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8th July, 1970

Text of Press Conference given by Dr. Patrick J. Hillery, T.D.
Minister for External Affairs, at the Irish Embassy, London,
on 8 July, 1970.

I am very sorry for being late for this Press Conference. I set out in adequate time and I find that there are so many bits of business to be done in between that I am always late and feel that I have caused you to be angry. However, angry or not I am here now and I am sorry for keeping you waiting. I hope the Embassy will have compensated in some form.

I had a meeting today, I am sure you know about it, with Sir Alec Douglas-Home at 4.30 after which I met Mr. Barber. The meeting with Sir Alec Douglas-Home lasted thirty-five minutes. I didn't time it myself but somebody did.

The content of the meeting with Mr. Barber was the same and, largely, a repetition of what I had transmitted to Sir Alec so that there are two members of the British Government who are now fully aware of my opinions. We were dealing with the question of the North of Ireland. I think perhaps you have been up-to-date with the happenings there. Last week-end brought a critical period because of a raid on the Falls Road by the troops, the British Army, who went there last year to protect the citizens from the armed mobs and the armed undisciplined B Specials and the armed RUC. The troops carried out a raid on the Falls Road area of Belfast which, for those who do not know Belfast, is the place where you find Catholics, Nationalists, and certain types of weapons were found.

For those of you who have any fears about the effects of the finds on the stability of the state in the United Kingdom, they were old pathetic weapons and one of them was a bow and arrow. However, I don't want to condone in any way the presence of arms in the North of Ireland situation which is tinder-dry and dangerous. But the fact that these weapons were found is a reminder of what we knew last year - that the Falls Road area was attacked by armed mobs led by police who were armed and antagonistic, burned out and some people killed. Since then the Falls has been a quiet area and nothing has happened, not even the normal hooliganism associated with any emotional events such as football matches or anything else. There has been nothing in the Falls Road area since last August until last week-end when there was a sudden swoop and these arms were found and I say it is the pathetic expression of the attitude of these people that they had to defend themselves with any kind of a weapon they could get. It is justified by some people that the finding of the arms meant that the swoop should have been made but I would like to say that, to my knowledge, the arms in a population of 50,000 people would be just about the same amount of arms as thirty B Specials would have and the only difference is that the B Specials would have modern arms.

Part of the background to all this is that the reforms promised by the British Government at Downing Street in August last year and at the United Nations, are not visible to the man in the street. There are other events in the Falls Road area which make people feel that they are living in an area where the Government is hostile and that troops sent in by the British public to protect them may now be used to protect the aggressive, insulting sectarian Orange parades which take place every year to remind them of their subjection. These people have never expressed a unified view of what their final position should be but certainly one thing they do feel is that they want somebody to be able to communicate from them to somebody in authority their need for justice and fairplay.

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I visited the Falls Road area to show them that this communication is possible. The fact that this caused some perturbation can be interpreted in many ways. However, the way I interpret it is that they need some re-assurance that they are not alone, that they do not have to regard themselves as totally isolated from authority. I would like to add that the question of authority, to my mind, has come very seriously into consideration in the last couple of days because the Orange Order, which seems to determine the course of events, and the distribution of justice and the number of votes and the distribution of houses and so on in the North of Ireland, has had not a consultation but a confrontation with those elected into authority and the Prime Minister of the North of Ireland has said that he would be very much relieved if provocative parades did not take place and the Minister for Home Affairs of the United Kingdom has asked them, for the sake of preventing bloodshed, to stop these parades. They have refused to do so. There is no authority left now for that area seemingly except the Orange Order. I have come to ask the British Government to re-assert the authority they claim to have, to take up the responsibility they have asserted and this is the function of my visit to London.

Question Could I clear up one point, Dr. Hillery, please? Can you explain why you didn't inform the British Government of your intention to visit the Falls Road area because wouldn't you have expected Sir Alec Douglas-Home to have informed you in advance of any intention he might have had to visit Dublin?

Dr. Hillery: I think that any British Government member is entitled to visit Ireland for shooting and fishing - we have wonderful amenities in that form. Indeed, we have a record of Ministers visiting Ireland for purposes of taking care of former officers, soldiers and so on without giving us any information.

Why did I go to Belfast without informing the British Government? I did not want to go down the Falls Road surrounded by troops and Constabulary.

Question Is it true that you were, in effect, rebuked by the Foreign Secretary today for going there without informing his Government?

Dr. Hillery: Without, in any way, taking away from the very high respect that all Foreign Ministers have for Sir Alec Douglas-Home, I would remind people that I represent a sovereign state not to be rebuked by anybody else and Sir Alec is much too much of a diplomat to do what you think. He did remind me that it would have been preferable from his point of view and I think he told your Parliament yesterday what he thought of the situation.

