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# GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND

PRESS NOTICE



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STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL  
6.15 P.M. MONDAY DECEMBER 9, 1968.

TELEVISION BROADCAST BY CAPTAIN TERENCE O'NEILL, PRIME  
MINISTER OF NORTHERN IRELAND ON B.B.C. (NORTHERN IRELAND)  
AND ULSTER TELEVISION MONDAY, DECEMBER 9, AT 6.0 P.M.

## ULSTER AT CROSS ROADS

Ulster stands at the cross roads. I believe you know me well enough by now to appreciate that I am not a man given to extravagant language. But I must say to you this evening that our conduct over the coming days and weeks will decide our future. And as we face this situation I would be failing in my duty to you as your Prime Minister if I did not put the issues calmly and clearly before you all. These issues are far too serious to be determined behind closed doors or left to noisy minorities. The time has come for the people as a whole to speak in a clear voice.

For more than five years now I have tried to heal some of the deep divisions in our community. I did so because I could not see how an Ulster divided against itself could hope to stand. I made it clear that a Northern Ireland based upon the interests of any one section rather than upon the interests of all could have no long-term future.

Throughout the community many people have responded warmly to my words. But if Ulster is to become the happy and united place it could be there must be the will throughout our Province, and particularly in Parliament, to translate these words into deeds.

## LONDONDERRY

In Londonderry and other places recently a minority of agitators determined to subvert lawful authority played a part in setting light to highly inflammable material. But the tinder for that fire in the form of grievances real or imaginary had been piling up for years.

And so I saw it as our duty to do two things. First to be firm in the maintenance of law and order and in resisting those elements which seek to profit from any disturbances. Secondly to ally firmness with fairness and to look at any underlying causes of dissension which were troubling decent and moderate people. As I saw it if we were not prepared to face up to our problems we would have to meet mounting pressure both internally from those who were seeking change and externally from British public and Parliamentary opinion which had been deeply disturbed by the events in Londonderry.

## PROGRAMME OF CHANGE

That is why it has been my view from the beginning that we should decide - of our own free will and as a responsible Government in command of events - to press on with a continuing programme of change to secure a united and harmonious community. This indeed has been my aim for over five years.

Moreover I knew full well that Britain's financial and other support for Ulster so laboriously built up could no longer be guaranteed if we failed to press on with such a programme.

### FOOLISH PEOPLE

I am aware of course that some foolish people have been saying: "Why should we bow the knee to a Labour Prime Minister? Let's hold out until a Conservative Government returns to power and then we need do nothing." My friends, that is a delusion. This letter is from Mr. Edward Heath and it tells me - with the full authority of the Shadow Cabinet and the expressed support of my old friend Sir Alec Douglas-Home - that a reversal of the policies which I have tried to pursue would be every bit as unacceptable to the Conservative Party. If we adopt an attitude of stubborn defiance we will not have a friend left at Westminster.

### OUR RIGHT

I make no apology for the financial and economic support we have received from Britain. As a part of the United Kingdom we have always considered this to be our right. But we cannot be a part of the United Kingdom merely when it suits us. And those who talk so glibly about acts of impoverished defiance do not know or care what is at stake. Your job if you are a worker at Shorts or Harland and Wolff; your subsidies if you are a farmer; your pension if you are retired - all these aspects of our life, and many others depend on support from Britain. Is a freedom to pursue the un-Christian path of communal strife and sectarian bitterness really more important to you than all the benefits of the British Welfare State?

But this is not all. Let me read to you some words from the Government of Ireland Act 1920 - the Act of the British Parliament on which Ulster's Constitution is founded.

"Notwithstanding the establishment of the Parliament of Northern Ireland ... the supreme authority of the Parliament of the United Kingdom shall remain unaffected and undiminished over all persons matters and things in (Northern) Ireland and every part thereof."

### MR. WILSON

Because Westminster has trusted us over the years to use the powers of Stormont for the good of all the people of Ulster a sound custom has grown up that Westminster does not use its supreme authority in fields where we are normally responsible. But Mr. Wilson made it absolutely clear to us that if we did not face up to our problems the Westminster Parliament might well decide to act over our heads. Where would our Constitution be then? What shred of self-respect would be left to us? If we allowed others to solve our problems because we had not the guts - let me use a plain word - the guts to face up to them we would be utterly shamed.

### SO-CALLED LOYALISTS

There are I know today some so-called Loyalists who talk of independence from Britain - who seem to want a kind of Protestant Sinn Fein. These people will not listen when they are told that Ulster's income is £200 million a year but that we can spend £300 million - only because Britain pays the balance.

