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Transcript by
JAMES LEE of:

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MR GILLILAND - M
FROM B. McBRIDE
NIO (L) PRESS OFFICE



PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, MR. TOM KING, AT STORMONT,
ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1985.

MR. KING

I want to give today my message to all the people of
Northern Ireland.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom,
of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Taoiseach,
signed an important agreement; an agreement that could offer
a better prospect of a happier future for us all.

My first message to all the people of Northern Ireland
is: before rushing to instant judgment, please study carefully
what that long and important agreement - and the accompanying
communique - actually say; and remember when you do, the
background against which that agreement has been reached; a
background in which, in this province of Northern Ireland, the
majority are totally committed to the union, but in which a
significant minority do not identify with the United Kingdom.

In a democracy, both the majority and the minority have
rights which should be respected and, of course, there is in
the situation of Northern Ireland a particular problem for the
majority. The majority have felt threatened by the fear of
a united Ireland.

The United Kingdom Government has sought to give
reassurance on that point on a number of occasions, but without

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an accompanying assurance from the Government of the Republic, fears have remained.

What the agreement seeks to do is to address both problems - the worries of the majority community about their position, the worries of the minority that their voice is not heard - and what comes out of the agreement is that for the Unionists, they have now got, in a binding international agreement which if approved by both parliaments will be registered at the United Nations, the affirmation, not only of the Government of the United Kingdom, but the affirmation of the Irish Government as well that there will be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority.

What the minority can look to is, through the Conference, a chance for their concerns to be raised and to be fully discussed and, in addition, what the Conference will provide is not just a one-way street of representations by the Irish Government in connection with minority views and concerns, but a two-way street in which cooperation can be enhanced between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the Irish Republic, and that the opportunity for views to be put forward by myself, my colleagues, on matters of concern, for instance, in security cooperation south of the border, and in also the most important area of concern on economic cooperation in trying to help improve the employment prospects in the province.

The Taoiseach said yesterday in the press conference that there were no winners and no losers, but I believe in a very real sense that if this agreement proceeds successfully, there can in a

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genuine sense be a situation in which all can gain. For the Unionists - and I stress this again - the solemn recognition that there will be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority. For the Nationalists, a better chance, opportunity, for their voice to be heard. For everybody in the island of Ireland a better chance at enhancing cooperation and working closer together in the fight against terrorism, which is in the interests of all law-abiding people of good will, whether north or south of the border.

I see this agreement, therefore, as something that holds out a real message of hope to break out of the situation that has damaged the whole life of the province and the economy of the province as well, and that offers a real opportunity for a better future for us all.

QUESTION (PRESS ASSOCIATION, BELFAST)

You talked there about improved security cooperation on both sides of the border. Can we expect therefore an early meeting between.....(inaudible)

MR. KING

You will see in the communique that it makes clear that improving cross-border security cooperation will be on the agenda of the first meeting of the Conference and it is my hope that the Chief Constable of the RUC and the Commission of the Garda will be present, certainly for that part of the meeting.

QUESTION

In Belfast?

MR. KING

Yes. The next step, of course, is for this agreement to be approved by both parliaments and if it is approved, then I hope it will be possible to arrange the first meeting of the Conference soon thereafter, but obviously I do not anticipate.

QUESTION

Before the end of the year or what?

MR. KING

Oh yes, I hope so, but it would be quite wrong to prejudge the decision of sovereign parliaments in this matter. That is the next step.

KEVIN DAWSON (DUBLIN "SUNDAY TRIBUNE")

expressed
Mr. King,.....in view of the hostility/towards it
yesterday....do you see any difficulty in making the deal stick?

MR. KING

Well that is obviously a matter for the Irish Government. If there were to be a change of government in Dublin, they would have to make their position clear, but it is an agreement between two sovereign governments. It will be registered at the United Nations and I would trust that any successor governments would honour it, but if it is not honoured and if it is not respected, then we are in a new situation and the article in the agreement makes quite clear that the agreement may be reviewed at three years or earlier at the request of either government, and if there was in any way any recanting on one side, and if there was some withdrawal in any way as far as the Irish Government is concerned, then obviously we would be in a new situation and we would not be bound in the same way as we would be in good faith and are in good faith by this signature which I hope will be confirmed by our respective parliaments.

QUESTION

The Minister for Justice in the south, said in New York, that the first aim of the intergovernmental conference would be to curb the policing activities of the UDR. What do you say to that?

