

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

VISIT BY TAOISEACH TO BRITISH PRIME MINISTER, MR. WILSON,  
IN LONDON ON FRIDAY, 5th MARCH, 1976.

The Taoiseach, accompanied by the Tánaiste, met Mr. Wilson at 10 Downing Street at 12 noon. The Prime Minister was joined later by the Secretary of State, Mr. Rees, who had, when the meeting began, been in the House of Commons making his statement on the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Convention. Messrs. D. Nally (Department of the Taoiseach) and P. Wright (Department of the Prime Minister) attended the meeting as note-takers.

The Prime Minister opened the discussions by welcoming the Taoiseach to London and saying he was glad to have the opportunity for this exchange of views. He understood that there was a wish to have a communique on the meeting. They had prepared a short draft which might be discussed after lunch when the subject matter and tenor of the meeting became clear. The Taoiseach agreed to this proposition - indicating that we too had prepared a provisional draft which might be taken into account in the later discussion.

SECURITY:

The Prime Minister then went on to inquire how the Taoiseach and Tánaiste saw things generally now. The Convention was being dissolved and obviously this would lead to a greatly changed position in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach said that on the security front the position had improved greatly since they last met. The Prime Minister said that they were highly appreciative of what had been done in this area. The Taoiseach went on to say that they had captured a number of the leading Provisionals. The Criminal Law Jurisdiction Bill had passed both Houses of Parliament and was now <sup>with</sup> the President. It would be for him to decide on whether it should be referred to the Supreme Court for a judgement as to its constitutionality. Even if he decided not to refer the Bill to the Court, it was likely that it would end up there anyway because the first case under it would probably be referred there by whoever was involved.

The Prime Minister inquired as to how long it would be before the Bill was in operation. The Taoiseach said that it was impossible to give a definite answer on this. However, the Court could act quite quickly and possibly a month would not be an unreasonable estimate. It was notable that even though the 1861 Act had been applied for a considerable time now, there had not been a single case tried under it. He wondered if the same might not happen in relation to the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Bill.

The Tánaiste said that the Herrema and Stagg cases had illustrated that in the South, the support for the Provisionals was minimal. The general feeling there was very much against them. The Prime Minister said that both cases had been "brilliantly handled". The Taoiseach said that Stagg had been buried some 12 feet underground and that the grave was being guarded at present. He then went on to enquire of the Prime Minister as to his views on the political situation.

The Prime Minister was starting to review this when the Secretary of State joined the meeting. The Prime Minister then went on to say that Craig had been really remarkable in what he had done. Glen Barr had also been very helpful. They were, however, a number of very hardline individuals. And they had become involved in "this hardline resolution." There seemed to be a possibility that the Convention would be adjourned to next week. They had decided "to hell with this - we will not keep going <sup>on</sup> with it." Their position now was that they intended to keep their heads down for a while.

POLITICAL  
SITUATION.

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They would keep quiet and not trot out with new solutions immediately. Direct rule would continue. There would be no new initiative. If the people in Northern Ireland came together and agreed on something then the British Government would look at it. For the moment, there would be no referendum - even if there was a possibility that the poll would be favourable it could happen that the result could not be operated in the conditions in Northern Ireland at present.

At this point, the Prime Minister said that Enoch Powell had come in to them. He was very sceptical of the general situation in Northern Ireland. He said that the level of political acumen was not high. It was essential to keep things cool. This was the line he would advise on any Government in relation to Northern Ireland at present. The Prime Minister emphasised the confidentiality of this contact.

The Prime Minister said that the main demand they had at present was that a date should be set for withdrawal. This they had steadily refused to give, as had their predecessors. They were going to introduce legislation in July renewing their mandate in Northern Ireland.

The Taoiseach inquired as to the way in which they envisaged direct rule working, now that the Assembly and Convention were gone. The Prime Minister said that it would operate in exactly the same way as at present. The Taoiseach inquired as to the position of elected representatives in this situation. The Prime Minister said that the elected representatives with which they would deal would be those elected to Westminster.

The Secretary of State said that some of them are going to continue talking among themselves. If the situation required it, he would prepared to see them. At this point, however, he did not want to erect this arrangement into any form of institution.

The Taoiseach enquired as to the status of the Convention members. Were these written off? The Prime Minister said that when they spoke of elected representatives now they meant the members elected to the Westminster Parliament. The Tánaiste, at this point, inquired whether the 10/2 representation was considered adequate. Both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State said that they would deal with parties. If a person came in as leader of a party or of a community, then they would be prepared to hold discussions with him and possibly with persons he brought. They would not necessarily talk to a person because he had been elected by the community to some other form of institution or authority.

