

INTERVIEW WITH ITN

Interviewer: Prime Minister, you came over here to assure the people of Northern Ireland. You don't seem to have been able to reassure the hard-line Protestants. Why do you think that is?

PM: I don't know that it is possible to reassure everyone. What I hope is is it possible to reassure the vast majority. Two things: first the guarantee to the people of Northern Ireland is the law of our land ^{it is} /in the 1973 Act and I give my personal commitment to it. That I wanted to get over. Secondly, I also believe very much that we have a duty to try to live in peace and reconciliation with the only neighbouring country with whom we have a land border. We shan't be deflected from that either. I wanted to make both perfectly clear.

Interviewer: Mr. Paisley says he will only accept your assurances if you announce that you are not discussing the totality of relationships with Dublin.

PM: I cannot answer for Mr. Paisley. I can only answer for myself.

Interviewer: But can you give him that reassurance?

PM: I can only answer for myself and for the Government. No. The communique was drawn up after the ^{last} /Summit meeting in Dublin. The communique stands and now that talks will be entered into as a result of that communique, entered into. Nothing firm was decided. We shall talk together.

Interviewer: Is not totality bound to include some minor, perhaps, constitutional questions?

PM: None at all. We are not discussing constitutional questions. The word does not appear in the communique.

Interviewer: Totality includes everything.

/PM: I am sorry

PM: I am sorry the word constitutional is not included in that communique - and was purposely not because it is against the present framework which is part of the law of our land. The constitution of Northern Ireland is in the law of our land.

Interviewer: What will you discuss? An Anglo/Irish defence pact, for instance?

PM: We haven't raised that with the Republic of Ireland. It would not be a matter for us. Defence would be a matter for NATO as a whole, not a bilateral matter between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Interviewer: Do you believe there is in fact anything you could say which could well reassure Mr Paisley?

PM: I can't answer for Mr. Paisley. I can only say that I hope to reassure the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland.

Interviewer: He has accused you of treachery and of being a liar. What do you make of that?

PM: He must be very desperate.

Interviewer: What about his parade of 500 people with firearms certificates. Doesn't that indicate that he has got some powerful support behind him?

PM: You must ask Mr. Paisley about these things.

Interviewer: But, doesn't it indicate he has got backing?

PM: I have said perfectly clearly that there is no plot, there is no sell out. The guarantee for the people of Northern Ireland is in our law, it cannot be altered unless the people of Northern Ireland wish it and the Parliament at Westminster changes it. It is in our law. Perhaps I had not realised enough that although it is in our law the people of Northern Ireland need the reassurance given just a little bit more often.

Interviewer: Finally, to the hunger strike. Are you concerned here alas the IRA this time back it up with a bombing campaign?

PM: I am deeply sorry there is another hunger strike. It is to try to achieve political status for criminals. It will never achieve that status. Criminals are criminals. To me there is no such thing as political crimes. Murder is criminal. Violence is criminal. It will stay that way. That hunger strike will achieve nothing.

Interviewer: Will they back it up with bombing?

PM: I do not know. I hope not because the people who will suffer will be the people of Northern Ireland and that will not help anyone. It will only bring great cruelty and suffering and I believe that the people of Northern Ireland will know where that cruelty and suffering came from. It came from terrorists who are the enemies of democracy and freedom everywhere.

Interviewer: Thank you very much Prime Minister.