

St. H's Derry  
TV film

November 1969

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Telesis Eireann Film

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Telesis Eireann Film

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[The Prime Minister]

unite in the single cause of creating a new Derry in which there will be peace and prosperity for all."

We will not march forward to this brighter future to the music of a dirge or a lament.

Mr. Hume: Or a big drum.

The Prime Minister: That is why I hope the whole community, hon. Members of this House and, above all, those who have a stake in Londonderry will now look forward rather than back.

I hope that I am in order if I mention the film to which my hon. Friends have referred. While there was much in it that I disliked and considered to be unhelpful it did contain some words which are profoundly true. They are these:

"We will be side by side for a long time . . . Derry has no future unless there is a change in the minds and hearts of people, for Derry is the mother of us all."

Only by planning together, working together, achieving together can its people with all our help and sympathy and understanding work out the future which we want for them and for all of them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

3.14 p.m.

Mr. Hume: I think that the raising of this question in the House today is indicative of the level at which politics are fought in this community and it is indicative of a very low level indeed. May I say in passing that I should like to express my disappointment that no hon. Members opposite gave me any notice that they intended to raise this matter which involves me personally? The fact that the Prime Minister has seen fit to give parliamentary time to this question today shows again the level at which politics are being fought in our community; a fact that he gave an opportunity for the sort of recrimination that he himself has been deploring recently.

May I come to the point of the complaint of the hon. Members opposite? In listening to them I was absolutely convinced that neither of the two hon. Members saw the film to which they

referred. Can I ask the hon. Member for North Derry (Mr. Burns) whether in fact he saw the film?

Mr. Burns: Come again.

Mr. Hume: Can I ask the hon. Member for North Derry whether in fact he saw the film of which he was complaining?

Mr. Burns: Well to be quite honest I did not but I heard so much about it.

Mr. Fitt: He has not got a TV yet.

Mr. Hume: The same applies to his hon. and gallant Friend the Member for the City of Derry (Commander Anderson).

Mr. Burns: There is only one thing about it. It is the truth anyway.

Mr. Hume: Both hon. Members have stood on their feet today and have tried to make hay of something which they have not even seen or which they did not even know what it was about.

Mr. Fitt: It is typical of them.

Mr. Hume: The statements which have come from the party of the hon. Members opposite have been similar. The Ulster Unionist Council was first out with its statement, taking statements from the film out of context and not quoting them accurately. Secondly, the Minister of Commerce complained that there was no mention of the Derry Development Commission; no mention, as the Prime Minister pointed out today, of all the plans for the future. Again the right hon. Gentleman did not see the film, yet these people see fit—[Laughter]—to make statements such as they have made today. The hon. Member for Dock (Mr. Fitt) did see the film and no doubt he will tell hon. Members what it was about.

The point of this film was not to deal with the potential of the city of Derry, of which I am well aware. I have been involved in the making of many films about the city. The most recent one is about the potential of the city and is

being used by the Minister of Commerce to bring industry to Derry. It includes an interview with the Minister of Development. That film is about the potential of Derry. I was criticised in the making of that film for not dealing with its problems and now in a film in which I am asked to state the reasons as I saw them as to why the city of Derry erupted in the past year I am criticised for not dealing with the city's potential; the same in reverse.

It was with the problems of Derry that I was dealing. For the past year the city of Derry has been on the television screens of the world. The whole world knows about Derry; I did not have to tell them. What they know about Derry is what they saw in news films. They saw violence; they saw batons, they saw windows breaking and they saw petrol bombs being thrown. The world would be confused by it all. The Unionist Party sent men to the United States to tell the world something far more damaging to the city of Derry and that was that this was due to red revolutionaries.

I think it is much more fitting that the world should be told clearly that the reasons why people took to the streets were genuine, whether hon. Members accept them or not. The film dealt with Derry's true traditions and it attempted, in my view, to deal sympathetically with the question. If hon. Members opposite had only looked at the film they might have decided that it is not the sort of film that they have been led to believe it is. The film deals with Derry's problems. It deals with the fact that 10 per cent. of the people in that city were homeless before they took to the streets. It deals with the fact that 20 per cent. of its men were jobless before they took to the streets and that 1½ per cent. of the population emigrates every year.

