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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE TAOISEACH ON 23 FEBRUARY TO
ROY BRADFORD FOR A BBC RADIO 4 PROGRAMME ON THE COLLAPSE OF
SUNNINGDALE, TO BE AIRED IN MAY 1983.

(Segments may be edited out because of ^{time}/constraints)

ROY BRADFORD

The first thing I would like to touch on is Sunningdale, now almost ten years afterwards, do you think at Sunningdale the Unionists were asked to accept too much, that they were landed with a deal which they could not sell to their own supporters?

TAOISEACH

I think that at Sunningdale the balance of the final agreement, in the light of hindsight, turned out to be more than it was possible for the Unionist leaders to sell to their supporters in Northern Ireland. We, on our side, were seeking what we thought would be a balanced deal. We were conscious of Unionist difficulties. At the end of the negotiation, indeed, we felt that it was important that the Unionists should emerge with more than looked like happening, and we were anxious to get a better balance and we thought at the end that had been achieved. But obviously we left it to the Unionist delegation and Brian Faulkner to make their judgement as to what they could sell. We wouldn't have pushed them and didn't push them beyond the point at which they thought it was feasible to get acceptance for it.

ROY BRADFORD

The role of the army now, did you hold the view that the army could have been used to actually break the strike, that in fact Her Majesty's Government or the Northern Ireland Executive should have put the army into for example, the power stations?

TAOISEACH

Well, first of all, I think that in the first few days of the strike on the information available to us at the time and, I think, confirmed subsequently from sources, indeed, amongst the loyalist workers themselves, if the army had moved at the beginning, then I think the strike would not have proceeded, would not have

succeeded. Once there was a failure to act for several days then the protestant population who had been suffering from frustration and fears for sometime past, seeing no action being taken, began to rally to a strike which I think at the beginning they didn't support, and the failure of the army to act at the beginning was fatal. And that failure of the British Government, from that flows everything that has not happened since, if you like, the disastrous situation in Northern Ireland since the strike.

ROY BRADFORD

If you accept that thesis, that it was the bully boys who early on dictated the course of events then you've got to deal with the situation that since then, of course, there has been continuing opposition to power sharing in the North from the mass of the protestant population.

TAOISEACH

Yes, at the time there were several different views as to what really was the thing that sparked off this massive opposition. Whether it was concerned with the Council of Ireland, or objection to power sharing, and historians will have to decide that in due course as best they can. The reality is that it brought down a power sharing Executive and that since then, once that was allowed to happen, it has been obviously very difficult to get acceptance for power sharing on the Unionist side.

ROY BRADFORD

On two other factors in the situation, the role of the British Government, I'd like you to comment on that, and indeed the role of the media.

TAOISEACH

Well as far as the British Government is concerned, it was the failure to insist on the army acting. I have discussed this from time to time with members of that Government and other British politicians and one point put to me by a senior politician is that the Government were influenced, wrongly—in the view of this politician

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who was a member of the Government at the time — by recollections of problems of the army after Suez, which I had not previously heard, and possible problems that loomed up at the time of Rhodesian UDI. And that with these memories there was a reluctance to insist on the army doing its duty. I find that very disturbing....

ROY BRADFORD:

Echoes of the Curragh Mutiny....

TAOISEACH:

Yes, apparently echoing in the British Government at the time. Insofar as the media are concerned, we thought it very surprising at the time that the BBC in Northern Ireland should have been used to broadcast messages which were basically in support of what appeared to be a rebellion, insistent messages from people in the milk and electricity areas and others, in a way which would not normally be allowed in any democratic country when people are mounting what in effect is a rebellion against the Government. Indeed it is a matter which at the time we took up. My recollection is that we found the BBC in London didn't know what was happening in Northern Ireland and were not monitoring BBC Northern Ireland and were rather taken aback to discover what was happening there.

ROY BRADFORD:

Briefly, the whole point and crux of this exercise was power sharing. Do you now think the concept of powersharing within Northern Ireland is dead?

TAOISEACH:

No. It offers the only prospect ~~of~~ some form of a solution because obviously no British Government is going to devolve Government, internal self-government, to Unionists only, and there can be no resolution of the Northern Ireland problem in which people in Northern Ireland don't themselves play a part in running their own affairs. So, eventually you come back to the fact that whatever problems

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may have been created by the failure to tackle this problem at the time, eventually there would have to be some solution in which the two sides of the community participate together in running the affairs of Northern Ireland internally, and in jointly taking responsibility for tackling the security problem, or that part of it, which can be tackled with domestic forces of order.

ENDS.....