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Transcript of telephone Interview with Ian Paisley on Radio  
Ulster's "Talkback" programme today, 3 March 1987

Newsreader: One of the major opponents of this proposed Public Order legislation is the DUP leader, the Rev. Ian Paisley, who also joins us by telephone. Could I ask you first Ian Paisley to wear your hat as a Minister of religion for a moment. What impact do you think the legislation will have on, let's say, outdoor religious rallies or meetings or so on?

Mr. Paisley: Well, for the first time in Northern Ireland, the RUC is given the power to impose conditions on open-air meetings. They can now bring such meetings to an abrupt end, they can prevent people attending or order those present to leave and they can change the place of such meetings. Now that is a drastic law never before introduced into Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has many, many Gospel open-air meetings. Ministers of religion, eminent Preachers and other zealous church workers stand at a street corner and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They now can be removed. Those listening to them can also be guilty of a breach of this law and this is a very serious thing indeed. And it's not enough for the Secretary of State to put out a little duplicated sheet and say that he has power to exempt, for example, a Salvation Army and gives himself full power in regard to that. What about other religious organisations and we are now talking about parades like the B.B., like the Church of Ireland who, I understand, have a regular parade down in Downpatrick on the 17th March. What about the Sunday Schools that have marches of Witness regularly in connection with their work. Are these all going to be exempt?

Newsreader: Do you think, Ian Paisley, people are sufficiently aware because I was quite surprised myself, by the extent to which this legislation stretches. I quote the example of the difficulty that's going to be facing the average common garden Scout Master even.

Mr. Paisley: Oh yes, and what is more, which is more alarming, that if you make remarks in private property in the confines of your own room at home, you can be taken up now for incitement to hatred.

Newsreader: On the principle that it could be heard outside?

Mr. Paisley: No, because it might arouse fear from someone that repeated it, having heard you use that and another thing too, for the first time, the mere possession of material, if I have in my house a copy of a book and that book, it could be maintained, would cause fear among a section of the Community, I could be in breach of the law. Which means that those who would say that the strong denunciations of the Bible against Idolatrous practices, against homosexuality, to possess the Bible could, under this particular legislation make you guilty of a breach.

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Newsreader: Isn't that though, something of an exaggeration Ian Paisley. I accept that that's possible in theory, but surely no Secretary of State is going to proceed down that road.

Mr. Paisley: Well, why have it at all. I mean this is amazing and then, of course, there's another thing that I've just noticed. He has sent us a re-vamped draft and he has put into it that, in the future, the police will have the power of immediate arrest for those people who picket a persons home or a persons place of business. So that means that if a picketer goes out with a poster and stands outside a persons home or business, that the police now have the power of arrest that they never had before.

Newsreader: Could I ask you another thing? I think you would agree that probably with the absence of political forums here that a good deal of politics is conducted through the newspapers and via the media. Do you think the legislation will restrict that?

Mr. Paisley: Oh yes, this legislation is, it comes directly, and I think that this is the point that needs to be made, it comes directly from the Anglo-Irish Conference. I heard Mr. Mallon on the media boasting that this Public Order was an order that came as a result of the representations made through the SDLP to the Irish Government and the Irish Government made them directly to the British Government. So this is part of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and it must be made clear that all the legitimate lawful protests that heretofore have been made against the Anglo-Irish Agreement are now going to be unlawful under the terms of this particular bit of legislation.

Newsreader: Do you therefore anticipate, as a result of that, that the protests against the Agreement will be pushed over the edge into unconstitutional and illegal acts?

Mr. Paisley: Well they have to be, I mean if I call a meeting with Jim Molyneaux at the City Hall, the police can say no, it interrupts, you see there's a new article in this, that if it interrupts the business of a place, the business life of a community then it can be banned. Well, I mean a mass rally does interrupt, even in that there you would have the way that they could ban a Loyalist 12th of July procession because it interrupts business. I mean the thing is so wide and I believe will be widely used, but what alarms me more is we said, and we made strong public calls that this legislation should be made law, come into law in England, that we would have a second reading, we would have a committee stage, we'd be able to put down amendments, we'd be able to fight on the floor of the House and the Government is not prepared to do that, the Government is going to do it by Order in Council and in the Order in Council no MP can stand up and move an amendment. He can vote against but he cannot move an amendment.

Newsreader: So you say you see no way, from your point of view, of averting the introduction of this legislation.

Mr. Paisley: No, in this, the word has been given by the Secretary of State to the Dublin Government and the SDLP that this will go through and they are, at the moment, glorying in the fact that this is going to go through. It's not going to be passed by the British Government, by the Parliament, it's going to be rubber stamped but the womb out of which it came is the Anglo-Irish Conference.

Newsreader: And therefore, one has to ask you finally if you are prepared to step outside the law to challenge this piece of legislation:

Mr. Paisley: Well I have an open air meeting at the City Hall at 12 noon every Saturday. I'll be having that open-air meeting. If the police come and tell me to shift, if the police come and arrest my people, if the police come and interfere with it then we are prepared to take the consequences and I believe that the day that this legislation comes into operation there has to be a close down of Northern Ireland. That the people of Northern Ireland have to come out and say we are not going to be dragooned by the Government. I mean, for instance, in this legislation there is a provision that all bands must be registered. Their names, their addresses given at the police station. What is a band under the legislation. Any two people carrying, not playing any musical instrument, so if two people go out on the road and carry a musical instrument they must register themselves as a band.

Newsreader: I am not trying to dragoon you, and obviously one has an eye to this legislation and its implications for broadcasting and so on, but are you saying there, when you say Northern Ireland should come to a standstill, are you in fact calling for a day of action?

Mr. Paisley: I am calling for a massive, a wide protest on the day that this comes into effect. That every village, hamlet or town must have, must come out, have their open air meeting, must have their marches, must have their protest. That's what I'm saying and the Government must be shown to be unable to handle this situation and what alarms me is my information that the Chief of the RUC was one of the allies of the Dublin Government in pushing this legislation.

Newsreader: What information do you have on that, in that regard?

Mr. Paisley: My information is that he was the man that said yes, traditional parades must give 7 days notice. He was the man that said the RUC must be able to control all open air services. He was the man that said we must have the registration of bands. Now in the old legislation, there was a provision to register bands. But in the new legislation that provision is there but Dublin has been promised that this time it will be activated.

Newsreader: Are you in fact saying, and do you have evidence to say, that Sir John Hermon was directly involved in drawing up the basic elements of this legislation?

Mr. Paisley: Yes and I have that from one of the top Civil Servants at Stormont.

Newsreader: OK, Ian Paisley, we must leave it there. Thank you for joining us.