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Title: Press Conference given by the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, after a meeting of the Cabinet on 12 August 1971, in which he answered questions on topics such as relations and talks between the Irish and British governments; alternatives to the Stormont government; the possibility of a United Nations peace-keeping force in Northern Ireland; the issue of a united Ireland; reform in Northern Ireland; illegal organisations; the British Army in Northern Ireland; internment; and refugees.

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Press Conference given by the Taoiseach after a meeting of the Cabinet on Thursday, 12th August, 1971. The Conference began by the Taoiseach reading a prepared statement and questions were then invited.

Q. What was the purpose of Dr. Hillery's meeting in London?

A. I asked Dr. Hillery to go to London yesterday specifically to find out where the British Government stood in this situation; what their policies are in relation to the situation that has arisen in Northern Ireland. We know now that they are in support of the action that has been taken; in support of the maintenance of the Stormont regime. In the light of what we know we have now to take our own decisions.

Q. What sort of political action can you take, Taoiseach, to overthrow Stormont?

A. I am not envisaging any particular political action. This action will have to be taken in a peaceful way as the situation develops. I would like to see some action taken that might be a start to setting up an administration as an alternative to the present Stormont Government. It is not a Government in the accepted democratic sense. It has no Opposition. The Opposition were driven out of it. They perhaps left of their own accord but these people who represent the minority up there, you know many of them, they are men of moderation who entered Parliament for the purpose of representing their people adequately, maintaining fair representation and fair play for them and these men must have been driven to extremes, men of intelligence, men of moderation, to leave Stormont.

Q. As regards political action, is there any question of action at the United Nations?

A. As far as the UN is concerned as everybody here knows when the troubles broke out two years ago Dr. Hillery went to the United Nations. The main purpose of his going there was to see whether it would be possible to induce the United Nations to send a peace-keeping force that would be seen to be impartial and effective. Before he went we asked the British Government to agree to such a peace-keeping force but the British Government did not agree then and they exercised their right under the appropriate article - Article 2 para. 7 of the Charter to refuse to ask for a UN peace-keeping force. They claim that this (Northern Ireland) is UK territory and as you know the people who exercise jurisdiction over this territory must consent to the presence of a peace-keeping force. I do not see any prospect of their consenting to a change in the attitude that they adopted then.

Q. How do you see the alternative assembly; how do you see political action following. You talked about an assembly.....Do you mean an alternative assembly to which people from the North and the Republic might be sent?

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A. I don't see an assembly from which the people in the South would send representatives. What I want to see is an impartial administration in the North. I think it could be achieved once the British Government realise, once everybody realises that the present Stormont regime is not a democratic government. Indeed it hasn't been for many years. I believe that the present Stormont Government is now not capable and never was capable of impartial government and I believe that both sections of the community up there should have, as I said in my statement, equal representation in power and in decision-making.

Q. In the new administration, what kind of representation do you envisage? Would it be 50-50?

A. Well there are two communities there and I think that would be the best situation.

Q. If an alternative administration was established, would your government recognise it?

A. Well I am not expecting an alternative administration immediately in the form of government. What I would envisage is something along the lines of a commission for the time being to ensure that the situation in the North would be quietened and violence would be vanished from the streets and from the houses and from the country.....

Q. But what you seem to say you do seem to imply that you have given up hope of getting the cooperation of the British Government in this.

A. I don't yet see that situation. I believe that the British Government will come to realise that Stormont as it exists is not capable of impartial government and to continue Stormont in its present form will only mean the perpetuation of the present instability that has been going on there now for 50 years and there has been no change and I don't see any prospect of change for the better coming out of the continuance of the Stormont Government.

Q. Do the result of the talks in London not seem to imply that the British Government is prepared only to support the present Stormont Government?

A. The British Government indicated to us that they supported the present set of circumstances, the present action being taken and I think they were wrongly advised or were wrongly induced into that support.

Q. Do you really consider, Taoiseach, that representatives of the Protestant community would send forward representatives to such an administration or commission?

A. Well I think there ought to be a preliminary meeting, some kind of a council that might consider that, some representatives of both sides. I am sure that the Protestant community or the Unionist community, whatever you like to call it, do not more than the other side want a perpetuation of the present troubles and if not a perpetuation of the troubles as they now exist a recurrence of them as inevitably they would recur in time and I think now is the time having seen the death and destruction that has taken place, now is the time to see that for once and for all the communities in the North will come together and abolish this awful system of living, awful system

of being, awful existence of being for ever. If it doesn't happen now future generations will have to tackle this problem.

