

Debates at the Irish Parliament (1 August 1961)

Caption: On 1 August 1961, Sean Lemass, Irish Prime Minister, announces to the national parliament that his Government has submitted an initial request for Ireland's accession to the European Communities.

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[...]

The Taoiseach: A Cheann Comhairle, I beg leave to state, for the information of the Dáil, that the Government have formally notified the Council of the European Economic Community that Ireland is an applicant for membership of the Community pursuant to Article 237 of the Treaty of Rome.

This application has been made in accordance with the policy of the Government as explained in previous statements and discussed in this House early in July after publication of the White Paper on the European Economic Community. The Government believe that there is general acceptance of their view that, in the circumstances now developing, this policy is dictated by the national interest.

In the communication which has been addressed to the President of the Council of the Community, the Government have stated that they fully share the ideals which inspired the parties to the Rome Treaty and that they accept the aims of the Community, as well as the action proposed to achieve those aims.

It is provided in Article 237 of the Rome Treaty that the conditions of admission of a new member and the adaptations of the Treaty necessitated thereby will be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the Applicant State. The Government have requested the Council to arrange for discussions on the conditions and adaptations applicable to Ireland. When these discussions have taken place and the conditions on which Ireland can participate in the European Economic Community are known, a White Paper setting out the relevant facts and implications will, as the Government have already undertaken, be published before the approval of Dáil Éireann is sought for the final decision proposed by the Government.

Mr. Dillon: I think some comment should be made on that statement, of which, I wish to put on record, the Taoiseach was courteous enough to send me a copy this morning. I should like to make a short observation in regard to it, which I think is a reasonable request. I should like to ask the Taoiseach whether he intends to lay on the Table of the House the precise terms of the communication addressed by the Government to the European Economic Community seeking membership of it. The Taoiseach's statement spoke of "the circumstances now developing." I think it is right the House and the country should note the significance of those words "the circumstances now developing," or the collapse and discredit of the whole Fianna Fáil concept —

(Interruptions.)

Mr. Dillon: — of a quarter of a century, which has been founded on the idiotic heresy of economic self-sufficiency and derived from the days when we thanked God the British market was gone forever and hoped that a day might dawn when no ship would sail the seven seas so that we might be more prosperous in our isolation.

An Tánaiste: The Deputy remembers when he wanted to see the grass growing on —

Mr. Dillon: The Fianna Fáil policy of economic self-sufficiency has now given way to the realisation of the essential value of the British market to the economy of this country in consideration of its unique capacity to absorb the output of the agricultural industry of this country. It is true that in the situation with which we are now confronted, and for which we are so ill prepared, the existence of list F in the Rome Treaty, which speaks of tariffs of 16 per cent. on cattle, 16 per cent. on pigs, 16 and 20 per cent. on meat and up to 80 per cent. on beet sugar, makes it unthinkable that we should allow a tariff wall of that character to separate us from the British market in the event of Great Britain joining the European Economic Community and our remaining outside.

It is no more true today than it was during the last quarter of a century that the British market is essential to our agricultural industry, but it is something of a surprise to me and to many others in the House and outside it that those who denied that simple economic proposition so trenchantly and so vigorously for the last

quarter of a century have suddenly undergone this conversion within the last two months —

(Interruptions.)

Mr. Dillon: It is not surprising that they are restless today —

Mr. Killilea: We know who is restless.

Mr. Dillon: — as their idiotic and tragic inconsistency is revealed. But I think the Taoiseach should avail of the opportunity which will probably arise on the Adjournment Debate, when we come to discuss the subject matter of his Estimate with that of the Adjournment, to give the House some reassurance in respect of those whose livelihood is now called in question as a result of his high tariff policy, plus the developments associated with the emergence of the European Economic Community.

I refer, first of all, to those who have invested their capital in highly protected industries, the prospects of whose survival will be seriously jeopardised by the obligations of the Rome Treaty. But I regard their problem as relatively simple of solution because our resources can be deployed to compensate them for any loss they undergo, and their loss can be measured in terms of money. The people for whom I am more concerned are the people who have invested their lives in these industries. I think of the man of 24 or 25 years of age who took employment in an industry 20 or 25 years ago and who will now find himself in middle age, with a skill appropriate —

An Tánaiste: Where are we going now?

An Ceann Comhairle: I intended to intervene. The Deputy is introducing argument.

Mr. Dillon: I am making a statement.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach made a factual statement and —

Mr. Dillon: I am making a factual statement.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is introducing argumentative matter which should not be introduced in a discussion of this kind. The Deputy's statement should be short and should not be argumentative.

Mr. Dillon: I shall do that. I want a reassurance from the Taoiseach that those whose lives are irrevocably invested in these enterprises will be looked after and that we will not be told hereafter that you cannot have omelettes without breaking eggs, when the eggs concerned are men who have spent their lives in industry of the character to which I have referred.

Mr. J. Lynch: "All things to all men." This is a political speech.