The Tánaiste adverted to the possibility that, in these circumstances, the SDLP might disintegrate. This could create a dangerous vacuum for the minority. The Prime Minister said that he was fully prepared to deal with Gerry Fitt - and whoever he might bring with him. The Taoiseach said that the members of this party would have no income when their payments from the Convention ceased. The Secretary of State said that he was tired listening to representations about broken taps in houses. If, however, Gerry Fitt wanted to bring people to see him that was alright but he (the Secretary of State) could not provide money for them. The Prime Minister said that Mr. Rees spends three-quarters of every week in Northern Ireland. He spends much of his time there talking to people. The Secretary of State said there must be a stop to the continual demands of people to be met.

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ELECTED  
REPRESENT-  
ATIVES AND  
PARAMILITARIES:

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They were "pouring into Stormont". There would be no problem about meeting with the SDLP provided the right arrangements were made. However, the important thing was finances. The Tánaiste said that it could be very harmful for us if discussions with this group were stopped. The Taoiseach said that it was important not to talk to the para-military organisations while discussions with elected representatives were cut off.

The Secretary of State said that most of the rumours on this subject were "utter rubbish". Andy Tyrie came to an official's house occasionally because they were personally acquainted. That sort of contact must continue. It was most useful to them in administration in Northern Ireland. They were <sup>not</sup> going to negotiate with any of the para-military groups but these talks and contacts must go on. The Prime Minister said that no-one had authority from the Cabinet or from him to negotiate with anyone bearing arms. The Taoiseach said that discussions with para-military groups weaken the authority of elected representatives and strengthen that of the groups. The Secretary of State said that he understood this problem but the contacts were too valuable to them to be broken off like that. The Prime Minister said that at one time Craig was associated with a para-military group. Would it have been useful if talks with him had not proceeded? The Secretary of State said that contact with the Protestant para-militaries was very valuable. They knew just what was going on, as a result of these contacts. The Prime Minister added that they knew all about the UWC strike at the time - because of these contacts. The Secretary of State added that the contacts were not with the UVF. The Prime Minister agreed with the summation of the Tánaiste that there would be no contacts but meaningful talks or negotiations with para-military groups.

The Secretary of State then referred to the Provisional IRA. He said that everyone knew they could deliver nothing. They represented 2-4 % of the Northern population. Left on their own, they could perhaps operate for a week. But as things were, they were holding down 15,000 soldiers, 5,000 reservists and 5,000 regular police. Even a security force of this size could not stop the sort of activity in which the Provisionals were at present engaged. Their information was that the IRA could keep going in the way they were, for a long time. The Prime Minister said that the organisation was, in their view, much less coherent than it had been. For instance, the people in South Armagh were not taking orders from their own top people. The Tánaiste said that the recent bomb in the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin might be an illustration of this same trend.

The Taoiseach said that outsiders did not appreciate the difference between talks and negotiations. The Prime Minister said that this might be so - and in addition malice had to be taken into account.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

The Taoiseach then said that in any arrangements for Northern Ireland it would be important to bear in mind the way in which the present local authorities there operated in some places. There was evidence of serious sectarian malpractice in places like, for example, Banbridge and Ballymena. Was there any way in which this could be corrected? The Secretary of State said that local authorities in Northern Ireland had very little powers and they were <sup>not</sup> going to get more. At this point, the Prime Minister mentioned the way in which the Greater London Council operated. The Secretary of State said that in the very long term this might provide a basis for Northern Ireland administration - but they would need to look at the question of legislative powers, with special care.

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CROSS-BORDER  
CO-OPERATION:

The Taoiseach then raised the question of improving cross-border co-operation. The Secretary of State said that he thought that all of this was going on. There was certainly no reason, as far as he was concerned, why it should not. The Taoiseach then mentioned a number of areas like roads, electricity, Foyle fisheries, etc. where cooperation could be developed. The Secretary of State said that he was most willing to see this go ahead.

DIRECT RULE:

The Tánaiste then inquired as to whether there was any idea as to how long direct rule in its present form would continue. Was there a possibility that a consultative assembly would be established - not now but later? The Secretary of State said that given the present political situation this did not seem likely. He added, as an aside, that as constructive politicians, the SDLP far outshone the Loyalists. But, between them, there was nothing they would agree on in the present situation.

The Prime Minister said that the idea of an assembly or consultative council at this stage was most difficult. However, he appreciated the money problem. Would a nominated consultative body be of any use? Possibly this could be associated with a Governor General. He mentioned an arrangement like that operated in Hong Kong. He thought that perhaps 12 people might suffice if this arrangement, which he mentioned now as a purely off-the-cuff suggestion, were to be put into effect some time in the future.