MR. KING

Well, there is a reference in the communique to the need to enhance the public confidence in the security forces. I have

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made this absolutely clear, and I would like to say this quite straight, because there have been some ludicrous rumours flying around as to what the implications were: that it is our concern to enhance the effectiveness of the security forces. Public confidence in them is important. We have been pursuing for some time a policy of what is called "police primacy" but in aid of the civil power it is desirable wherever possible for the police to be in the lead, supported by other arms of the security forces, whether it be the UDR or whether it be other army regiments and forces concerned. But we will be concerned and certainly, I am anxious that we should enhance public confidence.

Can I just say this - because I would would like to make one point very clear. I think a lot of people see the existence of a conference in which points of view from the minority can be raised and nationalist concerns expressed as an inevitable threat in some way to Unionist positions or to undermining government in some respect. I have noticed in the relatively brief time since I have had these responsibilities a number of different points raised, some of which I think have been valid concerns and no government should be frightened to face up to those; others have been based on hearsay, total fiction or rumour that has been allowed to gather momentum, when it is actually wildly away from reality.

I actually see it as entirely helpful to have some forum in which those sort of matters can be raised, in which the facts can be established, because the truth is that sometimes facts have been established in the past and if perhaps a British Minister has stood up and explained the position it may not have carried the credibility that it might if a nationalist - somebody seen to identify with the nationalist views having had the facts presented

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to him, accepts the reality of the situation, and so I think that is entirely fair, and I think that can only be a benefit and anybody who knows anything about Northern Ireland - indeed, the whole of the island of Ireland - knows the speed with which rumour and misunderstanding can so easily spread.

QUESTION

May I just repeat that question, because it is not suggest that a large proportion of the Northern Ireland community do not accept the security arrangements. What I am trying to find out is what practical arrangements can you foresee to make the security forces more acceptable to them.

MR. KING

I have made clear that we have had for some time a policy of police primacy. In other words, the police being in the lead in these matters, and the other security forces being in support of the civil power, and you will know that that has been happening over the last recent period. We shall carry that forward.

If there are other points of particular concern that the Conference wishes to raise, they are open to raise them. I make one point, of course, clear: that in the final analysis, I remain and those responsible to me remain fully responsible for security policy, fully responsible for all operational effects, and that we shall obviously consider seriously any points that will be raised, but in those areas the final decisions will be ours.

QUESTION

Have you got any practical changes to make at the moment?

MR. KING

We are in any case - and have been for a while - carrying through changes in the policy of police primacy. We also have a programme of increasing the training facilities and opportunities for the UDR, who play an essential role and a very brave role indeed in the security of Northern Ireland.

DAVID ROSE (ITN)

A lot was made at the press conference yesterday of the hope by both governments for a devolved system of government. How does Mr. King see a return to that and what will he do to encourage it?

MR. KING

I believe that this agreement does offer that opportunity. I think some people in the past talked about as though somehow this agreement was an alternative to devolution. I do not see it in that way at all, and of course, it does have within it the incentive - if I put it that way from the Unionist point of view - that if they dislike the area that is open for representations in the Conference, those matters on which agreement could be reached for an acceptable basis of devolution will no longer be within the remit of the Conference.

I also would hope that those representing the nationalist minority communities would feel able - the constitutional nationalist party - would feel able to recognise the benefits that could flow from giving people locally more say in their own affairs. I

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believe that this agreement does offer encouragement to both sides to enter into meaningful discussions. I hope that they will do that. I shall seek to encourage them to do so, and I shall be more than ready to listen to any proposals that they like to bring forward.

DAVID ROSE

Would it be open to the Republic representatives on the Conference to put forward proposals for a system of devolved government?

MR. KING

Actually that is in the agreement.

QUESTION (IRISH PRESS)

Is devolution not a lost cause having regard to the fact thatnot prepared to talk?

MR. KING

Well, we will have to wait and see. Can I just this: that everybody knows the real problems that exist in Northern Ireland: the very difficult economic background against which the province has been working for some time; the progress that has now been made. I have put at the top of my agenda actually the problems of unemployment and to try and help improve the economic prospects, of which there are now some signs.

I hope - and I think I am entitled to ask - all the politicians in positions of responsibility, leadership, in the

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province, before rushing to instant judgment, actually to just stop and reflect and look and see whether there might not be more benefits than they have appreciated.

You will know that they first announced their policy of not cooperating with ministers in any way before any of them had read a single word in the agreement. Now, that sort of attitude, I think, lets down the people of this province. I think they have a higher responsibility than that. I am prepared to argue the merits of this agreement. I am prepared to discuss the ways in which it can be more effectively operated and the concerns that they may have with anybody. What I deplore completely is people who, without reading a single word, have actually already announced that they would not cooperate with ministers and that they would oppose it in every way they knew how.