Question Are you not satisfied, Dr. Hillery, with the assurances that the parades will avoid sensitive areas?

Dr. Hillery: I have not sought the banning of parades. I have sought the banning of parades in sensitive areas where they could not mean a commemoration but could only mean an aggressive humiliation for the local population. I also sought the re-routing of parades so as not to go through areas where their presence would be provocative and insulting so if

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you are suggesting that I have an assurance that they won't do this, I would be satisfied with that assurance but I haven't got it.

Question

Have you such an assurance?

Dr. Hillery: No, I haven't. I haven't been refused it. What I have done is communicated my views to the representative of the British Government and it is up to the British Government now to decide and establish their authority and make their own decision.

Question

Have you indicated how many of those parades you would not find offence for and any reason for stopping them from going through what is called sensitive areas?

Dr. Hillery: It is not a matter of numbers - it is a matter of area. There are something like 1400 commemoration parades every year in the North of Ireland by the Orange Order, the Apprentice Boys or whatever and each one is commemorating something that the minority would prefer not to know about.

Question

Mr. Minister, I think you misunderstood me. On the 12th July there are rather a lot of demonstrations - 14 or 15. How many of these will be acceptable to you this year?

Dr. Hillery: We have a clear indication of this for ourselves.

Question

Can you tell us?

Dr. Hillery: No I don't think so. There is a particular reason for not publicising it here.

Question

Does not the line in the joint declaration about the parades put particular emphasis that they are on routes designed to avoid security problems?

Dr. Hillery: This is a request. This is not a decision - it is a request. There will have to be the establishment of authority and somebody will have to say what parade in what particular place will not take place at that particular time - somebody other than the Orange Order.

Question

Dr. Hillery, last August the minority in Northern Ireland tragically and naively, I think, interpreted the fact that the Southern Government moved units of the Irish Army up to the Border as a sign that the Southern Government would, in fact, intervene in Northern affairs if there were further bloodshed. In the light of this, I wonder if you would like to tell us what you mean when you say that your visit to the North was to show the people of the Falls that they were not alone.

Dr. Hillery: There is always a risk, as happened in many countries in Europe, if you feel that the nations of the world will come in and save you from oppression, there is always a risk that you will take action to put your own life at risk. I know that nobody here would want to acknowledge that this could take place in an area claimed by the Government of the United Kingdom to be under their authority but there is always that risk that an oppressed group, if they feel help is coming, and if they are desperate, will take action which puts them at risk and all our policy has been to try to prevent this happening.

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Our Prime Minister, the Taoiseach, has taken every step in every statement on behalf of the Government, you may have read something about that, to show that we are not aggressively disposed towards the Six Counties of Northern Ireland. We realise, as did Governments before us, right from the foundation of our State, that any aggressive action by us against the Six Counties is aggressive action against other Irish people and we do not intend to attack other Irish people.

Would you like to explain what you mean by showing them then that they are not alone?

Dr. Hillery: I spoke for them today. I spoke for them about ten days ago here in the Foreign Office.

Question

Can we take it then that the Minority in Northern Ireland will in future send its representations to the British Government through the Dublin Government?

Dr. Hillery: You would have to ask them both that. At the moment they are just isolated.

Question

Would the Dublin Government be willing?

Dr. Hillery: Oh, certainly. The North of Ireland feel that they must express themselves. I am available when there is nothing else available to them.

Question

Do you not accept the assurances of Sir Alec Douglas-Home in the Foreign Office statement that there will be equal citizenship, equal protection for both religious communities?

Dr. Hillery: I accept it. There is no quick proof that this is going to be a fact. There is considerable doubt in the minds of people in the North of Ireland. I have no reason to doubt anything Sir Alec Douglas-Home said.

Question

Dr. Hillery, are you suggesting that the representation of the Catholic minority in the North in both Stormont and in Westminster is totally ineffective?

Dr. Hillery: They have been so treated by the Orange Order, and the Government in the North of Ireland is so incapable of handling the Orange Order that the Government here must now deal with the Orange Order, ~~and~~ they cannot hope unless there is some definite act, some definite act of authority by somebody on the Orange Order, they cannot hope to be treated as equal citizens no matter what is said for them.

Dr. Hillery, as Foreign Minister and Minister for External Affairs of the Irish Republic, do you now regard yourself as the representative of the minority of Northern Ireland?

Dr. Hillery

I always regarded myself as a representative of any man living in Ireland. As far as we are concerned we have had to accept that Six Counties of our country have been separated and ruled by another State but I believe that I represent any man living in Ireland and I am entitled to visit any town or hamlet in that Island.

