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TRANSCRIPT B - PRIME MINISTER MAJOR/IRISH PRIME MINISTER BRUTON  
JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE - BELFAST - 22 FEBRUARY 1995

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FROM JAMES LEE FOR COI RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICES

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY  
PRIME MINISTER JOHN MAJOR AND IRISH PRIME MINISTER JOHN BRUTON  
HELD AT THE SALMORAL CONFERENCE CENTRE  
IN BELFAST  
ON WEDNESDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 1995

TRANSCRIPT B - (CONTINUED FROM TRANSCRIPT A)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (CONTD)

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QUESTION:

Dr. Paisley has described this document as a declaration of war. Have you any proposals to get him off a war-footing?

PRIME MINISTER:

I would regard it as a declaration for peace rather than a declaration for war. I had an extremely worthwhile, constructive discussion with Dr. Paisley and his colleagues last evening, I look forward to more in the future, there is a great deal of discussion to come. I don't anticipate that Dr. Paisley will welcome every dot and comma in this document immediately, we will need to discuss that over a period of time, I think that is undoubtedly the case, it is always going to be the case.



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This is a balanced document but nobody - Unionist or Nationalist - is going to like everything that is in this document; there will be people who like it because they appreciate the balance that is within it but if you had asked someone who was a Unionist or someone who was a Nationalist to write down specifically what they wished to see, they would not have produced this document so of course there is a great deal of discussion; that will take time, it will take patience. Dr. Paisley, like every other political leader in the North wants, if it is at all possible, to enshrine a position where Ulster's prosperity can grow without the troubles and difficulties of the last twenty-five years. I don't have the slightest doubt about his commitment to that and I think on that basis we will be able to talk.

PRIME MINISTER BRUTON:

I would like to add, if I may, in response to that last question and to a number of other questions that have been put in regard to this matter that it is important in looking at the cross-border institutions to refer to the precise wording of paragraphs 25 and 30; they refer specifically to the various designated functions of these bodies occurring by or as a result of agreement. The emphasis throughout this document is on reaching agreement. The purpose of the document is not to create a fait accompli but to give parties who previously wanted to know and were asking what the governments' ideas were and who were perhaps using the absence of a clear statement from the governments as to their ideas as an excuse for not coming forward with their's. That excuse now no



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longer exists, the governments have set out clearly their ideas. These are ideas which the governments intend to proceed with on the basis of agreement reached and I am glad to say that news of the impending publication of this document by the governments has encouraged a number of other parties to put their ideas on the table in recent days and we hope there will be many more suggestions put from other parties on the table for discussion in conjunction with this framework document.

What we are seeking is to challenge people to think, to challenge people, if they don't like what is in this document particularly in regard to a special matter, to ask themselves what is the problem that this document in that regard is trying to solve and then, having identified the problem, say: "Well, I don't like the framework document's suggestion for solving it; here is my alternative!"

It is very important that everybody who offers a criticism of an aspect of the document should ask themselves first the question: "What problem is this aspect of the document trying to solve?" and secondly: "Have I a better way of solving that problem?" That is what we mean when we say we are challenging the parties in this document; we are challenging them to either go with this or come up with something better.

QUESTION:

(inaudible but regarding the triple lock)



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PRIME MINISTER:

I am not proposing to change the order of the locks. I think those are the natural and sequential order. We have learned before in the troubled history of the last few decades in Northern Ireland that unless you carry all the people with you then you don't get where you seek to go; that often means things go more slowly than you would ideally wish, it means a great deal of patience and sometimes a touch of frustration but I think that has to be the way it is and I have set out the way in which we propose to deal with it and I don't propose to change that.

QUESTION:

Mr. Major, will these North-South bodies be in place before the next general election and if not, in what sort of time-scale do you anticipate they could be?

