him. His demeanour clearly suggested that he continues to be under considerable personal pressure and clearly unhappy with the Prime Minister's replies. McNamara accompanied Hume in his call on Smith and told us subsequently that Hume was "very, very angry" with both Governments. He continues to insist that the British Government were fully aware of the detail of his proposals. He is also still convinced that he will be invited

to Downing Street either late tonight or early tomorrow. This looks however, increasingly unlikely. Hume was boosted somewhat by Smith's statement which we happen to know went a great deal further than the cautious draft prepared by McNamara's office. He also received strong vocal support from the Labour benches.

Among those to whom we spoke subsequently was Jim Kilfedder who commented that in his view, Hume is now in serious difficulty and from a Westminster perspective has clearly lost all credibility with the Conservatives.

One particular subtext to the debate which may develop further in the coming days is the question of what precisely the Taoiseach said to the Prime Minister in Brussels. Peter Bottomley in particular feels strongly that it is up to the Governments to make public the content of the Hume/Adams dialogue and he told us that he is thinking of pursuing this in the coming days.

A final point worth noting is the fact that taking the debate as a whole, much of what the Prime Minister had to say this afternoon, emphasised points of concern for the Unionist side. You will note for example, his references to Articles 2 and 3.