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Question

Looking at what was said about the Orange Order, which I will not dispute, is it a fact that in the present circumstances a period of direct rule would be beneficial and if not immediately under what circumstances would a period of direct rule be beneficial?

Dr. Hillery: I think that a period of rule based on principles of justice would solve the problem. My reading of it now at this time is that somebody must deal with the Orange Order. Now direct rule from anywhere that is incapable or unwilling to handle this matter of the Orange Order will make no difference.

Question

In your visit to London will you call on members of the Opposition?

Dr. Hillery: This is a State visit. This is quite unlike my visit to Belfast. This is a State visit to the Government here. This is a direct visit Government to Government. I have made no attempt on this visit to contact members of the Opposition. I am sure they themselves will not wait to be asked what to do. I have great faith in the principles for which this country has for so long contributed and fought.

Question

Would you inform the British Government of a further visit to Belfast again or do you not think that is necessary?

Dr. Hillery: If I wanted to travel around with troops and police and tell the people you had a great time here I would probably go officially but the problem there is that there are people isolated with nobody to meet them. I am not saying they would pick me if they were given a free vote. I am just saying that it would have been marvellous if somebody from here, without seeking authority from anybody, went over and talked to them.

Question

Did you not regard it as meaning any discourtesy as Sir Alec said in the House of Commons. Do you not regard it as a severe diplomatic discourtesy? You think that Foreign Ministers should go to other countries without informing the Government of these countries?

Dr. Hillery: I would not ask the Foreign Ministers of other countries to base their behaviour on me at all. I am somewhat inexperienced. But I will say this: I am an Irishman. If Ireland is completely free I will obey the rules of the games that other nations laid down but while diplomatic niceties are so used as to prevent a large section of Irish people from getting fair play then I won't play the rules - I will play the main rules but not the niceties.

Question

What comments do you care to make on the suggestion that your visit to the Falls Road on Monday was largely explained here as a political dodge thought up by the Taoiseach to placate public opinion in the South?

Dr. Hillery: Anything I do is to placate myself. You know we did not get a free independent sovereign Government in Dublin from placating people or from practising diplomatic niceties. No; the purpose was what I said. There are political pressures in every country but the real malignant disease in the present situation between our two countries is the placating of the Orange Order and I don't know if there is anybody here who wants to support that.

Question: Will you ask the U.N. to send observers?

Dr. Hillery: Last year I asked for the British Government to send observers. We have been quite fair about this. Last year on the 1st of August I asked that the British Government send observers to Derry for the Apprentice Boys Parade, and if you think Apprentice Boys are boys have a look at their photographs, but the British Government felt at that time that there was no need for observers from here as Apprentice Boys behaved very well - now you know what happened. When we thought of the United Nations having observers there we didn't say to the United Nations send observers - we asked the British Government to invite observers there. In fact we have been much too close to protocol and diplomatic niceties. This time the total responsibility for law and order in its decent sense and for the application of justice rests squarely on the shoulders of the British Government and what will happen this time must be answered for by the British Government. We always know what is happening. We have no plans to send observers. You know we had no plan to have me up there to see what is happening. We are not happy to come on after and say - this happened, that happened. What we want to do now is say this must not happen and we are asking the British Government to stop this happening. All they have to do is to say to the Orange Order - there is a Government.

Question Dr. Hillery, are you representing exclusively Catholics or do you defend also the Shankill Road?

Dr. Hillery: Well these are people who have no cause for insecurity whatever. As I said in the beginning 30 B Specials would have as much arms as was found in the total toll in the Falls Road.

Question Are there any B Specials?

Dr. Hillery: There are people like them. You don't stop existing because your name is taken away from you and I am not saying - I don't want to cause trouble but there are people in that segment of the community who are totally committed to their own protection and of the type of state they want to exist up there. Now you might not call them B Specials. I acknowledge the B Specials were abolished.

Question Dr. Hillery do you think that things are more difficult now than under a Labour Government?

Dr. Hillery: My dealings with the present Government have given me no reason to believe that matters will be any worse under the present Government. It is a factor in the situation that people in the North of Ireland feel that the link of the Unionist party with the Conservative Government will cause less sympathy with the minority view. It is a very big factor and I think that anything that happens will be coloured by that thinking. But I personally, as a representative of the Irish Government, have no reason to believe that the present Government in Britain intend to renege in any way from the promises made for reforming the North of Ireland.

Question Dr. Hillery can I ask have you made any representations about the Special Powers Act to the British Government and what response you got about that?