Rhodesia in defying Britain from thousands of miles away at least has an Air Force and an Army of her own. Where are the Ulster Armoured Divisions or the Ulster Jet Planes? They do not exist and we could not afford to buy them. These people are not merely extremists. They are lunatics who would set a course along a road which could only lead at the end into an All-Ireland Republic. They are not Loyalists, but Disloyalists: disloyal to Britain, disloyal to the Constitution, disloyal to the Crown, disloyal - if they are in public life - to the solemn oaths they have sworn to Her Majesty The Queen.

### BRINK OF CHAOS

But these considerations, important though they are, are not my main concern. What I seek - and I ask for the help and understanding of you all - is a swift end to the growing civil disorder throughout Ulster. For as matters stand today we are on the brink of chaos where neighbour could be set against neighbour. It is simple-minded to imagine that problems such as these can be solved by repression. I for one am not willing to expose our Police Force to indefinite insult and injury. Nor am I prepared to see the shopkeepers and traders of Ulster wrecked and looted for the benefit of the rabble. We must tackle root causes if this agitation is to be contained. We must be able to say to the moderates of both sides: Come with us into a new era of co-operation and leave the extremists to the law. But this I also say to all Protestant or Roman Catholic, Unionist or Nationalist:- Disorder must now cease. We are taking the necessary measures to strengthen our Police Forces. Determined as we are to act with absolute fairness we will also be resolute in restoring respect for the laws of the land.

### GENERAL ELECTION

Some people have suggested that I should call a General Election. It would in my view be utterly reprehensible to hold an election against a background of bitterness and strife. I have spoken to you in the past about the groundswell of moderate opinion. Its presence was seen three years ago when we fought an election on a manifesto which would stand inspection in any western Democracy and we swept the country on a non-sectarian platform. Those who would sow the wind by having a bitter election now would surely reap the whirlwind.

### CHANGES

And now I want to say a word directly to those who have been demonstrating for Civil Rights. The changes which we have announced are genuine and far-reaching changes and the Government as a whole is totally committed to them. I would not continue to preside over an administration which would water them down or make them meaningless. You will see when the members of the Londonderry Commission are appointed that we intend to live up to our words that this will be a body to command confidence and respect. You will see that in housing allocations we mean business. You will see that legislation to appoint an Ombudsman will be swiftly introduced. Perhaps you are not entirely satisfied; but this is a democracy and I ask you now with all sincerity to call your people off the streets and allow an atmosphere favourable to change to develop. You are Ulstermen yourselves. You know we are all of us stubborn people who will not be pushed too far. I believe that most of you want change, not revolution. Your voice has been heard and clearly heard. Your duty now is to play your part in taking the heat out of the situation before blood is shed.

### BULLY-BOY TACTICS

But I have a word too for all those others who see in change a threat to our position in the United Kingdom. I say to them unionism armed with justice will be a stronger cause than unionism armed merely with strength. The bully-boy tactics we saw in Armagh are no answer to these grave problems: but they incur for us the contempt of Britain and the world - and such contempt is the greatest threat to Ulster. Let the Government govern and the police take care of law and order.

What in any case are these changes which we have decided must come? They all amount to this: that in every aspect of our life justice must not only be done but be seen to be done to all sections of the community. There must be evident fairness as between one man and another.

The adoption of such reforms will not I believe lose a single seat at Stormont for those who support the Unionist cause and indeed some may be gained. And remember that it is with Stormont that the power of decision rests for maintaining our Constitution.

YOUR VERDICT

And now a further word to you all. What kind of Ulster do you want? A happy and respected Province in good standing with the rest of the United Kingdom? Or a place continually torn apart by riots and demonstrations and regarded by the rest of Britain as a political outcast? As always in a Democracy the choice is yours. I will accept whatever your verdict may be. If it is your decision that we should live up to the words "Ulster is British" which is part of our creed then my services will be at your disposal to do what I can. But if you should want a separate, inward-looking, selfish and divided Ulster then you must seek for others to lead you along that road for I cannot and will not do it. Please weigh well all that is at stake and make your voice heard in whatever way you think best so that we may know the views not of the few but of the many.

TIME OF DECISION

For this is truly a time of decision and in your silence all that we have built up could be lost. I pray that you will reflect carefully and decide wisely. And I ask all our Christian people whatever their denomination to attend their places of worship on Sunday next to pray for the peace and harmony of our country.

9th December, 1968.

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