PRIME MINISTER:

It is up to the parties. As the Taoiseach has just said, we were asked to put forward proposals for discussion. We have put forward some proposals. These may not be the only proposals. If the parties don't like what is in here, then the parties can produce something else. We have the clear indication of where we all wish to get; if they don't like this, put forward something else. We are prepared to discuss that.

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As to whether we will get there by the next general election, I can't at this stage know how soon the parties will engage in bilateral discussions, after they have examined the document how soon they will sit down collectively, how soon they will reach an agreement so I can't give you a clear indication about that. We will not unduly delay but I would rather take things securely and be sure of the progress that we have made than try and rush things ahead too fast and let the process fail so I am afraid it isn't possible to give a date but what we do want is measured progress and we want measured progress in the peaceful atmosphere we have had recently.

NICK CLARKE (BBC "WORLD AT ONE"):

You have suggested over and over again that this is a consultation document. Will you not be trying to persuade people of its value and will you not in fact be a persuader for change?

PRIME MINISTER:

We have set out, as we were asked to do, some ideas for the parties to consider but I go back to the point that I have made and the Taoiseach has made this morning: the whole thing rests on consent and on carrying people with us; if they don't like it, they will change it. Of course, we think these are workable ideas or we wouldn't have produced them, that is self-evident but they are not ideas where we are going to say: "Stick to that! We don't want your alternative!" If they have an alternative that will work and will lead to the objective that every sensible



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person in Ulster and beyond seeks, then we will look at those alternatives.

To the extent that we are persuaders, we are persuaders for people to come together and examine these propositions and bring forward other propositions if we wish. To that extent, we are persuaders but beyond that what we are seeking is to draw from the people collectively what they believe would be a workable proposition for the future and that is a point that the Taoiseach emphasised a moment ago; it has to be by consent, it has to be by agreement, slow, difficult, painful but the only way.

QUESTION:

Given the facts of the Sunningdale Agreement, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration and this framework document today, is it not reasonable for Unionists to consider that you are thinking ultimately in terms of an Ireland coalition as a solution to this particular problem?

Secondly, did you ever think about throwing in the towel amidst all this.....

PRIME MINISTER:

No, I most certainly didn't. You may call it old-fashioned but I have a rooted objection to people killing one another and we have made some progress and it has stopped. Things have changed in Northern Ireland, you know Northern Ireland well. Everybody in



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this room knows that Northern Ireland has changed in the last few months. I don't just mean the political atmosphere, I mean the atmosphere out on the streets; people aren't searched when they go into stores, they don't have the same worries in the morning, they don't pick up their morning newspapers or listen to the media each morning with a new outrage. There is a different sense, a different attitude. To that extent, there is a better chance of progress for the future than we have had in the past.

I don't underestimate the difficulties that lie ahead but I do believe that with care and patience those difficulties can be overcome and the prize is really very great, isn't it and doesn't really need spelling out. The prize is so great as to be worth the effort, whatever the effort itself might be.

As to the first part of your question, I cannot do better than to reaffirm the consent principle. I made the point a few moments ago that I am a Unionist, of course, but I am a Unionist who wants peace and a prosperous future for Unionists. It is a matter of choice: for so long as the majority of the people of Northern Ireland wish to remain in the United Kingdom, they will remain in the United Kingdom with my full support, with the full backing of the British Government and with the full support of everything that that means. If their choice is to do something different, we will accept it but it has to be their choice.



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PRIME MINISTER BRUTON:

I just want to stress that the whole document right through stresses the three strands, the three sets of relationships. It is not therefore all strand 2, all a matter of looking at the relationships in an all-Ireland context. There is Strand 1, which is a very important part of the settlement which is the internal settlement in Northern Ireland; there is Strand 2, which is the all-Ireland dimension; and there is also the East-West dimension. It is quite important that once we can normalise our relations between Britain and Ireland by reaching agreement on the outstanding differences in regard to Northern Ireland, that we can then move on to a much richer cooperation on an East-West basis between the whole of Britain and the whole of Ireland and that is something that has been stunted by the conflict here in the last seventy years and it is important to stress in that context the importance of Strand 3 as well.

