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26th November 1971

The following statement has been issued by the Government Information Bureau on behalf of the Taoiseach.

Asked to comment on Mr. Wilson's statement in the debate on Northern Ireland which opened at Westminster yesterday, the Taoiseach said that Mr. Wilson's contribution had been extremely interesting and significant. His recognition that the proper goal of British policy should be to seek the unity of Ireland is the first occasion on which the Leader of one of the two major political parties in Britain has publicly asserted this.

The Taoiseach could not, however, endorse that part of Mr. Wilson's speech where he suggests Irish membership of the Commonwealth. This step would be running against the course of history. Britain herself has begun to turn away from the Commonwealth towards Europe and Ireland is also moving towards closer union of the European peoples. We consider it better to seek new solutions in this context rather than to revert to a concept from which both Britain and Ireland have moved in varying degree. When Irish unity has been achieved the future relationship of Ireland with other countries is a matter to be decided by the Irish people as a whole.

It is common ground that the unity of Ireland must take a form which is satisfactory to the legitimate demands of the Irish people as a whole. There are many ways in which this can be done; the Taoiseach has commented on such matters on a number of occasions. They can be discussed and resolved in conference among the interested parties. They can and should be resolved within a framework which does not include a formalization of the Anglo-Irish relationship. Much of the unhappy history between Ireland and Britain has resulted precisely from an attempt to formalize a relationship which the experience of the

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past 50 years as between this country and Britain has shown to be unnecessary.

There are many other features of Mr. Wilson's speech which are progressive and useful and which require and will receive serious examination here.