An Ceann Comhairle: Order!

Mr. Dillon: I did not think the Minister would like it. It was not made to please the Minister. Lastly, Sir, I want to direct the attention of the Taoiseach and of the House to the fact that, contemplating the terms of the Rome Treaty and such protocol as our Government, whoever may be responsible for Government after the general election, may be able to negotiate, one thing is certain: the agricultural output of this country must be greatly stimulated and the methods employed in its production drastically reformed if the farmers of this country are not to suffer severely in the new climate in which they will be called upon to trade. I see no evidence in the administration of the Department of Agriculture calculated to reassure me, this House, or the country, on that score.

An Ceann Comhairle: Surely all this is argumentative.

Mr. Dillon: I merely wish to record that when the Taoiseach comes to the House to announce that he has applied for membership of the European Economic Community, it is not unreasonable that we should expect that he would inform us in greater detail than we have succeeded in extracting from him heretofore on what the implications of this application truly are and what he has in mind this country should do to meet them. I want to give him fair notice that on the Adjournment Debate, these matters will be raised, and another matter: none of the Deputies of the Fianna Fáil Party has any knowledge or any appreciation of the political implications of the Rome Treaty.

An Ceann Comhairle: That, surely, is argumentative.

Mr. Dillon: I want to inform the Taoiseach that, in my judgment, nothing he has said in this House, or elsewhere, has adequately dealt with that aspect of this new departure. He should hold himself in readiness on the Adjournment Debate to give the House and the country information in that regard, information which the House is entitled to have and which the country expects to receive. We believe that if Great Britain enters —

An Ceann Comhairle: I cannot allow the Deputy —

Mr. Dillon: I am entitled to say this.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is not entitled to introduce argument.

Mr. Dillon: I am now about to state —

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is introducing argument.

Mr. Dillon: I am now about to state precisely the attitude of this Party in regard to the decision to enter the European Economic Community.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy must make it on the Taoiseach's statement. The Deputy is entitled to make a statement, and that is all. The Deputy can discuss the factual statement.

(Interruptions.)

Mr. Dillon: I did not think the Deputies opposite would be happy. I am sure the longer I continue, the less happy they will be.

Mr. Smith: We are happy to hear that the Deputy believes something.

Mr. Dillon: That comes well from the Minister who, in his time, has believed everything, backwards and forwards, up and down, and has never blushed for his various conversions.

With regard to the European Economic Community, our position is precisely what it might be expected to be, that is, that the vital interest of this country is to retain access to the British market. In the light of Great Britain's decision to adhere to the European Economic Community, we are of opinion that this country should do likewise, just as we are satisfied, as we have always been satisfied, that free access to that market, as secured by us in the 1948 Trade Agreement, is vital to the future economic welfare of this country. Such free access to that market can only be retained by us on the terms envisaged in the European Economic Community and, thereafter, we believe it will be necessary to adhere to that Community, but in the knowledge that in the negotiations of the protocols to provide for the special situation that exists in this country anxious negotiation will be requisite, and we trust that that negotiation will be in safe hands.

Mr. Corish: I just want to ask the Taoiseach a few questions. I wonder would he say, in respect of paragraph 2 of his statement, what the circumstances adverted to there are. Does he mean the economic or the political circumstances or does he refer specifically to the mounting Berlin crisis? Could the Taoiseach

say if he has any idea when these negotiations or discussions as to our application will take place and can he say when they may conclude? Would he also state whether or not our discussions will be independent of those of Britain? Will he state whether or not our discussions will coincide with the discussions between Britain and the European Economic Community? The Taoiseach says in his statement that they, meaning the Council, have been requested to arrange for discussions on the conditions. I may have heard him wrongly. I am under the impression that a representative of the British Government is in either Paris or Brussels today to commence discussions on behalf of the British Government and I am wondering whether or not we are waiting to see how the British, first of all, get on at their discussions before we commence ours. I should like the Taoiseach to make it clear whether or not our discussions will be independent of those of Britain.

The Taoiseach: First of all, as regards tabling the document, I will arrange for that in the course of a day or two. Deputies can take it that the document is similar to the statement I have just made to the House. With regard to the questions asked by Deputy Corish, the circumstances to which I referred in my statement are those which have brought about, or appear likely to bring about, decisions to join or associate with the Community by most of the remaining countries of Western Europe. I cannot say when negotiations will start. That will be a matter for the Council of the Community to decide but I think it is not likely that discussions will begin for some weeks to come and even, perhaps, for a longer period. Our discussions will, of course, be separate to those undertaken by Great Britain. The Deputy's reference to a member of the British Government commencing negotiations today can hardly be correct. As I understood the British Prime Minister's announcement, their application to begin negotiations with a view to membership will not be made until their parliamentary debate on the topic has concluded in a couple of days' time.

It would be appropriate that this matter should be discussed in the debate on the Motion for the Adjournment and I hope, when that takes place, we shall have a more intelligent contribution from Deputy Dillon.

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