The Secretary of State said that there were many objections to this idea. For example, if the body were nominated, minority representatives on it would be regarded as Castle Catholics. The Provisional IRA would cut the ground from under them. The purpose of the present period of "vacuum" was to enable the people of Northern Ireland to concentrate their minds. The Prime Minister said that they appreciated the danger in the situation as it was now emerging. There was an obvious possibility that the vacuum might be filled by the para-military organisations. The elected representatives should have time to concentrate on this possibility. On the other hand, the para-military groups might not be able to take this place - certainly for the indefinite future. Obviously, what was happening would not stop Paisley and his sermons but it could lead people to think a great deal more than they had done in the past. There were risks - but it seemed to them to be the obvious course at present.

The Secretary of State said that it must be brought home to them that they were shuffling off their possibility of devolved government. The idea of an organisation like the GLC was good but the Northern people would say, if it were put forward, that they were being cheated of devolved government. They must recognise their position, as they now were.

The Prime Minister then inquired as to whether there was any possibility that they could help the SDLP - in a party sense. The Secretary of State added that "so long as money is not involved". They appreciated fully the necessity for a Catholic Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland.

At this point, the Prime Minister said that no party in the Commons was in favour of a British pullout. However, a recent public opinion poll in Britain had shown that a majority of the people would say "pull out". It might be that the questions in this poll had been framed in a discriminatory way. However, this was not the position of members of Parliament. He

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compared the attitude of the public and of M. P. s to death sentences. He said that even though British public opinion at certain times in the recent past had been in favour of death penalties, there had been a very big majority against, when the question came up in the Commons. The feeling, in both parties, in the Commons was overwhelmingly against any pull-out. Exactly the same was true of the possibility of going back to Stormont majority rule. There was an overwhelming majority in the Commons against this. He thought that Mrs. Thatcher on both of these subjects was very firm. He had some doubts as to the position of Airey Neave. Whitelaw was as firm as a rock.

The Taoiseach inquired as to the possibility of public opinion influencing political parties in the long run. The Prime Minister said that this would not happen. Some areas were particularly weak - he instanced Glasgow and the British Midlands. They hear that British soldiers are being killed. They think that if there were a pull-out bombs would not go off in Britain and in London. This was not true. The Provisional IRA might not stop their activities and the Loyalists could well start.

The Tánaiste said that it would mean a civil war in Northern Ireland in which the South would be involved - volunteers would probably cross the border in large numbers.

BRITISH  
SUBSIDIES:

Mr. Wilson <sup>said</sup> that if there were a suggestion of pograms or if the Ulster Workers' Council strike were reconvened there would be no more British money. They would <sup>not</sup> pay £600 million a year - their present bill - for a country which discriminated fiercely against Catholics. The direct subsidy being paid to Harland and Wolff at present was equivalent to £74 per week per man employed in the shipyards. They could not justify this sort of subvention to a British public which saw their own people on the unemployment lines.

The Prime Minister then said that not only were the Members of Parliament strongly against any suggestion of a pull-out but the trade unions also, as a body, were extremely strong against the idea. At the same time, as taxpayers, they had a very strong feeling on the money going to Northern Ireland. Some years ago, he had used the word "spongers". There had been objection to it at the time but he said that he still continued to object to the £hundreds of millions going to Northern Ireland when they strike and behave as they do. The people there were reasonable enough in most things but when dogma takes hold, all the good work goes for nothing.

MONEY FOR  
PARAMILITARIES:

The Taoiseach then raised the question of his visit to the United States for the bicentennial. He mentioned the subject of American money for the IRA. The Prime Minister said that what the Taoiseach was suggesting could be tremendously helpful. The Taoiseach said that some speeches recently by Mr. Wilson might not have had the desired effect. They might, in effect, have been counter-productive. The Prime Minister referred to what he had said just before Christmas to American journalists and elsewhere. He said that a large part of his effort had been aimed at Protestant para-military groups operating particularly in Canada and that on this front he had, he considered, a considerable success.

FISHERIES AND  
CONTINENTAL  
SHELF:

The Taoiseach then raised the question of EEC fisheries. The Prime Minister said that he thought we had a certain community of interest in this subject. As far as they were concerned the question was complicated by

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the action of Iceland which the International Court of Justice had held was acting illegally, but there was also the question of the outcome of the Law of the Sea Conference. He agreed that there were certain problems common to Ireland and Britain. He mentioned also the question of the Continental Shelf and inquired whether progress could be made in this area. Could we have agreement on arbitration? The Taoiseach said that he did not wish to deal in detail with this because there was a meeting today in Dublin at which the Minister for Industry and Commerce would be discussing the subject in some detail. The Prime Minister said that we should keep in touch on the subject. They were now reaching a figure of £70/80 million a month for the saving in their balance of payments resulting from North Sea oil. They hoped they would soon, possibly this year, save £800 million a year in this way. He had always said that the Celtic Seas had more oil than the North Sea. On fisheries, there were many structural problems. They now found that their fleet was composed largely of the wrong sort of boats. He enquired as to whether "our fisheries" people could meet later this month for a general discussion on the subject. The Taoiseach enquired as to how the Prime Minister saw the Law of the Sea Conference going. The Prime Minister said that it would be "long and slow".