Q. Are all parties in the Dáil, Taoiseach, cooperating in helping in a campaign which probably would be directed by the Government and by the people in the North who support your proposals, and by some people in England... to bring pressure to bear on the British Government to abolish the Stormont regime?

A. I don't think there is any doubt but all parties in the Dáil subscribe to the policy that we have adopted. That has been the consistent policy of our Government ever since Fianna Fail first took up office and that has been declared on numerous occasions both inside and outside the Dáil. I believe too that the other parties recognise as well as I do that Stormont as at present constituted is incapable of impartial government and that they would support any move to replace Stormont in its present form.

Q. Taoiseach, you are making this your immediate objective - the urgent objective - to bring peace and not to follow the idea of a united Ireland at this stage?

A. We should never lose sight of our ultimate objective of a united Ireland. We know that we cannot coerce people who don't want to join us into coming with us. But in the long run we will in time induce them. If we can get the two communities in the North to live together: they can't live together under the present circumstances; they can't live together under a system whose policies are dictated on the other side in the interests of a small section outside and when they see as I am sure they would see when there would be an impartial regime that the two communities can live side by side I can ultimately see that all Irishmen can live together in a united Ireland. However, I am not pressing that at this particular stage. What I want to see now is an end to violence and the best way of doing that is along the lines I have suggested.

Q. Three weeks ago, the SDLP threatened to set up a provisional administration in the North. If the SDLP did take that step would your Government back it?

A. Well now I don't know what the SDLP's intentions are. The SDLP has with the other opposition parties come together and they have made formal declarations recently and there was no question or no suggestion in these six or seven points that they publicised at their meeting in Dungannon a couple of days ago that they proposed to set up an alternative administration. I don't think it is likely to happen now.

Q. Do you support the six or seven points set out in the statement issued after the SDLP meeting in Dungannon?

A. I am in support of any political action that will avoid violence. I can't endorse each and every word of that document. I have only recently seen it. But I certainly support the suggestion that the Stormont regime as it now stands ought to go and if reasonable action has to be taken in order to ensure that then I shall have to consider to what extent we shall support such action.

Q. How far, realistically, had the Irish Government succeeded in convincing the British Government that change in Northern Ireland was necessary?

A. I believe myself that the British Government does not fully realise the lethargy with which the Stormont regime has approached the implementation of the Downing Street Declaration. They had set up certain institutions which are in the form rather than in the substance of what the Downing Street Declaration sought. That is true of the housing authority, it is true of the police authority, and its in matters like that that unfortunately the minority representatives are themselves being frustrated. I believe the British Government haven't fully seen the ineffectiveness of the implementation of the Downing Street Declaration and haven't fully realised that the implementation has been delayed and as I said....

Q. Taoiseach, how does this Stormont must go attitude of yours now affect your attitude to illegal organisations?

A. Not in the slightest. My attitude to illegal organisations remains the same as ever it was. I abhor violence, I abhor any violence that illegal organisations might perpetuate, generate. Illegal organisations have no place, they must come out into the open and if they have any right to public support, they have to establish that right by policy previously declared. The policy I am following is the policy endorsed by the people time and time again. If illegal organisations are going to adopt a different policy then they can only get the right to pursue that policy from the people in a democratic way. I still do not condone in any way either the existence or the activities of illegal organisations.

Q. In your position of second guarantor is this the most you can say to the Northern minority in the present situation, where the British Government - the British Army - is no longer protecting the minority?

A. I don't think that the British Government would permit a situation in which their army would not protect people they claim to be their own citizens in their own territory. If that were permitted it would be the end of, I might say, civilisation in Western Europe.

Q. But what I am asking is this as much as you can do in the present situation?

A. I don't say what the most is at any stage. One has to take ones decisions in assistance and in giving assistance and coming to the aid of other peoples as one sees situations arising. As far as the second guarantor statement is concerned I still believe that we have that role and that we have the influence to carry out that role. I still believe that we have the influence with the British Government. They remain friendly with us.

Q. That is still the position you are in?

A. I think it is, yes. Unfortunately we haven't been able to avoid the present situation but when people take to violence it is very difficult to take action that will immediately stop it.

Q. Do you think the British Government is taking enough steps to protect the minority?

A. I think they are not right in permitting the present situation to continue. I am convinced of that and I hope I will be able to convince them.....

Q. Is there any likelihood that, in fact, the meeting between you and Mr. Heath might be put forward so that you can press this point with the British Government?

