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PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MRS. THATCHER, ON 8 DECEMBER 1980 AFTER
VISIT TO DUBLIN.

PRIME MINISTER

(tape starts in mid-sentence)...the United Kingdom and The Republic of Ireland. The first, remember, was held here some months ago before Mr. Haughey came into power and we agreed then to set up regular bilateral meetings. The second one was held today in Dublin. I took with me a customary bilateral team of the kind which I would take to France or Germany or anywhere else in the Community: Lord Carrington, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and, of course, Humphrey Atkins too.

I myself had tête-à-tête talks with Mr. Haughey for over an hour and then we went into fuller session of ministers discussing all matters of interest between us. On some matters, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom agreed very strongly indeed. For example, that violence is no way forward. That we must have maximum cooperation on security. That there is no point in a hunger strike and that we both hope that it will end very quickly. You will see something about that in the communiqué.

On others we disagreed. For example, on the Common Agricultural Policy, the viewpoint of our Irish friends is very different from ours and we both share some problems: the problems of world recession and unemployment, and so on.

So there were quite a lot of things to discuss, some on which our interests were different and some on which they were the same.

I think you probably will have heard more than I have about any statements which have come out from Dublin, because after all, we have flown back since then and perhaps I might leave it to you to ask me questions.

QUESTION

Prime Minister, could you tell us something about the joint studies mentioned in paragraph 6; whose is going to do them, how long they will take, and what they will be studies of?

PRIME MINISTER

Well, we cannot tell you a great deal more than what is already in the communiqué. There are various economic matters, for example we can discuss. There is already an Anglo-Irish economic council and there is an energy council subcommittee of that. I think we can discuss very much better energy cooperation across the border or otherwise between the Republic of Ireland the United Kingdom.

There may be a number of other things we can discuss. We pointed out that we were having an enterprise zone in Belfast as a means of trying to attract industry to Northern Ireland. I think it is possible that citizenship rights may be discussed. As you know, we already have citizens of the Republic of Ireland in the United Kingdom with full voting rights and I believe that Mr. Haughey has already said that he is prepared to consider reciprocal voting rights, but naturally he wishes to see that those are not at odds in any way with the Nationality Bill when it comes in.

It is largely economic cooperation. We do already have a great deal of cooperation on security matters, because it is in the interests both of the United Kingdom north of the border and the Republic of Ireland south of the border that violence is not furthered. It is damaging to both communities.

With some of our other European partners, we do of course also have things like the Franco-British Council and we have a Konigs winter conference. There is a unique relationship between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom in that it is the only country with which we have a land border and it is worthwhile thinking whether one can give expression that unique relationship in any way.

QUESTION

..the point about who will be doing it? What level?

PRIME MINISTER

It will be done through Ministers. Ministers obviously will have to commission them, but we have not in fact yet sorted them out. But we did feel that what we needed was continuity of cooperation, not just meeting from time to time. Continuity of cooperation on these things. For example, we have already four working parties on joint cooperative ventures between parts of Northern Ireland and the Republic. Now, we felt that we needed a good deal more continuity on practical measures of cooperation than we have been doing. It is a question of setting up those working parties with a ministerial input, which we have not had before, except perhaps through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Do not think there is anything there that I am concealing from you; it is just that we have not got any further yet, except an intention to keep continuous cooperation between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland on these matters.

QUESTION

You have made it very clear that there will be no give on the hunger strikers' demands for political status. However, Humfrey Atkins did make some mention of discussions of those peripheral issues dealing with prison reform. Are you prepared to go further with that?

PRIME MINISTER

Two points. Of course, there can be no give on political status. Murder is a crime. Carrying explosives is a crime. Maiming is a crime. It must stay a crime in the ordinary sense of the word. Murder is murder is murder. It is not, and never can be, a political crime. So there is no question of political status. You are absolutely right in that.

Secondly, Humphrey Atkins put out a very comprehensive statement the other day setting out all of the rights and privileges that are already available for prisoners who conform to the ordinary way of life in a prison. I do not think they had ever been set out in full before. What they show is that some of the things which some of the prisoners were demanding are already available under ordinary prison rules. What we now have to do is to get over the full totality of that statement to those who are on hunger strike and those who are not conforming to the normal prison routine.

If you look at that statement, it is divided into rights for all prisoners and privileges for prisoners who conform to the regime and it is, I think, the first time they have all been set out together and it is a question of getting what is already available home to those prisoners who are on hunger strike, because, really, most of the things, the ordinary things on humanitarian grounds which they had been asking for, are already available to all prisoners under ordinary prison rules.

QUESTION

Could I ask about the mention in the communique of new institutional structures.

PRIME MINISTER

That is just exactly the question I have already answered at some very considerable length. There is nothing beyond that.

QUESTION

Mr. Haughey was talking about assemblies in Dublin and Belfast.

PRIME MINISTER

I do not think the word was actually mentioned.

QUESTION

This was in a press conference.

