

## CAN WE SOLVE IRELAND? YES, PRIME MINISTER

(Yes, Prime Minister with apologies to Jonathan Lynn and Antony Jay)

The following conversation took place between the British Prime Minister and the Secretary of the Cabinet in London on May 10th, 2007.

PM: Jenkins, I know three people were killed in Northern Ireland. I do listen to the news, you know. But so what? What's it got to do with me? They're always killing people over there anyway. Why are they making such a fuss?

CS: Well, it was the army who killed them, and Paisley, Molyneux and Hume were rather well known.

PM: Why did they kill them?

CS: They thought they had a gun.

PM: Look, I'm tired of all this. Everybody keeps blaming me for everything that happens over there. I've never even been to the country. I think it's time we faced up to our responsibilities. I'm going to declare a united Ireland.

CS: You can't do that.

PM: Of course I can, Jenkins.

CS: Well, yes, Prime Minister. But, no, Prime Minister, you can't.

PM: Why not, Jenkins?

CS: Well, Prime Minister, you don't run Ireland, and the Irish would block you.

PM: Don't be stupid, Jenkins. I do know something about the situation. I know the Irish want a united Ireland.

CS: Well, no, Prime Minister. The Irish say they want a united Ireland. That's not the same as wanting a united Ireland. They would go around every embassy in the world blocking us.

PM: But that's ridiculous. All we have to say is that the Irish want a united Ireland.

CS: Eh, it's not that simple, Prime Minister. The Irish won't tell the world that they don't want a united Ireland. They'll tell them that we would be irresponsible to withdraw because there would be a blood-bath.

PM: But they're killing each other as it is.

CS: Yes, Prime Minister, but the Irish don't have to worry about it as long as it's our problem, not theirs. Besides, there would be some other problems.

PM: Oh, yes?

CS: Well, you could only do it by expelling Northern Ireland from the UK.

PM: Quite so, Jenkins. A jolly good idea to throw them out. They've given us nothing but trouble.

CS: Yes, Prime Minister. But what about the Scots?

PM: Jenkins, why do you always complicate my life by raising complete irrelevancies?

CS: Well, Prime Minister, if you expel Northern Ireland, some people in Scotland will say that they should be entitled to leave the UK if 50 per cent of their people agree.

PM: But they can't leave. They've got oil.

CS: Precisely, Prime Minister.

PM: Look, Jenkins, stop being your normal obfuscating self. I want this problem off my desk once and for all.

CS: The problem is, Prime Minister, that you get blamed for everything that goes wrong over there.

PM: Precisely, Jenkins. That is the problem. Wasn't that what that fellow Hume used to say: first we have to define the problem. Then solve it. Well now, I have defined the problem, Jenkins. So solve it. Give them power sharing.

CS: We've tried that several times, Prime Minister.

PM: Oh yes, poor old Peter.

CS: Why not offer the Irish joint authority instead?

PM: Don't be stupid, Jenkins. You know that would never work. It would mean bringing Charles Haughey over here and both of us running the UDR, for example. He'd be telling them to go to Derry and I'd be telling them to go to Londonderry. Then there would be a right hullabaloo. I do know something about the situation, you know. Besides, haven't we got something like that under the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

CS: No, Prime Minister. The Irish hold the whip hand under the agreement. Every time they get annoyed about something they call a meeting and we have to traipse over and listen to them rambling on about things. But they don't have to make any decisions. You have to do that, and then you get the blame, and the Irish get off scot-free. The Irish have it made under the agreement.

PM: Jenkins, we have to do something. I'm going to go mad if I don't get rid of this problem.

CS: Why not bring in the EC, Prime Minister? You know, set up a committee with so many members from Europe, and so many from the South.

MS: That would never work. Half those Europeans are either Bolshies or Nazis. We'd never be able to control them.

CS: But you could always veto them.

PM: How can we veto them when we're part of the committee?

CS: Well, of course we would be the sovereign power. After all, everything in the EC depends on a sovereign power, and somebody always has to be able to veto everything.

PM: But then I'd still get blamed for everything.

CS: But most of the time it wouldn't come to that. Either the committee won't agree on anything, in which case they can't blame you for making the decisions, or else the Provos will shoot a few of them and they'll all start agreeing with each other. If the Provos don't shoot some of them we can always do it ourselves. Either way you don't get blamed.

PM: The Unionists would never buy it.

CS: So what, Prime Minister? They didn't accept the 1985 agreement either, but what difference did that make?

PM: But the Irish would never agree. The last thing they want is to be stuck with responsibility for any decisions about that place.

CS: Well, offer them a united Ireland.

PM: Jenkins, don't be stupid. You've already said that they would go to every embassy in the world to block us.

CS: Yes, but when they do that you could back down and offer them joint authority under our sovereignty.



PM: Mmm. Jenkins, I think you are lucky that you have such an intelligent, courageous and farsseeing Prime Minister, who is now prepared to take a radical step to solve the totality of relationships on these islands. Get me Charles Haughey on the phone.

CS: Yes, Prime Minister.

*Brian Lennon  
in The Irish Times  
November 28, 1991*

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