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INTERVIEW WITH TAOISEACH, JANUARY 8, 1978.

Interviewer: Taoiseach, turning to the North of Ireland, could I ask you what your relations are like with the present British Government?

Taoiseach: Quite good, I've known the Prime Minister, James Callaghan for a long time. He was Chancellor of the Exchequer when I was Minister for Finance and I met him at a World Bank meeting and I remember at that time we had a problem about the restriction of investment by the British Government on their own people which affected us to some extent and I raised that with him as an aside during one of the World Bank meetings in Washington and I found him very considerate and sympathetic, and he did something about that little problem on that occasion. As you know I met him since then. I met him officially at the end of last September and again I found our relations were quite good and I get on well with him. Of course he looks after his own end and of course I try to look after mine. He doesn't give away too much, nor do I give away much at all. But I went that time because there was at that time an apprehension - apart from the fact that I wanted to meet him anyway - my having come in to office quite recently - there was an apprehension that there was a move towards integration in the North, in other words that the British Government would completely absorb the North, without any form of administration in the Six Counties and that apprehension was born of two major factors, one a belief that there was some kind of an agreement between the Unionists and the Labour Party that because the Unionists would support the Labour Party in their difficult circumstances from the point of view of the voting divisions in the House of Commons, that there might be some quid pro quo for them. That might have been interpreted as diminishing the British Government's intention towards a power-sharing administration in the North. And as well as that there was started at the time what they call the Speaker's Conference which is apparently a necessary pre-exercise before giving any increased representation to any particular area, and the purpose of this Conference as I understand it is to consider whether to give increased representation to the Six Counties in the Westminster

Parliament. So these two factors gave rise to the apprehension to which I referred. But I did get from Mr. Callaghan on that occasion a firm undertaking that there would be no devolved government without power-sharing, and really he enforced it by saying that unless there was power-sharing there would not be devolved government. As well as that he told me there was no suggestion whatever that because of some support given by the Unionists in the division lobbies to the Labour Party in their difficulties up to the last Recess that there was no deal whatever as far as the North was concerned, in other words a deal as far as giving the Unionists any concessions. So I was trying to establish that. Over and above that of course, as you know Mr. Callaghan is in difficulty as far as his position, or rather that of his party, in the House of Commons. At any given moment he has the fear that he might be beaten on a major issue and then he would have to go to the country. Naturally, it's in his interests to take his time, if he can, and I believe he is now likely to weather that storm, but for how long I don't know. But, I think at the moment Mr. Callaghan is pre-occupied with that situation. He wants to get back to office naturally, and he has a lot of things on his plate. As well as that, when I went to London on that occasion, Mr. Roy Mason, who was present at the meeting, said that things were at a rather delicate stage then, because he had been, or was about to negotiate with the major political parties in the Six Counties to see if he could get a form of devolved administration. Well, he said it was delicate and I acknowledged that it was since he did say so. Since then he has had meetings with the main political parties and subsequently there have been meetings between his officials and representatives of the political parties. So there is an on-going situation at least and I hope it will lead to a devolved government and with power-sharing. That is I think the situation that was common cause in the last government, and before that we supported the last government in creating a climate that was conducive towards the creation of a devolved government. As you know, there was one, that was in 1974, which was defeated because of the Unionist strike. And I hope it will be possible to get another one, because without a government in the North, without an administration, I should say in the North, to which all people can subscribe then it's unlikely there can be any peace.

But at the same time, I told Mr. Callaghan about our long term ambitions and I told him that these would remain our long term ambition, that is the ultimate unity of all the Irish people.

Interviewer: Do you think you'll see a united Ireland in your lifetime?

Taoiseach: Well, of course, I don't know how long I'll live, but I think I could wish to see a form of administration North and South that would be acceptable to the Majority of the Irish people, if not complete unity under the one government. I think we could hope for a form of administration that would be acceptable, even if it was an interim acceptability, during my lifetime.

Interviewer: Is that a personal priority?

Taoiseach: Well, certainly it's something I would like before I die, just to see movement towards what has been the goal of the vast majority of Irishmen and the aspiration of the vast majority of Irishmen for generations. It's not so much a personal wish as far as any personal gratification is concerned, I think this is an aspiration I share with the majority of my fellow countrymen and I would like to think I could share the achievement of that aspiration with them.

Interviewer: Taoiseach, have you ever thought of showing the colour of the Government's money to the Unionists of Northern Ireland in terms of, say, a White Paper or what a United Ireland or a two-government Ireland would be?

Taoiseach: I think it would be a good exercise. But in the meantime we have been engaging on a series of talks on cross-border co-operation in which we will be showing in a practical way the colour of our money. As you know one of the outcomes of my meeting with Mr. Callaghan in September was the establishment of an inter-governmental committee composed of senior civil servants to examine ways and means of increasing not only cross-border activity or co-operation but Anglo-Irish co-operation. But the emphasis is on cross-border economic co-operation. In order to implement these activities - the officials have met now a few times - which are now under examination, we will naturally have to show the colour of our money, because it's going to impose some cost on us to implement them.