STRASBOURG  
CASE:

The Prime Minister then raised the question of the Strasbourg case. He enquired as to how far we were committed to pushing it. He said that he felt strongly on the subject for two reasons. First, what had happened had occurred under a different Government. As leader of the Opposition he had attacked what was going on. This had made him the subject of the dirtiest cartoon he had ever experienced in his life. It had shown a British soldier going by in a coffin with Mr. Wilson going in the opposite direction - saying that he could not go to the funeral because he had to go to speak to the murderers. The cartoon had been referred to the Press Council. This was because he had personally, as leader of the Opposition, condemned the "methods of barbarism" used at the time. The enquiry which had subsequently been set up had produced a minority report by his nominee, Lord Gardner. He had pushed for acceptance of this minority report and the Prime Minister, at the time, Mr. Heath, had accepted the view that the minority report should be acted on. The Taoiseach said that the matter had not yet been discussed to a decision at Government. They had deliberately deferred doing so because of the fact that the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Bill was going through Parliament. It was in the interests of everybody to keep the other report quiet for the present. The Prime Minister said that he would do whatever was proper - a statement in the Commons or an exchange of letters, whatever we wanted. He felt as strongly as any member of the British Government on the subject. The Secretary of State said that the RUC were becoming more and more responsible for security in Northern Ireland. This was the only way to get the province back to any sort of normality. The effects of the report could work off on to the RUC, at present. Its effect on the minority could be serious. They were starting to come back into the RUC now. Recruitment from them, in the last few months, had been particularly noticeable. The Prime Minister said that his strength of feeling on it - and on Northern Ireland generally, might perhaps be gauged from the fact that the last time he had been in Derry, he had shook hands with 20 soldiers. Of these, two had been killed on that same day. Had his presence in Northern Ireland or something he had done killed those two men? He remembered that on that occasion the man in charge of the RUC in Derry - Frank Lagan - had been bubbling over with praise for the Gardai. He had

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got a Christmas card which he was showing to all and sundry. Cooperation between the two forces was extremely good. The Secretary of State said that the first objective of both Governments was to beat the Provisional IRA. They were holding down 15,000 troops, their explosions were causing death and destruction, etc. The Taoiseach said that the worst explosion in the two islands had been those in May some years ago. They had killed more in an afternoon than anywhere in the islands. He was not saying that any particular explosion in Northern Ireland or Britain was any better, simply because less were killed. The Secretary of State said that "we have to beat the lot of them". Paisley had contacts with the UVF. The Prime Minister added that the Secretary of State had proscribed this organisation.

Following some further comments on the level of politics in Northern Ireland, with words of praise for the courage of Messrs. Craig and Faulkner and the general comment that in the area it seemed that those who played to the gallery and debased politics always seemed to get to the top, the meeting concluded.

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8th March, 1976.

[Copies to Tánaiste, and Minister for Foreign Affairs; also to Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and to Secretary, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (references to Fisheries) and Attorney General (references to Strasbourg case).]

## AGREED COMMUNIQUE

1. The Taoiseach, Mr Liam Cosgrave, T.D., accompanied by the Tanaiste, Mr Brendan Corish, T.D., and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, T.D., had talks at 10 Downing Street today with the Prime Minister, The Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson. Mr Wilson was accompanied by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Merlyn Rees, and the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Mr David Ennals.
2. The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister reviewed the arrangements for cooperation in security and expressed satisfaction at the excellent results that had been achieved.
3. On Northern Ireland the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister reaffirmed their identity of interest, with that of the people of Northern Ireland, in ending violence and restoring peace and stability. They agreed that an acceptable form of Government there could be established only through both sections of the community agreeing on a system of government providing for partnership and participation. The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister said that they would support in every possible way institutions of government agreed on this basis. Pending such agreement, a period of direct rule and constitutional stability was necessary.
4. The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister agreed that a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland could be found only through elected representatives and political parties and not through negotiations with para-military organisations.

5. The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister also discussed European affairs, including Monsieur Tindemans' Report, direct elections to the European Parliament, the EEC Commission's proposals for a common fisheries policy and the need for action at Community level to deal with problems of structural unemployment.
6. The talks were friendly and useful and a wide measure of agreement was reached.

Irish Embassy  
London

5th March 1976