

SOS
Speech in
Omagh

CONFIDENTIAL

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COMMENTS BY SECRETARY OF STATE WHEN DOORSTEPPED BY MEDIA AT OMAGH:
WEDNESDAY 16 FEBRUARY 1994

Mr T... W G...

Interviewer

What's your response to the article in The Sun this morning which suggests that you're in favour of dropping the broadcasting restrictions on Sinn Fein and other banned organisations?

MRS...
MR...

Secretary of State

I never comment on speculative articles.

Mr Stanley
file
18/2/94

Secretary
Mr. Gibson
Mr. McVeigh

Interviewer

Are you in favour of it, Sir?

Secretary of State

I refer you to the answer given by my colleague Peter Brooke, whose responsibility this is, in the House of Commons on the 4th of February, and he said the Government has this matter under review and it will maintain the present ban but will keep an eye on changing circumstances.

Interviewer

So you are neither denying nor confirming the story?

Secretary of State

I said what I wished to say about it that I never comment upon speculative stories.

Interviewer

Do you feel the ban has outlived its usefulness?

Secretary of State

A very good try, if I may say so. But I have already said that this is a matter for my colleague, the Heritage Secretary, Peter Brooke, and he has given that answer in the House of Commons which represents the position of the Government, of which I am a member, unless you know something I don't know.

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Interviewer

In terms of your speech, Sir Patrick Mayhew, what will we be hearing this afternoon?

Secretary of State

Well, I have got the very nice invitation to come to the Rotary Club here in Omagh and I am going to be emphasising the importance of an end of violence in terms of the economic benefits that will come to everybody in the Province, not just to people in Omagh, where my goodness me, it's needed, because we do have here something like 18% unemployment which is far, far too high. The average for the Province is now about 13.6/13.7%; it's traditionally here higher for reasons which I have been discussing with the Chairman. And so those who say Northern Ireland have a lot to answer for if they continue to justify violence, because violence is the biggest single brake upon employment and prosperity of all.

Interviewer

Sir Patrick, could it be seen as a direct appeal to the business community to get themselves involved in the political process and push for an acceptance of the Declaration?

Secretary of State

Oh, I don't think that there's any need to push within the Province of Northern Ireland. What you're speaking of, I think, is get the business people to press Sinn Fein to end their justifying of violence, and I think that I certainly have in mind drawing attention to the people of this part of the Province of the great benefits that would come and naturally I wish to include business view. I am bound to say that it won't come as news to business people. I think that the biggest single area where we will see more jobs is in the tourism field and it's been calculated that if the emergency could come to an end, perhaps a very high number of jobs indeed - I don't know it is possible to put an actual figure upon it - but I think a very high number of additional jobs would be created in the tourism field. I think that's pretty well obvious.

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Interviewer

You have been visiting a lot of Councils in recent weeks. Many Councils are responding to the whole business of tourism because many of them have seen most of their industry disappear and tourism is the only thing largely that's left to them. Is tourism perhaps the biggest issue that you have been discussing with the Councils.....?

Secretary of State

No, it isn't actually. The biggest issue that I have been discussing in this tour, this programme of visits which I pay (not just courtesy calls, because I come for a whole morning) has been the attraction of industry employment jobs. IDB (the Industrial Development Board) are very active and I have been very pleased to hear today from the Chairman of this Council that there's a very close relationship between the Council and IDB here in Omagh. It's that. IDB have been doing very well. Last year they attracted some 1700 new jobs to the Province and that's a lot and a total investment of about £200m and they're doing very well in this present year that we're in and I think there's a very good prospect there. So that's what people are primarily interested in. We want to get unemployment down.

Interviewer

Sir Patrick, you suggested that this afternoon's speech will focus on the peace dividend, rather than perhaps a nationalist dividend which Sinn Fein might be interested in. Is this the start of a process to leave Sinn Fein behind because they haven't responded to the Declaration?

Secretary of State

Well, I'm not leaving Sinn Fein behind; they're behind already; they're behind public opinion. Public opinion says 'end violence now'. They're miles behind. They're so far behind they're out of sight. What I want to do is to just impress upon everybody concerned that there is only one rational choice for Sinn Fein. They have a

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political objective, fair enough. Anybody can argue for any political objective here; we're a democracy. What you can't do is to come and demand to argue it when you're using bombs to back up your argument, and the reason is a very simple one. If the Government were to negotiate with people who use violence for a political objective, who are nationalists, where does that leave the constitutional nationalists? It leaves them high and dry and really betrayed by a Government of a democratic country. So we are never going to do it; we have never done it and we won't.

Interviewer

You are meeting the Irish Government and the British Government. What is the agenda per se?

Secretary of State

Well, the agenda is to watch the match, but beforehand it seemed sensible to the Prime Minister and to the Taoiseach that they should meet and Mr Spring will be coming, so we shall have a foursome just to take stock of the situation so far as the Declaration is concerned and also the talks process.

Interviewer

And will you be in a position to progress things at that stage, though?

Secretary of State

Well, I can't tell. We are progressing the talks process already, that's never stopped, nor should it, and whether of course Sinn Fein are prepared to say that following the Declaration they are going to stop justifying violence, that's a matter for them. They should do and they should have done it already.

Interviewer

So in terms of your ideas or notions for progressing your talks process, you've sent those to Dublin, have you had any response of where we are at with those?

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Secretary of State

Well, I don't think it's beneficial really to have the public eye on every moment of relationships between the two Governments. These are ideas which I have put to the parties; I am now putting to the parties, I have them to two, I have got another one to do, and it was polite and sensible for me to show them to the Irish Government first because they are co-chairmen of the talks and that's where we are. These are not proposals by the British Government. These are our ideas based on our past experience as to what has the best chance of getting general agreement as an overall package, and that's where we are. The two Governments want to see of course the objective of the talks process reached.

Interviewer

Could I ask you, on the question of the reported suggestion that the ban might be lifted, what's your personal opinion on the broadcasting ban?

Secretary of State

Well, I don't comment on speculative articles. I gather that there's a speculative article in one of the newspapers today.

Interviewer

I'm asking you about your personal opinion?

Secretary of State

Well, you will have seen that Peter Brooke, who is the Minister responsible, has said in the House of Commons on 4 February that the Government is going to maintain the ban for the time being, but it will review it in the light of changing circumstances. That's my opinion too. That's what's going to happen.