QUESTION (INAUDIBLE)

MR. KING

Obviously, the Assembly will be very much more effective if it did contain within it representatives of both identities within Northern Ireland, but I would like to say this: I would like to see that Assembly continue. I believe that it has a role to play. I would not like people to think that they exercise some sort of veto over its continuance or not, and I very much hope that against the background of this agreement, which does offer genuinely opportunities and benefits to both the Unionist and the nationalist traditions in Northern Ireland, that people will

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be prepared to embark upon it.

I understand all too well - and who would not in my position - the historical animosities, the traditions, the imbued reactions that are so deeply embedded, and if those are actually never shakeable, if to any proposal there is to be instant rejection before you have read a single word of it and then attempts afterwards to pretend that it has then been very carefully read and it is a carefully prepared policy of rejection after, if people observe that these policies, that people are not prepared to consider any policy whatsoever, then I think that is a betrayal of the people of Northern Ireland and their true interests, and I think that people in Northern Ireland and all my contacts, discussions - and I have tried to meet as many people as I possibly could since I have taken over these responsibilities; of course I have been here on a number of occasions before - I think the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland are prepared, if they believe an agreement is fair, to actually give it a chance and see if it can work, and that is why I only ask the people of Northern Ireland that they actually read and study and then reflect a bit on not only what the agreement says, but the implications of the ways in which it could help. It is all I can ask. It is all you can ask in a democracy, but I think I am entitled to ask that because I genuinely believe that it can offer a better future for all the people in Northern Ireland and indeed help a lot with the economic problems that exist, not only north but south of the border as well.

QUESTION

(Inaudible except at the end when level improved).....having some role in recommending major policies and major legislation to protect nationalist interests in Northern Ireland?

MR. KING

On that second point, you have read it carefully. Thank you for doing that, but you have actually misread it and I will read to you what the document actually says and that is why I am very grateful. I am not saying this trying to score a quick point, but it just underlines the point that people need to read it; they need, if necessary, to seek clarification of it if they do not understand it; think through what the implications are; because it is not actually that they may put forward major legislation. The actual agreement says that they may put forward views on proposals for major legislation. Now that is exactly in line with article 3, that they may put forward views.

I obviously appreciate the pressures and the number of things going on at the present time, but you have read that very quickly and you said that they may put forward proposals for major legislation and you will understand there is an important distinction between them.

I do not think I can answer the first point you made. I do not of any and I do not know whether you want to add some supplementary.

QUESTION

Can I ask you a supplementary on the second one. Should, in fact, the Loyalist people use other means, other than constitutional devices, do you think that Mrs. Thatcher will in fact stand up and

QUESTION (CONTD.)

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MR. KING

If this agreement is approved by both Houses of Parliament - I as a Minister answerable to Parliament - this Government will then proceed to give effect to that agreement. Belonging to the United Kingdom, we are all subject to the same sovereignty of the United Kingdom Parliament and its views are sovereign and will be respected.

QUESTION

Where does the British Government stand on the question of a referendum?

MR. KING

It obviously leads on from the last answer I gave; that in a matter of this kind, dismissing a question of an agreement between sovereign governments, that this matter would and always has been dealt with by Parliament. It is a matter for Parliament to take that decision and I see no case for a referendum on this.

QUESTION

Just how far will the British Government go to implement the agreement in the face of threats of strikes, threats of people coming out on the streets, threats of Unionist violence?

MR. KING

Can I just say this: If you say Unionist threats and Unionist hostility are, in the final analysis, Unionists going to

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come out on strike against the achievement of something that I thought was central to Unionist concerns throughout the years - that they now have a solemn agreement. For the first time it is going to be registered at the United Nations. That actually recognises the legitimacy of their position and gives not only the assurance of the British Government, but gives the assurance of the Irish Government as well, that the position of the majority must be respected and that the principle of consent is now vital and accepted by both governments and that there will be no change in the status of Northern Ireland - and that is absolutely clear and that is Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. And so the question is if this agreement is approved by Parliament, that we believe genuinely that it offers very real hope and opportunity for a better future for this province. We shall see it through. We are determined to bring it into effect if Parliament supports it. I would like to make that absolutely clear. And that we shall be anxious, not in some aggressive way, but I hope by explaining as I have sought today, what the merits are. Of course it is not a one-way street. Of course, it does not give everything to one side and no undertakings or gestures or help in other directions as well. It seeks to be fair and respect the reasonable balance between the position of the Unionist majority and the nationalist minority and if we believe that is right we shall see it through. I do not think I have to repeat to this audience or any other that the Prime Minister is a very determined lady. She is a leader who having, as she did yesterday, signed that agreement on behalf of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland which we believe is in the best interests of our country, we shall honour it in good faith and seek to see it through.