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Dr. Hillery: I decided I wouldn't talk about responses and indeed responses don't always come the day you make the representations. It would be natural for the British Government to make their own decisions. All I can say is what I want done, what I think should be done, and it's up to the British Government to make their own decisions.

Question

Dr. Hillery what about the Special Powers Act?

Dr. Hillery: I think there shouldn't be a Special Powers Act. I don't think a man should be detained - or a woman - without trial. I don't think an offence should be declared after the act has taken place if it wasn't previously described as an offence.

Question

Dr. Hillery you have just told us that you do not consider yourself bound by normal diplomatic rules. Does this apply only to Britain or to anywhere?

Dr. Hillery: I am not a diplomat. I am a politician. I have some of the best diplomats in the world working in the Department of External Affairs in Dublin and they obey all the rules. Now as far as diplomacy is concerned we have no worry about the behaviour of Irish diplomats but the behaviour of Irish politicians is something related to the actual reality of our needs at home and I don't intend by what I said to give an idea that Ireland will not obey the rules - in fact one of the outstanding characteristics of Ireland, of the Irish Government, has been its contribution to law, order, peace and to international organisations. We have never undermined the rules of procedure in international affairs.

Question

Dr. Hillery how many people did you meet in the Falls Road?

Dr. Hillery: I didn't count them. I met people in doorways and women whose houses had been raided, old men, young children as I went through the areas. All the pubs were beaten up - I don't know why they don't like pubs in Belfast.

Question

Did you make appointments to meet anyone?

Dr. Hillery: No, I made no appointments to meet anyone. I met some people there who knew me but I couldn't honestly tell you what their names are. They recognised me and took me round.

Question

Did you take your official car?

Dr. Hillery: I went in a private car.

Question

How were you introduced in the Falls Road?

Dr. Hillery: In speaking to the inhabitants of the Falls Road area the people who accompanied me said "there is a fellow here from the South who wants to know about you". No; this is not a formal thing. The people were told that there were up from the South a couple of people who wanted to know what happened on Friday night. What happened you? What did the troops do? How did you feel about it? But there was no question of saying there was a member of the Irish Government up here. No, I didn't make any attempt to do that kind of thing.

Question

Did you tell those people who you were?

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Dr. Hillery: Those who recognised me indicated it by a glance or otherwise and the others didn't care who I was.

Question

Who were the couple of fellows from the South?

Dr. Hillery: The other man was the driver - a very good driver.

Question

Would you think it legitimate to go to Cyprus and talk to the Cypriot minority without involving the present Government there?

Dr. Hillery: Well at the moment with the Irish troops peace-keeping there I think anything could happen. I don't think you have any problem there at the moment. The Irish troops are peace-keeping there but we have made more than our contribution - we have made a marvellous contribution for a small little island.

Question

Dr. Hillery, do you think a Minister could arrive on the island unannounced, to visit a minority community, without officially informing the Cypriot government?

Dr. Hillery: I could tell you that Ministers of your Government - I presume you are from Britain - have turned up at places like Puck Fair and the Dublin Horse Show. It doesn't worry us.

Question

Do you really think you can compare a visit to the Falls Road in those circumstances to somebody going on holidays?

Dr. Hillery: No. In fact the visit to the Falls Road had a very specific purpose. It was calculated to prevent a most extraordinary isolation of a big number of the population and as my Prime Minister said, it was done to prevent an outbreak which would interfere with peace. I will tell you one thing. We don't always expect people to agree with us in Ireland!

Question

Do you not accept that the previous Friday's rioting (26 June) in which five were killed, do you not accept that there was some Catholic provocation there?

Dr. Hillery: No. There was a group of Protestants found in the vicinity of a Catholic church in which the sexton's house was burned. I don't know whether they were praying or not but they were there and I wouldn't say you would call that Catholic provocation. I don't think there is much religion in this act.

Question.

Minister, can I for a moment turn off the past and look to the future. Will you look for U.N. observers?

Dr. Hillery: Last year I asked for them. I think what I would like to see is if it is a fact, which I hope it is not, that the Orange Order has no higher authority in the North of Ireland or here. If they cannot be told what to do I think it would be very important that as many observers whether from Government, from the press, from television should be there to see what is going on.

Question

Your Government promised a year ago that if there was any trouble in Londonderry or Belfast the Irish troops would be sent

Dr. Hillery: Your question is loaded; like "did you stop beating your wife?" What we sent were hospital units to the border and there were military hospital units and the troops that went with them were those which would normally go in a military operation with a hospital unit. We have some camps up

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there and the people are coming from the North to them.