I believe it is valuable to let the world know exactly in cold and calm language why the people took to the streets rather than let the world have an image of a place where people are running about in violence all the time or, worse, that they are—as the hon. Members opposite who went to the United States allege—red revolutionaries. All that this film purported to be was a statement of a point of view. I take it to be indicative of the

total narrowness of mind of this community that it cannot look at a point of view, and it cannot even disagree with it, without getting hysterical.

When a point of view is stated one either agrees with it or disagrees with it and in a normal community it may be a subject of discussion or debate. However, in this community it is a subject for a statement from the Unionist Party, the Minister of Commerce and, today, the Prime Minister. All this stems from a television film which has been forgotten already by vast numbers of those who saw it.

I recall a film on *Twenty-four Hours*, six months before 5th October, made by a South African negro producer and a Jewess commentator, and I heard Unionists in the city of Derry saying, "What else would you expect from such a combination?" That film drew attention to Derry's housing problem and its jobless problem and said that here was a situation which could lead to trouble. It was attacked by hon. Members of the party opposite for the exact same reason—that it was destroying the image of Derry.

The hon. and gallant Member for the City of Derry sheds crocodile tears today over the fact that he feels that the image of his city is being destroyed in the outside world. I say "crocodile tears," because he talks about it and supports the Prime Minister in saying that this film did not deal with the plans for the future, with the Derry Development Commission. He has yet to welcome that Commission in public. Not only has he not welcomed it but he avoided the meeting of the Corporation at which it was being discussed so that he would not have to vote. He further avoided

Commander Anderson: Would the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Hume: I will not give way. He further avoided the meeting of the delegation from Derry Corporation who came here to meet the Minister of Development to discuss the changeover; so that at no stage has either he or his party in Derry given a welcome to the Derry Development Commission. But

[Mr. Hume]

all of us on this side of the House have welcomed the appointment of this Commission.

**Commander Anderson:** On a point of correction.

**Mr. Speaker:** Commander Anderson, on a point of correction.

**Commander Anderson:** Everything that has been said in the last half-dozen sentences is absolutely incorrect.

**Mr. Hume:** Would the hon. and gallant Member care to stand up now and give a whole-hearted welcome to the appointment of the Derry Development Commission and I will give way to him?

**Commander Anderson:** I can hardly be asked to agree to something which put the Derry Corporation out of existence. But I wish the Commission every success in its work and the hon. Member knows it. Do not forget that it is not John Hume's Derry—the title of the film—with which we are dealing. We are dealing with the Derry of everybody there.

**Mr. Hume:** I think my point has been made. The hon. and gallant Member has been shedding crocodile tears, when he perhaps more than any other person has been responsible for the image of Derry, the true image.

**Commander Anderson:** You have, not me.

**Mr. Hume:** The body politic in Derry for a long, long time has been suffering from cancer. Hon. Members like the hon. and gallant Member for the City of Derry have attempted to put powder and paint on its face and say to the world, "Look how healthy it is" instead of dealing with the root problem of community division and, worse than community division, domination by a small power clique, which has been the real root problem. I hope that this may be in the past. I say "may be in the past." I am not yet sure that it is, listening to some of them here today. The people took to the streets to rid themselves of this sort of thing.

**Mr. Fitt:** They succeeded.

**Mr. Hume:** And they have succeeded in the city of Derry in getting rid of the sort of power clique about which I have been talking. All of us look forward to the new city the Prime Minister talked about which is on the drawing board. I regret that the Prime Minister chooses to distort facts in his statement when he says that the housing record of Derry Corporation since the war is equal to that of any other part of Northern Ireland or, indeed, the British Isles, if the figures for the number of houses per 1,000 of the population were examined. I have done that. I have taken figures from every town clerk in Northern Ireland. They reveal that Derry Corporation's record was 70 houses per 1,000 of the population. The highest was Newry with 144.