JOHN BARNARD

Since according to you, complete understanding of the agreement is central to your case, why did the British Government not take the same care to do advanced briefing of the Unionists as the Government of the Republic of Ireland did for the SDLP?

MR. KING

I cannot answer the second half of that question. I do not know whether they did or did not brief the SDLP. We always treat negotiations between sovereign countries as totally confidential and that we honoured throughout and we did not talk and I did not talk about the details of the agreement to either the Unionists or nationalists. I honoured that. The Irish Government will have to speak for themselves. That is the only honourable position to adopt.

What we did seek to do, of course, is to draw on our understanding, our approach, our contacts in discussions in formal and informal ways, with the known views and known attitudes that existed.

PAUL JOHNSON ("THE GUARDIAN")

Can the Unionists, as they claim, make this province ungovernable merely by withdrawing consent?

MR. KING

Well I do not know is the answer to that. I think it would be tragic if people set out to see whether that was possible, because the only people who will actually suffer out of all of this course are tragically the people of Northern Ireland themselves.

We meet at a time when I believe there are rather better economic prospects for Northern Ireland. The economy is starting

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to grow. We have, of course, a very serious unemployment problem and at the moment that is not improving, but the first requirement as we know is to get the economy starting to grow and that is starting to improve and I could point to all sorts of indicators like the traffic levels, whether it is in airports, air freight, whether it is in the ferries, whether it is in the growth of the economy, whether it is in the export achievements of firms in Northern Ireland, whether it is now some prospects in inward investment. These areas will all be put at risk if we get into this sort of country of people saying: "We will make it ungovernable!" and I have to say this: that you know, and it is a fact, and you could see the television pictures of it yesterday which were filmed yesterday morning outside Hillsborough Castle, the demonstrations, the statements being made, and you know that nobody in that audience and those people had read a single word of the agreement.

Now that is simply not good enough. Responsible democratic leaders, if they wish to be seen in that light, they owe a higher duty than that, yes to argue from the facts, yes to stand up strongly for their beliefs, but not to indulge simply in spontaneous reaction based on ignorance and old traditions, and I do think - and I say this very clearly because the people of Northern Ireland know this is true as well - those protests and demonstrations took place from people who were actually going to oppose anything regardless of actually what might contained in the document. For example, if I may say this: I talked about one aspiration of the Unionist community, which was reassurance about the legitimacy of their position and recognition of that by the

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Government of the Republic. That is now achieved in this agreement and I have not heard one Unionist who has been shouting and screaming for it in recent years - Unionist politician I hasten to add - actually pay tribute to that.

At this point I understood they attached some importance to the Government of the Republic acceding to the Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. That is actually contained within that communique as well and the Taoiseach confirmed yesterday his intention to accede. I would have thought, because I believe as I believe many Unionists do as well, that that could be an important weapon in the fight against terrorism. I am sorry that there has not been a single word of welcome that I have seen from any Unionist politician to that important addition as well.

QUESTION (NBC NEWS)

In the run up to the agreement, on several occasions, newspapers articles have been talking about as much as \$1 billion aid coming into Northern and Southern Ireland. In general, it was suggested that that money would be American, at least a major portion of it. Am I correct in saying that there is no explicit promise of American money to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, but that you have an understanding that money would come forward. Can you tell us something about that process and what you expect America to do financially?

MR. KING

I do not know, and there is no understanding about some specific sum of money that might or might not come forward. It is no secret that the United States, both Government, both leading members of the Senate, Congressmen, take considerable interest in the affairs of the island of Ireland. It is also true that there is considerable investment by United States companies now in Northern Ireland, investment both in terms of direct investment in plants that they may have here, also of course there are significant orders that are enjoyed by Northern Ireland companies which, whether in defence or other fields, are very valuable and very important to us and matter a lot for jobs.

I do not know and I cannot comment on whether or not they would wish to in some way seek to support this agreement, to show their support for it, in financial ways. What I do say is this, and I make no secret of this: that I am very keen to attract more investment into Northern Ireland. I want to encourage the investment by American companies as well as investment from other countries as well, because that is very important to try to get more jobs, and I hope that if this agreement is seen as a positive step forward, as a way to improved relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, to help tackle the problem of terrorism as well, that can only help to improve the climate for investment here and make Northern Ireland - and maybe make the Republic as well, but I am battling for Northern Ireland - a better and more attractive location for more US investment, particularly obviously for selling products into the European Community. That is where I see the benefit coming from and I put that in the long term perhaps above any questions of other special support.