PRIME MINISTER

I was not there, but I do not think the word "assemblies" was actually mentioned and I have just given a very full answer of how it seems to me. There is nothing further beyond what is in the communiqué. We have just have to explore the possibility of whether the unique relationship between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, which is a land border, it is the only one of our Community colleagues with whom we have a land border, find some special expression. Now, we do not in fact have some of the arrangements with the Republic of Ireland that we have with other countries. For example, we have a Franco-British Council; we have a Konigswinter with our German friends. It is just a question of finding whether we give some...whether or not there is some special expression we can give to this unique relationship. Otherwise, there are a number of parties, like the Anglo-Irish Economic Council - I had not realised the full extent to which they already meet - whether we can in fact get more ministerial input to these and after all, we have already today, in a way, set up a new institutionalized structure by having these bilaterals on a regular basis. We have them on a regular basis with Germany, with France, with Italy and now with the Republic of Ireland.

QUESTION

Will the border poll be affected by this new study group which seems to me could conceivably be thought to prejudice any reasonable outcome to the studies?

PRIME MINISTER

I do not see that the border poll will be affected in any way, not in any way. After all, we hold a guarantee to the people of Northern Ireland which remains. We had the border poll. So long as the majority of the people of Northern Ireland wish to stay the way they are, so long does the guarantee remain.

QUESTION

Did Mr. Haughey ask you to reconsider the guarantee which he regards as an obstacle to progress?

PRIME MINISTER

No, the guarantee was well understood between Mr. Haughey and myself previously. He came over of course to No. 10 previously. I had also seen Mr. Lynch previously. No, the existence of the guarantee is very well understood, that it is there and will remain.

QUESTION

Prime Minister, to use the language of the communiqué, you say that the best prospect of attaining these objectives of peace, reconciliation and stability in Northern Ireland was a further development of the unique relationship between both countries. But does not that mean in fact that you are giving up the possibility of achieving it through a devolved government structure in Northern Ireland?

PRIME MINISTER

The two countries here are the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

QUESTION

But with respect, Prime Minister, it has been your policy to seek peace and reconciliation through a devolved structure. It might appear from the wording of this communiqué between Dublin and London and is not this capable of being seen by Unionists as a rejection of the very guarantees that you are giving them?

PRIME MINISTER

No, I do not think so in any way. The two countries referred to there are the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. There is nothing there for Unionists to worry about. As I said earlier, there is one country with which the United Kingdom has a land border and that is the Republic of Ireland, and that is what

makes it a unique relationship. What we have been talking about today is between London or Westminster and Dublin.

QUESTION

Are any constitutional changes implied then by the phrase on new institutional structures?

PRIME MINISTER

I cannot really add to what I have already said on that I think you are trying to probe further than you can probe.

QUESTION

You mentioned the Königswinter conference, but because it is a conference it is a meeting of politicians and journalists really. Are you thinking of something like the Franco-German treaty? The treaty of friendship?

PRIME MINISTER

I do not think anyone has got to thinking out exactly what. It is just exploring further whether this unique relationship between United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, which is not only actually on a land border - there are a number of other things which are unique as you know - should be given some institutional expression.

QUESTION

When Humphrey Atkins published his last proposals, that was quite new...

PRIME MINISTER

What are you talking about? On the Maze?. Oh, I'm sorry the Northern Irish..yes.

QUESTION

...the Government...then the Irish Government..it was new for the Irish Government then..the contents of this proposal. Does this sentence to bring forward policies and proposals to achieve peace, reconciliation and stability, does that mean that in future similar plans and proposals will be..will be you consult the Irish Government in advance?

PRIME MINISTER

No. Again, you are seeking for a meaning to those phrases which just is not there. We brought forward those proposals. It is just not possible as a result of all the consultations we have had, to go forward to legislation upon them. The need to try to find reconciliation between the people in Northern Ireland still remains. The need for stability still remains. But we shall get very very much more stability when we have very much less violence and, of course, we do have excellent cooperation both sides of the border on security, which is of advantage to the people of the United Kingdom in Northern Ireland and also of advantage to the people in the Republic of Ireland, because violence is bad for them both.

QUESTION

Prime Minister, you did say earlier on that the Anglo-Irish Council had been in existence for some time.

PRIME MINISTER

...economic..committee...

QUESTION

I am sorry to come back to this, the communiqué actually refers to possible new institutional structures. I do not feel that we know what the new ones really are.

PRIME MINISTER

It is exploring. Do not think there are any ready-made sets of proposals: there are not!

QUESTION

But could the Prime Minister at least deny what has come out of Dublin tonight, that these studies might include the possibility of a confederation of United Kingdom and Ireland because that would seem to go a very long way?

PRIME MINISTER

Well, all we are doing at the moment is exploring further whether this unique relationship between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland can or should be given further institutional expression and one just cannot go any further than that.

QUESTION

Prime Minister, is not the very language that you have used capable of being interpreted by some people in Northern Ireland as an indication on your part that the emphasis of your policies is now directed towards cooperation in Dublin rather than finding a solution in Northern Ireland?