The Prime Minister has given us a list of what has been done. He has given us a list of what he hopes will be done. He has outlined the plans for the future. I do not think that anyone on this side of the House or, indeed, anyone in Derry who would be represented by the opinions on this side of the House, would do other than give an outright welcome to these plans if fully implemented and give them their full support. But I believe, as I have always believed, that the future of the city of Derry depends not on a continuation of a tale of two cities but the removal of the roots of community division, which have been injustice in the past. It is the removal of these injustices and the basing of community relations on a proper basis, a basis of justice, which hold out the only prospect for a viable future, a future in which I would hope divisions based on outdated religious hatred will no longer be found.

I would urge that in future before hon. Members get up in this House to criticise something that they know nothing about and have not seen: they are going on hearsay—the hon. and gallant Member for the City of Derry is laughing. The newspaper which supports him has a banner headline this morning:

"BUSINESSMEN ARE FUMING"

The story is, again—and this, of

course is why the hon. and gallant Member gets to his feet today to speak to the Gallery in his usual style—

Commander Anderson: I leave that to you.

Mr. Hume: This story deals, again, with this film. Every businessman interviewed said he did not see it. The headline in the Unionist newspaper said that they were all fuming but not one of them saw it. I would be glad to have a showing of this film and afterwards to face an audience made up entirely of members of the Unionist Party and deal with any questions that they might ask, because I do not think it would do any harm at all to discuss the real problems of the city of Derry. It is only when one solves the problems of the city of Derry that one has solved the problems of Northern Ireland.

3.27 p.m.

Mr. Devlin: The film referred to—and I have read the reviews of it—gives a fair representation of the facts as they are in Derry at present. That is exactly what it set out to do. I agree with what the Prime Minister's Government are at present doing in Derry; I think that they are going to do an excellent job and one which will go a long way to help. But the facts at present are that the unemployed do stand at the street corners. The male unemployed, for instance, are running at about one in five. They have no place else to go. They have not sufficient money to do anything but stand at the street corners.

There are bad housing conditions in Derry. The Prime Minister accepts that as well as anybody else in this House. As regards what John Hume has commented on, I think he is quite right. At the moment there are something like 10 per cent. of the people still homeless in Derry. What is wrong with John Hume commenting on that?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member should refer to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) not by name but as "the hon. Member for Foyle."

Mr. Devlin: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was relating him in that particular instance to the commentator in the film.

not to the hon. Member for Foyle, if I may be forgiven.

Two other questions arose in connection with the film. One was the question of the New University going elsewhere than to Derry. The hon. Member for Foyle was a leading member in the campaign which was mounted at that time to have the university attracted to Derry. He was therefore in a position to comment on that matter and in my view he was right in doing so. The final question was that of the new city. I think he was right in commenting on that as well. He was involved in a campaign, and consequently he drew attention to the fact that he felt the new city should have been built at Derry instead of elsewhere.

Those are four facts that everybody accepts. That they were brought out in the film and commented upon by the hon. Member was reasonable and I do not think that the campaign or the exercise that has been mounted against him here today is fair. When all is said and done, he is a Member who has been doing a conscientious job for his constituency. The unemployment and the housing record in Derry are very bad. They are even worse than they are elsewhere. As the hon. Member is a conscientious M.P. it was natural that he should do all in his power in order not merely to have the unemployment figures reduced but to have every man in his constituency in a job and every homeless family in his constituency in a house. While doing that he has been faced with this exercise, which I can only condemn as being intimidatory.

3.29 p.m.

Mr. Keogh (South Down): I do not wish to delay the House. I was among the unfortunate people who did not see this film. After this discussion today the film will probably be repeated in order to give everybody an opportunity of seeing it. I believe that the attack which has been made today has more or less ricocheted from its target back to the people who made that attack. I say that the bad publicity which Northern Ireland is getting at present—and it has been bad publicity, too, for the city of Derry—is the price the Government must pay for the neglect of the