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IRELAND



Reference Code:	2000/6/662
Title:	Speech by Neil T. Blaney, Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, at a Donegal North East Fianna Fáil function to mark the 21 st anniversary of his election as a Dáil deputy
Creation Date(s):	Dec 1969
Level of description:	Item
Extent and medium:	7 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
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Speaking at a Donegal North East Fianna Fáil function at the Golden Grill Restaurant, Letterkenny, on Monday, 8th December, to mark the 21st anniversary of his election as a Dáil Deputy for the area, Mr. Neil T. Blaney, Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, said:-

Twenty-one years is a fair span in one's life and I reach that period as a parliamentary representative for this area of the North-West of Ireland with a feeling of humility when I consider the trust and confidence which I have received down those years from the people of this constituency.

There are those among you to-night who stood with my late father in a generation to which all of us are deeply indebted. I recognise faces that belong in the famous by-election of 1948, when I first had the honour of being sent by the electors of this area to Dáil Éireann. I have seen them in many a famous by-election elsewhere since, and their acumen and dedication have won the respect of politicians throughout the land. Then there are the young people here, the new generation of Fianna Fáil; it is they who will join in the task in the years ahead of continuing the development of the Irish nation.

I am among friends to-night. Looking back on the years that are past, I thank all those who have worked for Fianna Fáil. I thank especially all those who have helped me in so many ways in the various tasks which I have encountered in public office. I thank the people and the organisation of the constituency. I have never been noted for lack of honesty in speech, and if, therefore, I have hurt anyone by straight talking, I hasten to offer my regrets and to assure them that I bear no animosity.

Looking back as we do to-night, one can see with a sense of real achievement the way that we have progressed in the free portion of Ireland. In my time in politics, we have made impressive advances in the living standards of our people in social welfare, health, education, housing, industrial development and agriculture ... and it is all the more impressive because it has all been done from a very lowly beginning out of the resources and hard work of our own people. Above all, I have seen the confidence of our people restored.

There are still many major tasks ahead of us. There is the problem of the underprivileged in our society, and the need to press on with expansionist and growth policies which will create the national wealth to enable us to do all the things we wish for the less well off sections of our community.

Our basic problem in this regard is that there is a limit to the resources our people are able to provide at our present stage of development. Another vital problem is the way in which our economy is developing, the growing imbalance between the well-being of our people in the rural and Western areas and that of the population along our East coast, particularly the Greater Dublin region.

The over-crowding of Dublin caused by excessive concentration of industrial growth is becoming more and more obvious every day. If Dublin and the nation are to continue to prosper, then it is vital that rural and Western areas be rapidly developed. Not only should we move certain Government Departments to provincial centres, but we must, if only for a limited period, concentrate our development resources almost exclusively on the Western and rural areas. This course would not only create the much-needed job opportunities among the rural and Western communities, but would give us the breathing space necessary to provide the much-needed amenities in Dublin.

These are two major challenges facing Fianna Fáil and the Irish people in the Seventies. But our greatest national challenge is to end Partition.

In the past year we have seen the sham Government of Stormont, propped up as it has been by British subsidy and maintained by sectarian force for half a century, finally exposed to the world. Impartial judges have freely indicted the Unionist regime and its agencies as rotten and corrupt.

We have witnessed the horror of the shootings and the burnings, the open intimidation, the blatant discrimination, and with it all the callous attempts to hush up and stifle the truth. Again we see history repeating itself. Time after time down the past generations, history has recorded the same savagery of mobs whipped to hate by their leaders, the same commissions of inquiry, the same washing of hands by the British Governments, and in the end a return to the same bolstering up of a discredited regime.

Winston Churchill once said: "The maxim of the British people is 'Business as usual' ". That is what our people in the Six Counties are now being offered by the Westminster Government. British diplomacy is once more at work. The British Government is once again trying to shirk its moral responsibility towards the people of all Ireland - the people who could be Britain's only real and true friends in the future - by giving way to a threat of armed revolt by

Unionist/

Unionist extremists, just as it did half a century ago.

In the 1920 period it was the bluster and bluff of Carson and Craig and their Tory conspirators that duped the then British Government into setting up the wholly artificial entity that is the Six Counties. To-day it is the adroit use by the Unionist leaders of the sabre-rattling of their own extremists - the tail wagging the willing dog - that is being used to mislead Mr. Harold Wilson and his colleagues, by fear of violence, into draping a mere garb of respectability over the Stormont regime, which the entire British public now acknowledges for the shameful and dishonest institution that it is.

The scales may have fallen from the eyes of the British people, but are they allowing themselves to be coerced into a situation in which, once again at a turning point in the history of these islands, they are resorting to temporary expedient after temporary expedient? Are they indulging in double-talk to salve their own conscience, and evading the responsibility of setting in motion the beginning of the final and just settlement of what they have come to know as "the Irish Question"?

One need look no further than the example of Mr. Callaghan's much publicised tours of the North. I respect his sincerity in wishing to undertake reforms in a set-up that stinks in the nostrils of all decent men. But the euphoria of his visits has now evaporated; and the patched-up programme of reforms now emerging is but a pale shadow of the high promise.

The measure of Britain's concession under veiled threat from the Unionist junta can now be gauged in the Westminster Government's decision to set up the so-called Ulster Defence Regiment. The very name is a perpetuation of the entire sham that is the Six Counties, while to me as a free Ulsterman it is a calculated insult. Regardless of whatever concept the parliament of Westminster may contrive to conceive for it, the Irish people of the Six Counties cannot in conscience accept this private army, which merely puts the B Specials back in business.