QUESTION

Perhaps I might ask a supplementary on that question. Having accepted what you said, how important is it to the agreement that American contribute in some way financially? I understand what you said in terms of benefits to Northern Ireland and indeed the benefits to the Republic, but let us assume the worst case possible, that no money is forthcoming. Would that be tragic to you then? Are you resting this agreement or are people resting this agreement on some American support?

MR. KING

I sought to make it clear that the agreement stands quite clearly in its own right, but obviously, if one of the consequences is to help improve the atmosphere, the climate, for investment here - we live in a very competitive world in which, in terms of the incentives that we offer, in terms of the location of Northern Ireland now, my advice is - and the last person who told me this was the managing director of a Japanese bank - that Northern Ireland is now becoming an attractive location for inward investment; for factories and plants to be located there, saving only this continuing problem and uncertainty about the possible threat of terrorism or the possible difficulties in the political situation.

If those can be alleviated, then it can only help the economy of the province and I hope that the Americans would not be the slowest to recognise that and would see the benefits that it could bring.

I see that as most important, but the agreement is in no way conditional, and if there were to be more investment, that only helps to reinforce the merits of the agreement which in any case stand in their own right.

QUESTION

The Northern judiciary are known to be against the concept of mixed courts. The Conference will at some time examine this whole question. Will it be in the near future or.....

MR. KING

What the Prime Minister said, I think briefly, on the subject of mixed courts was that there is a reference in it in that particular section of the agreement that the Conference would inter alia consider the possibility of mixed courts in both jurisdictions and what I have to say is that if this matter...the Irish Government wish to raise this matter...we shall obviously look at it in good faith, but I have to say this and there is no concealment and we are quite clear that this is our position...we had to do that without commitment, that we believe that there is no easy and early way in which it could be done. You will see - I think it is in the communique - that it refers to the need for advice from experts, which would obviously include the Northern Ireland judiciary, that if it was done it would have to be done in both jurisdictions, and I therefore say - I say that as you notice with some care - that that is our position: that we do see real difficulties over this and we have made no secret about it and we have to say that if it is discussed, it has to be with no commitment.

QUESTION

What makes you think that this agreement will have any effect on the level of violence in Northern Ireland?

MR. KING

There are two particular aspects. One is that, obviously, there is the situation on the nationalist side as to whether they feel that they are excluded from the chance for their voice to be heard and the minority do not get fair consideration of their point of view; there is the question as to whether they feel that there is no constitutional route through which that can be achieved. The degree to which that then enhances the support or the tacit acceptance of support for the men of violence and the degree to which a feeling that there are constitutional ways in which - or institutional ways - in which their voice can be heard, may help in that respect. And there is the very specific and direct point that we all know that the problems of the border are real; that they have led to many difficulties in the security situation, and that any ways in which we can enhance security, get such closer working cooperation on a whole range of different matters affecting security could have a very direct and quite significant effect on security.

QUESTION

But it will not wash with the IRA will it?

MR. KING

I am not sure that the IRA are signatories to this agreement and as the purpose of this agreement is to defeat the IRA and ensure that we do have a more effective response to violence which, as we know, threatens democracy and parliamentary government and civilised life, both north and south of the border, and that we are determined to make still more effective our determination to

JIM ALLAN ("DAILY TELEGRAPH")

You obviously recognise that Unionist political leaders are not going to help you get across this agreement to the people. Do you plan perhaps an advertising campaign over there to get to the people?

MR. KING

I would obviously hope that those in elected positions of responsibility will reflect on the situation and I hope that they may recognise that there are rather more merits in the proposals than they have been prepared to recognise so far. I hope that perhaps some of those they represent may have views on this as well and may seek to represent them to their elected representatives.

I shall be anxious to see that the real facts about this agreement are understood as widely as possible. Whether we sought to take steps as to an advertising campaign, I am not sure at the present stage, but I am anxious to make sure that people know the truth.

QUESTION

If the Unionists carry out one of their constitutional threats and resign their Westminster seats en masse in order to gain an electoral mandate against this agreement, will the Government oppose holding bye-elections. Secondly, has any further.....

MR. KING

On the second point, not in terms of the substance of the agreement as far as I am aware. Whether there have been informal contacts I do not know, but of course, there are contacts between the RUC and the Garda at a number of different levels.

That is point 2. Point 1 was..on the question of bye-elections, it is a technical parliamentary point that the tradition usually is that the writ is moved at the convenience of the leader, chief whip, of the party actually holding the seat.