QUESTION (NEW YORK TIMES):

Could both of you say what you think the odds are that some day Sinn Fein, the major Unionist parties and of course the SDLP, will actually sit at the same table?

PRIME MINISTER:

I am not a bookmaker but they are improving. The fact that the Government are now engaged in talks with Sinn Fein is evidence of that; those talks still have some way to go but progress is being made, I hope further progress is going to be made in the future.



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Once it is clear that Sinn Fein have renounced violence for good, once it is clear that action is taken on the decommissioning of weapons, then Sinn Fein becomes a democratic, legitimate political party and will be able to sit down with the British Government and with the other political parties. That day is much closer than it was a year ago.

PRIME MINISTER BRUTON:

I would say the odds are about 5-1 on. I would say it is very likely that we will see that happening. I can't say when. It may take quite a long time. There is no point in understating the serious issues that the Prime Minister has referred to that still remain in regard to the decommissioning of arms and also there is the sense in the Unionist community that they have been the victims of a campaign waged over twenty-five years in which so many of them lost their lives but I think there is a recognition on the part of both parties and their supporters that if there is to be permanent peace within Northern Ireland and in these islands, a relationship must be struck up between those two parties and I believe the inevitability of that is very strong and I think it is simply a question of finding a process of healing the wounds sufficiently so that the people concerned can sit down together. I am therefore specifically very confident that that will happen. I won't tell you when the race will take place but I have quoted the odds!



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QUESTION:

(inaudible)

PRIME MINISTER:

They will decide in the discussions the extent of these bodies. That is the point we have repeatedly sought to make this morning, that these are ideas and proposals for discussion with the political parties; they will be discussed with the political parties; they will then be put to a referendum; only then will there be legislation; that broad legislation about North-South bodies will only be - if I can put it in shorthand terms - in headline terms and then further details will actually have to be agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The position is within the hands of the political parties by agreement right the way through and once the North-South bodies are confirmed, the North-South body will be answerable to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to the Dail respectively.

The fear I know exists that someone externally is going to impose all sorts of draconian things on the North-South bodies but that is not what we have in mind. What we have in mind is putting forward these ideas for discussion.



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There are obvious areas where it is very sensible to cooperate. There is cooperation that goes on now and has gone on for the last twenty or thirty years. There are areas where cooperation is self-evidently common sense and what we are asking is for people to consider those areas and consider what is in the interests of everybody in the North-South bodies and in other things as well.

I believe in the politics of persuasion and I believe in the politics of reason and I think we will be able to let people discuss these matters and draw out the joint advantages of proceeding as we have proposed.

**PRIME MINISTER BRUTON:**

Could I answer that question directly by saying that what weakens the Union is the sense amongst the Nationalist minority in Northern Ireland that the state doesn't recognise their loyalty, that it doesn't recognise their aspirations, their sense of Irish allegiance. It is that alienation of the minority community in Northern Ireland that creates the tension that in turn means that issues of the Union are constantly being questioned and raised.

What this document is designed to do is to create new structures to which both communities in Northern Ireland will be able to give an equal sense of allegiance, that both communities will feel equally at home in their own place. If that happens, all of the issues that prompted your question will cease to be problems, people won't see the need to ask that question any more because it



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won't be a relevant question because a framework will have been created in which both communities will feel equally at home. That question is only asked out of a sense of insecurity. The purpose of the document is to create a comprehensive new dispensation in Northern Ireland in which both communities will feel equally at home and that is the security that can be offered to both of them, the security that there is an arrangement in place that their neighbours are as happy with as they are. As long as there are arrangements in place that their neighbour on the street or in the next housing estate is not as happy with as they are, then there is no security for anybody. That is the purpose that we are seeking to achieve in this agreed framework, a new dispensation where both communities would feel equally at home.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT B AND END OF WHOLE TRANSCRIPT)