Interviewer:

And do you think the time has come to show in concrete terms in concrete form, these proposals in a White Paper?

Taoiseach:

It would be very difficult to know at this stage, to show what extent a White Paper could show all the proposals we would be prepared to implement. And anyway I don't think I could do it unilaterally because we would have to know to what extent there would be input from the North itself and from the British Government. And let me say if the British Government decided to embark on disengagement from involvement in Irish affairs at, say, a future date, obviously there would have to be a phasing ^{out} operation. They would gradually have to reduce their financial commitment, which now stands at something like £700 millions a year or near enough to make no difference to illustrate the point I was making. That would have to be reduced of course if the British Government were going to engage in dis-involvement and there would have to be an increase in the possibility of income within Northern Ireland itself by way of tax or otherwise - I don't really know how they could make it up - but it would just not be a unilateral exercise in my opinion. It would be a tri-lateral exercise and here this is part of ^{the} kind of proposition we put forward in the autumn of 1974 when we suggested that the British Government gave an indication of their interest in the unification of Ireland as an ultimate remedy for our problems, and then began to work towards achieving that situation, without any time-table, and for that purpose to set up committees, tri-lateral committees, for example one to examine the very thing we were talking about, what financial arrangements would be made. We had all that in our policy statement in 1974.

So we are willing, certainly, to do it but I don't think this would be a useful exercise at this stage to do it unilaterally, until there has been greater political progress

Interviewer:

Conversely, do you think the time has come for the British Government to make that long-awaited declaration of intent?

Taoiseach:

I think it has, yes. You see this declaration of intent can be interpreted in a very stark way. We never intended that it be interpreted as "the British Government can get out at the end of a certain year". What we want them to do is to indicate their interest in the bringing of Irish people together and their indication as well that they have little to offer to Ireland as a whole and therefore if they could start the process of bringing Irish people together. If the British could indicate that rather than maintain what I have described as the 'negative guarantee' which is contained in all the statutes: the 1920 Ireland Act, the 1949 Ireland Act, the Atlee Act whichever year it was, the Downing Street declaration which says that unless and until there was a majority in the North in favour of changing the Constitution the position of the North would stay unchanged. Well, that is a steel wall up against which any intransigent Unionists can put their backs and nothing will shift them. So they have that there all the time, and if the British Government, who are generally believed not to have any great heart for continuing their involvement in Irish affairs, if they indicated in a general way that they'd like to see the Irish people coming together, that they don't wish to continue subsidising a small corner of Ireland to the extent

that they have been doing over the last 50 years and that the British people themselves have no stomach for that kind of subsidisation which involves taxation on them, I believe that the people of the North would be realistic enough and hard-headed enough to know that there should be, and there ought to be, accommodation found between themselves and the minority in the North on the one hand *and between them and us.*

Interviewer: Have you ever said that to Mr. Callaghan?

Taoiseach: I have indeed, yes. I said it to Mr. Heath, I said it to Mr. Wilson and of course they have listened.

Interviewer: Have they reacted?

Taoiseach: No, they haven't reacted openly anyway. I'm sure they reacted in their own minds. And I'm sure they said - of course I can't speak for them - but I'm sure they said in their own minds, I wish that we could bring this happy situation about.

Interviewer: It seems to have been an ambition for many British Prime Ministers to settle the Irish question.

Taoiseach: Yes, indeed, and I think Harold Wilson hoped that he would because he always said to me that he had more Irish people voting for him than Sean Lemass and myself together had. And that was probably true in the sense that he represented a constituency with a huge electorate and a lot of Irish people and it was a first past the post system whereas Sean Lemass and I usually stood in five-seat constituencies. However, I think Harold Wilson had an interest in Ireland generally, and I think he manifested that interest in a variety of ways, notwithstanding normal slow-going on the part of some of his ministers, he went to great lengths some

years ago to implement the Anglo-Irish treaty some years ago. And as well as that he has returned the Casement remains, the flag that flew over the GPO in 1916, so he has shown good will in many areas and I could have hoped, of course, that he could have solved the Irish question, before he ceased to be Prime Minister. But that is not to say that James Callaghan and before him Edward Heath lacked any bona fides in that respect. I believe both of them, at least, wanted to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

Interviewer: You mentioned a moment ago Sean Lemass. His daughter, Mrs. Peggy Lemass O'Brien in a letter to the newspapers during the week said that her father had talked to the heads of government of the Six, the then six countries of the EEC and had extracted promises that a condition of Ireland joining the EEC would be the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland. Now you negotiated with Mr. Haughey the terms of our entry, in 1966, I think you did a European tour, was that ever a condition of our entry in your mind?

Taoiseach: I went not only in '66 but I went to Brussels in 1960 - 61 with Mr. Lemass and we initially presented our application at the same time as the British did theirs and you remember subsequently the French veto, General de Gaulle vetoed the British application, and therefore our application was terminated or at least was stopped in its tracks with the British. Well, certainly at that time when we presented our application, either in written form or in oral form, with Mr. Lemass, there was no mention of any precondition in relation to the North of Ireland. He did to, to see some heads of state in order to, you know, indicate to them how