PRIME MINISTER

The emphasis of one's policies is on the United Kingdom. Can I get it across? I have used it all throughout: the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom. There is only one meaning for the United Kingdom. United Kingdom included Northern Ireland and you have not heard me refer to anything other tonight than the United Kingdom. United, united, united. Have you got it?

QUESTION

You appear to be building this project on the continued existence, the institutional existence of the border. Mr. Haughey does not want that to continue to exist. Therefore, by hanging the project on it, you are giving it an extra permanence.

PRIME MINISTER

I think you are trying to read a good deal more into it than there is. I see absolutely no possibility of confederation, no possibility of confederation. What I am talking about is whether, with the only country with whom the United Kingdom has a land border and also we have special relationships with citizenship between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, whether we should explore whether there should be any special institutional expression given to that. Ironically, it happens that we have less, I think, of these contacts with the Republic of Ireland than we have with some other countries in Europe at the present time.

QUESTION

To come back to the hunger strikers, Mrs. Thatcher, did Mr. Haughey agree with your point about they should never get political status because they are murderers?

PRIME MINISTER

I'm sorry, would you say that again?

QUESTION

Did the Irish Prime Minister agree with your point that there could be no question of giving the hunger strikers political status?

PRIME MINISTER

There is no question. I do not ever ask anyone to agree with it, but I think he accepts that there is no question of our giving political status to people guilty of murder, explosions, maiming in Northern Ireland or anywhere else. There is no question of it at all! And the purpose of the document which..the statement which Humphrey Atkins issued, I think it was last Thursday, was to set out on humanitarian grounds what is already available, because I do not think that is fully known. I mean, you or I may know it, but I do not think it is fully known to those people in the Maze Prison.

QUESTION

Also in that document, Prime Minister, Mr. Atkins hinted that there could be further progress on the humanitarian aspect of the regime in Ulster prisons. Was any progress made on that in this...

PRIME MINISTER

No, he said he was always willing to talk to people on humanitarian grounds, but if you look at that list it is pretty exhaustive.

QUESTION

Do you think your meeting today has brought the Maze hunger strike any closer to an end?

PRIME MINISTER

I very much hope that the Maze hunger strike will come to an end. We both agreed that it should. I think you will find paragraph 7 of the communique deals with that. We both agreed that it is futile to continue the hunger strike. It will achieve nothing. Be such a waste of life! And that, as you will see, the statement made by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will provide the basis on which the issues could be resolved.

QUESTION

Did you, during your economic discussions today, discuss the implications for the Republic of Britain joining the EMS?

PRIME MINISTER

No, we did not. We are not about to join the EMS.

QUESTION

Prime Minister, just on the confederation point again, sorry.

PRIME MINISTER

There is no possibility of a confederation so there is no point in raising it....the Morning Star will always try to blaze a trail, yes!

QUESTION

Well, on clarification...

PRIME MINISTER

No, the question has been clarified.

QUESTION

Well in relation to the communique, does that mean that from the Prime Minister's point of view the joint studies would not cover this question?

PRIME MINISTER

Confederation is not a possibility.

QUESTION

..used the phrase about the land border assigning some sort of unique and full expression....institution..yes...the last time something like this happened was at Sunningdale and that, of course, it broke down did it it?

PRIME MINISTER

I am sorry, this is purposely why throughout today and throughout this evening the phrase I have used is the phrase I mean: the two countries are the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Sunningdale was not about the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

QUESTION

Yes, but Sunningdale surely was about trying to take thethe border question wasn't it?

PRIME MINISTER

I am talking myself about the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland and that is what we have been talking about today.

QUESTION

Prime Minister, could you say how you got on with Mr. Haughey personally and informally?

PRIME MINISTER

Oh very well! We took a very powerful team and we all got on very well together. After all, what we are trying to get is greater continuity of relations. We do, in fact, cooperate very closely on some things and we are trying to get much greater continuity of relations with these people with whom we have a land border between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

QUESTION

You are not hoping Prime Minister that Ireland will join the United Kingdom? I mean, just to extend the argument the other way, you do not have any hopes....

PRIME MINISTER

That was not discussed.

QUESTION

In the wake of today's talks, is it likely that Mr. Atkins would open renewed discussions about the subjects discussed in Dublin with people in Northern Ireland or the political representatives there?

PRIME MINISTER

What Mr. Atkins has to do is to get over the full message of that statement which was issued last Thursday which lists the very very many rights and privileges that are available to all prisoners in Northern Ireland who conform to a proper prison regime. There are some rights which are available in any case and there are many many privileges which it so happens actually meet the demands made by the prisoners, that they are available to all prisoners who conform and if you through that, I thought it one of the most extensive and almost exhaustive documents I have ever seen on all the rights and privileges and when they are all put down they are very impressive indeed. We have seen them, we have read them; what we have to try to get over to the people concerned is the extent to which many of the things they are asking for are already available to all prisoners.

QUESTION

Prime Minister, does that include wearing their own clothes and freedom of association?

PRIME MINISTER

Perhaps if you like to go through the statement you will find it all there.