Question

Dr. Hillery, you must be aware that there has been some criticism in the British press on the lines that this is an internal Southern Ireland political problem for you and your Cabinet and therefore your visit across the border was a political one in terms of domestic politics in Dublin and had nothing to do with people in the Falls Road. I wonder would you comment on that?

Dr. Hillery: Well you know you can't stop people writing these things. I thought you were going to say that the North of Ireland was an internal problem for our Government - I wish it were. This is the whole basis of my Party - my Government's activities - to make Ireland one unit. If you think we can't take internal punishment I'll tell you a story. Two Ministers were fired, two Ministers resigned and one junior Minister resigned about a month ago. I don't know of any other Government in the world that could take that in carrying out a policy which needed long sight and much patience and if you think we are suddenly going to start stunting we needn't have done that. My Prime Minister need not have removed from the Government some of the best brains that could possibly be in a Government. It's unreal to think that you will remove - I am not saying everybody was of the same calibre - but there were brains in that Government that you would not want to do without and to think that you could remove them and then do something else for political purposes - it's unreal - it's just not believable.

Question

Minister, would you personally like to see Mr. Charles Haughey come back into the Government at a later stage - at a later time?

Dr. Hillery: Well, to start off with, he is a personal friend of mine. I would like to see him there because of that. I think that he is one of the best brains that we have ever had in an Irish Government and he has made an enormous contribution to our economic development. I can't comment on what is sub judice in the Courts but certainly I would very much hope for Ireland's sake that it would be possible to see Charlie Haughey in Government again.

Question

Minister, you said a lot about the Orange Order. Are you aware, for your information, that the Orange Order is opposed utterly to having any contact with Southern Irishmen and is British, aggressively British, as indeed they are entitled to be?

Dr. Hillery: I think that the Orange Order position in the North of Ireland, with that part of our country partitioned off - just enough of it that they can hold - is in a false situation. Anybody in a false situation must feel constantly insecure and anybody who is constantly insecure will be aggressive and I think you have some evidence of this in the Parliament here at the moment.

Question

Were your talks on the Common Market full of sweetness?

Dr. Hillery: We had arrangements about consultation because of the close relationship between the two economies and Mr. Barber and I agreed that these methods of consultation should continue in the negotiations which are coming.

Question

Dr. Hillery is this crisis about civil rights or is it about partition?

Dr. Hillery: Today's crisis is about the Orange Order. I'll do

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the British Government a favour now just before I finish. There is a crisis of authority here. Do the Orange Order say to the Prime Minister of the six northern eastern counties of Ireland for which Britain claims responsibility and do they say to the Home Secretary of the British Government and do they say to the British Government and to the whole of British public opinion, do they say - well what do they say? Do they say "we won't listen to you?".

Question: What do you think the Government should do about it?

Dr. Hillery: They have already said they won't listen. It's a crisis of authority in what we like to regard as very near the cradle of democracy.

Question Are you opposed to all Orange parades?

Dr. Hillery: I concede that some parades will cause no harm. I am quite discriminating about parades. I think that some parades will do no harm; they will have a jolly good day out; they will probably beat the drums and have a good time. But there are some parades that will go out there to humiliate people and humiliated people will sometimes turn and we are going to have trouble that we don't want.

Question Did you discuss with Sir Alec specific demonstrations and which ones you would cope with?

Dr. Hillery: I mentioned a few where it was obvious that nobody living in the particular town would want to celebrate the particular event.

Question Is the channel still open between you and Downing Street - you and the Foreign Office?

Dr. Hillery: Yes: there are very very good relationships between the Government here and our Government.

Question Will there be after this Press Conference?

Dr. Hillery: Oh yes. I have given my own opinion only. If I have said anything that would damage relationships between the two countries I would expect that my Prime Minister would remove me. The relationships between the two countries are good and important and valuable and if I have said anything here that would damage that I would quite accept that I would be removed from Office.

Question Did anyone in the Falls say to you quite plainly "if there is shooting this August will you come in to help us", and if so what did you say to them.

Dr. Hillery: No, not in my visit to the Falls. Nobody was thinking of shooting. It's quite wrong to think that I went up there to meet a crowd of gunmen - I met women who were frightened, old men who were frightened - there was no question of guns.

Question And none of them said what will the Southern Government do if there are any attacks this summer.

Dr. Hillery: No - they were in a stunned state - they just had this sudden visitation; they didn't know what happened. I don't know whether you ever had troops suddenly invade your home without

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explanation. They might be the best, decentest boys in the world but these people suddenly had troops coming in to their houses. But there was no question of their saying to me, will you come up and do something.

Question

What would you have said to them if they had?

Dr. Hillery: That is a hypothetical question.