

INTERVIEW GIVEN BY SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
ON DOORSTEP OF NO 10, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1985

TK: We had a very full and frank discussion. Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley made very clear their concerns about the discussions taking place between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the Republic and we discussed the issues and they discussed the importance that they attach to seeing more development internally and possibly more devolution. And the Prime Minister and I confirmed that any discussions that are taking place aren't an alternative to devolution, I certainly hope that we can develop that as well.

Q: They have said that Mrs Thatcher has undertaken to consider the points which they have made to her. Do you think that in consideration of those points that anything will change in the way the negotiations are coming out?

TK: Well we don't know at the moment whether they will come out. I don't yet know whether we will have an agreement, but what was clear at the meeting and both the Prime Minister and I were able to confirm again that if we do get an agreement it will in no way affect the sovereignty state of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. We confirmed that again and I hope that was a clear reassurance to both the party leaders.

Q: Do you think they will eventually accept some role for the Irish Government?

Well obviously at the moment we have a difficult situation in which it is not possible to give the full details of the agreement. I hope that when they see the agreement, if we do reach it, it will be clear that the pledges we have given have been fully honoured and as I have frequently stated to the people of Northern Ireland, I have made absolutely clear

my own personal position that we stand absolutely by the position of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, no change whatsoever in that situation or the responsibility of Ministers and that I hope is quite clear and quite well understood by everybody in the Province.

Q: And the negotiations are continuing?

TK: They are indeed.

Q: Why are you so pessimistic about whether or not they might materialise?

TK: Until you have an agreement you can't be certain that you will actually get an agreement, and obviously in the final stages there can be detailed points which can present real difficulties. There are difficult issues involved but I hope because of the benefits that could flow and one of the interesting things that Mr Molyneux and Dr Paisley said is that they recognise as everybody does in the North of Ireland the advantages of a better relationship and the advantages of talking to the Republic about a whole range of different issues, not least the issue of security.

Q: So today's meeting does not in any way obstruct the prospect of an agreement?

TK: No. We've taken note of the points that they made. I've made it my business to try and understand the issues in the Province and I think that the points that they put were very fairly the views held by many Unionists at the present time, the concerns that they have, and I hope that the meeting with the Prime Minister, as I said more than an hour of discussion, may have been helpful to them in making absolutely clear that there is no question of the Prime Minister or I changing the position on the pledges that we have given to the people of Northern Ireland.

Q: But that's not going to affect the course of the Anglo/Irish talks?

TK: Well we have made quite clear that these are continuing at the present time and that we hope that the agreement, if it is reached, will fully meet the concerns that have been expressed by Mr Molyneaux and Dr Paisley.

Q: If the talks don't in fact reach an agreement what are the consequences? What are your major concerns?

TK: I think it would be very unfortunate if we were not able to reach agreement on what are steps to try and improve and deepen the relationship with the Republic of Ireland. We both share a common interest, for example most obviously in defeating terrorism. We know that the particular problem that terrorism poses, not just north of the border but south of the border as well, and that would be one obvious loss if we weren't able to achieve that as well. Of course we want good cooperation anyway, but a closer relationship could improve that still further.

Q: Has this changed anything this morning?

TK: Its confirmed the concerns, and I hope that it has reassured the Unionist leaders of both the Prime Minister and my position and the position of the Government in the assurances that we've given about the pledges about the position of Northern Ireland.

Q: Your predecessor, Douglas Haard, said several months ago on several occasions that the chances at that stage of an agreement with the Republic of Ireland and the UK were fifty-fifty. Would you care to put a figure on that?

TK: I've never entered into the betting stakes on that.

You can't tell until you actually know whether or not there will be an agreement just what the chances now are. There are still some difficulties to be resolved and obviously reaching agreement of this kind between two sovereign governments has to go before Parliaments in both countries. I can't at this stage tell whether we will get agreement, but I am hopeful that we may be able to do that.

Q: Are we fairly close to the point where decisions will be taken on whether or not there will be an agreement?

TK: That depends whether we do well over the final stages of discussions which we are in now; whether they come to a successful conclusion.

Q: Are troop levels being increased in Northern Ireland to deal with a possible Loyalist backlash to an Anglo/Irish deal? Would you care to comment on that?

TK: That's not true.

Q: Nevertheless are you concerned there might be a violent Protestant backlash were your proposals to go ahead?

TK: It would only happen if there was very wide misunderstanding what the proposals actually are. That's why I am most anxious, and why I welcomed the opportunity today to make clear again to leaders of two of the main parties in the Province just what is involved in the agreement, because there is nothing in that agreement that would justify the sort of backlash or concerns that some have expressed. A lot of misleading stories have been put about, some of those have caused concern and I have been anxious to put those straight.

Q: Nevertheless Dr Paisley has actually warned publicly that were there to be no political solution here, it could

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be left to the men of violence, obviously on both sides, was the Prime Minister able to say anything directly to Dr Paisley on the dangers of violence?

TK: Well I think the Prime Minister reassured Dr Paisley, but they must obviously speak for themselves, but I got the impression that they may have thought the discussions with the Republic of Ireland were some alternative to trying to encourage more devolution within the Province and we were able to assure them that far from being an alternative, we regard them as two desirable ends in themselves, and I certainly hope that the agreement may actually help to encourage the parties in Northern Ireland, the parties that have no part in violence, the constitutional parties, to be able to come together and see they can together work out a solution in which more of the responsibility for the administration of the Province is in the Province and not a direct rule situation that we have to have at the moment.

Q: What is your reaction to the devolution document that was presented to the Assembly yesterday?

TK: I haven't seen it yet, I'm waiting for further details and understand they are sending it to me.

Q: Secretary of State will one of the elements in the agreement be some form of devolution in Northern Ireland

TK: That's quite a separate matter because we are talking about relations with another sovereign government and ways in which we might improve that relationship. The quite separate matter, but very important matter is whether we can get some way in which we can get agreement on administration of the Province on the basis of widespread acceptability of the people of the Province. I am very keen to see progress in that, I very much hope the people of goodwill and as I

say the parties who foreswear violence can come together and achieve that sort of working together. It would be very much for the benefit of the Province if we could achieve that.

Q: And notwithstanding an Anglo/Irish agreement you would be looking for some form of devolution?

TK: I very much hope we can achieve that because the question of decisions, at the moment they are entirely in the hands of Ministers of the United Kingdom government and they will remain like that unless we get some agreement on devolution in which more decisions can be taken by the people elected within the Province in that way.