A. I don't rule out that at all. If the situation justified my asking Mr. Heath to bring that meeting forward I would certainly do so and I believe - I have no reason for saying this - I believe that Mr. Heath would similarly react if the situation was such. If a meeting between us could produce an immediate result with a view to long-term results I am sure that he would be willing to meet me.

Q. Might you not be accused of hypocrisy when you demand liberalisation in the North while being accused of introducing repressive legislation in the Republic?

A. There are two different situations altogether. We are living in a real democracy here. We have several political parties; we have a system of proportional representation and in each of these political parties all sections of the community; all the denominations are represented. There is no similarity between the situation here and in the North where there is a divide between two communities and where the repression seems to be directed against the minority or rather the non-Unionist section of that community. I don't accept at all that there is a parallel between the situation in the North and the situation down here as far as that kind of legislation is concerned.

Q. During your talks in London, did the question of the reintroduction of internment in this country arise?

A. Well I wasn't talking in London. Dr. Hillery was. The decision to intern in the North had already as you know taken place at that time but as far as we are concerned we are not contemplating internment.

Q. Were you asked to support extradition to the North of people who come South after the introduction of internment?

A. I wasn't asked to support it in that way at all because as you know extradition for political purposes is not permitted under international law or under the international agreement that one country has with another. That just does not apply to the extradition law as far as it affects people in the United Kingdom are concerned, it affects people in all countries.

Q. Did Dr. Hillery ask for a UN observer corps for the North?

A. I'm not in any way going to indicate what transpired at that meeting. That was a meeting arranged at very short notice and these meetings are useful as long as what was said on one side or the other are not disclosed and therefore I have no intention of disclosing what was said and by saying that I am not saying that it was or it wasn't. But the main purpose of Dr. Hillery's visit to London was to find out where exactly the British stood in present

circumstances so that we as a sovereign government could take whatever action we thought we could take.

Q. May I ask you about refugees? When will you reach saturation point?

A. Well we are not very far from saturation point now. I believe that there is between 5,000 and 6,000 refugees here at the present time. We have made all available army camp accommodation ready. As well as that we have asked other institutions, particularly residential colleges to make accommodation available and the local authorities, some of them, are also cooperating. I don't think there should be any saturation point as long as everybody cooperates but, of course, there is the difficulty of sufficient personnel and to that extent I would appeal to people generally who have the time and the experience to make their services available. It is very difficult for the army alone to handle thousands of refugees, to feed them and to have them bedded down and in some places to clothe them. We will certainly use all our resources to ensure that anybody who needs refuge here, who needs food or shelter, no matter what their religion, no matter what their background, it will be available for them.

Q. How many can you actually cope with?

A. I couldn't give a specific figure. I'd say in the short run we probably could cope with 7,000 or 8,000 but if it increased beyond that then we would have to ask for assistance of authorities, institutions outside of the Government. In fact some of them are already cooperating and residential accommodation and parish halls are already being made available.

Q. Taoiseach, how would you compare relations between your Government and the Heath Government and your Government and the Wilson Government?

A. They are exactly the same. We were in very good terms with the Wilson Government and these good terms have been continued with Mr. Heath and his colleagues.

Q. Do you feel you are in good terms at the moment?

A. I am absolutely certain about that. What we are doing here is quite legitimate. We found out what the British attitude is, and we told them that, and in the light of that we would make our own decisions.

Q. Did you inform the British Government of your decisions?

A. Not of the decisions. But they had been informed in advance that their attitude having been ascertained by us, that we regarded ourselves as free to take our own decisions.

Q. Has the British Ambassador been called in?

A. No, not specifically. This is a decision of the Government, a decision of Government policy, and is in full accord with the implementation of Government policy as it has been endorsed in recent times at our Fianna Fáil Ard-Fheiseanna, at Party meetings, and indeed, in the House, and supported by other parties.

Q. Could you be a little bit more specific about the commission which you wish to see introduced?

A. It is difficult to be specific about something that has not yet happened; something you are not yet sure it will be possible to have formed in the manner one would like. But the Commission I would like would be representative of both communities of Unionists and non-Unionists. I would be prepared even to consider some kind of a council, I think some kind of a consultative council in advance to see what kind of a commission might be set up. But it is essential that such a commission be set up in order to retrieve this present situation, and not only to retrieve the present situation, but to ensure that such a situation will never occur again. And I'm afraid that the present situation with the present regime in Stormont, in its present form, with its present extreme Unionist influence, that is likely to be continuously exercised, there will always be people who will feel that they are being oppressed and that oppression will continue - the root of the trouble will continue.