What we are all being asked now is to forget the recent happenings, the murders of innocent people, the armed attacks by partisan police and Unionist gunmen, the hapless families burned out and forced out by threat from their homes - for all of which the Unionist version of justice has so far failed to produce a single culprit. We are being urged to "get back to normality":

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in other words to permit the Stormont regime to return to "Business as usual". But normality is fraudulent and "Business as usual" a myth while the Border is maintained.

The people of free Ireland, and those who long for freedom in that portion of our country which is still fettered, are not prepared to accept another 1921 settlement from the British Government. A united Ireland is the answer.

In this connection, it is important to correct some recent misconceptions about the rights of the majority of the people of Ireland in regard to the Partition of this country. We have heard reference in past weeks to the argument that Partition should only end with the consent of the majority in the Six Counties.

It should be made clear here and now that the majority in the Six Counties has no moral right to decide on Partition, for the very logical reason that the Six Counties was, and still is, an artificial creation set up against the majority wishes of the Irish people, and drawn up on the sole basis of giving the Unionists as much territory as they could safely maintain, and that only by gerrymander and discrimination.

Carson has told us, for instance, why he did not take in the whole nine counties of Ulster in his conception of an Orange State. The reason was that there were at the time some 275,000 Catholics living alongside 72,000 Protestants in the Counties of Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan. These figures would have upset the Unionist majority in the other six Ulster counties. For this reason, Carson (to use his own words) "abandoned them" to freedom.

To say that the majority within the Six Counties should have the right to decide on Partition is to accept that Partition was in the first justified. Ireland was partitioned against the majority wishes of her people, and it is the majority of the people of all Ireland who alone have the right to decide this question. That is the primary civil right of all; it is the right that Ireland has constantly sought from the British Government over the past half century of Partition.

We have heard much in recent times concerning the use of force, We should be clear about where we stand here.

In the discussion on October 22/23rd last in Dáil Eireann on the

Six County/

Six-County Situation, the Taoiseach, in opening the debate, said: "The Government in this part of Ireland has no intention of mounting an armed invasion of the Six Counties".

Mr. Cosgrave, the leader of the Fine Gael party, speaking in his turn, went further by stating that his party's consistent attitude was that "the only way to achieve ultimate unity was by peaceful means and co-operation". Mr. Corish, the leader of the Irish Labour Party, when he came to speak, went still further and stated that as far as he is concerned "force is out".

I believe, as do the vast majority, that the ideal way of ending Partition is by peaceful means. But no-one has the right to assert that force is irrevocably out. No political party or group at any time is entitled to pre-determine the right of the Irish people to decide what course of action on this question may be justified in given circumstances.

The Fianna Fáil party has never taken a decision to rule out the use of force if the circumstances in the Six Counties so demand. The situation last August in Derry and Belfast was such that, had the violence continued, the question of the use of force in defence of our own people under attack would have had to be urgently considered. If a situation were to arise in the Six Counties in which the people who do not subscribe to the Unionist regime were under sustained and murderous assault, then, as the Taoiseach said on August 13th, we "cannot stand idly by".

The grave responsibility for the continuance of Partition, and for the violence that flows inevitably from it, rests, as it has always done, with the Government of Westminster. If they fall into the same error now as their predecessors in the past, allowing themselves to be persuaded that compromise will suffice for another fifty years, and that a rag-bag of reforms covering over the real problem will bring peace in our time in Ireland, then they are assuredly sowing the seeds of further violence and bloodshed for innocent people.

The Six Counties is now at a vital point in its unhappy history. That is why our people should stand firm and united in their resolve to see justice finally emerge. For this reason, I appeal for an end to personal attacks and petty squabbling among those to whom our people look for leadership and guidance. The leaders who are opposed to the Unionist regime may agree to differ on political philosophies, but they owe it to the people to unite on the

Partition issue, and to work together for freedom and justice and an end to the unnatural division of Ireland.

Indeed, that is what the Irish people demand of all of us at this point of history; and that is what we owe to our patriot dead and the future generations of Irish men and women.

Asked to comment on the Letterkenny speech of the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries the Taoiseach said:-

The policy of the Government on the Partition issue is, and continues to be, precisely as I most recently stated it to be in the course of my speech at Tralee on September 20th and in Dáil Éireann on October 22nd last.

In my Tralee speech, having referred to the fundamental desire of the overwhelming majority of the Irish people for the restoration of national unity, I said:-

"I want to make it clear, however, once more, that we have no intention of using force to realise this desire. I said as recently as the 28th August that it was and has been the Government's policy to seek the re-unification of the country by peaceful means".

In my Dáil speech of October 22nd last I said:-

"I want to assert again that it is Government policy that our legitimate desire for a united Ireland will be realised by peaceful means.....
Again, I want to say that we do not want to seek to impose our will on anyone by force."

This policy has been endorsed again and again by the Fianna Fáil Party. While Mr. Blaney's feelings on the Partition issue are very deeply felt and he occasionally finds it difficult not to give public expression to them, he knows and endorses Government policy on this issue as he did in his speech at Letterkenny last night. This policy is the only realistic policy to pursue for the peace and progress of the country and its ultimate re-unification.