

[Mr. Robinson]

The *Belfast Telegraph*, never a close friend of the unionist community, said:

"Even those who, like this newspaper, can see benefit flowing from closer consultation with Dublin, must draw the line at such institutionalised links between the two countries."

I say again that it is not only the Ulster Unionists and the Democratic Unionists who believe that the deal goes too far. The ordinary citizens of Northern Ireland, never previously involved in politics, were present at the mass demonstration at the city hall in Belfast.

I was born a free citizen of the United Kingdom. I was brought up to respect the Union flag. At my father's knee I was taught the love that I should have for the monarchy, and throughout my life I have put that into practice. I was nurtured on the principle of the greatness of our British heritage. I have taught all that to my children. I now have to tell this House that over the last 17 cruel years, when Ulster has been confronted by a vicious campaign of terrorism, not one of the unionist community was prepared to allow that campaign to shatter his loyalty to the United Kingdom.

It is not a one-way street. It never has been for Ulster. We cheered with this country during the Falklands campaign. Ulster suffered its losses just as many did on this side of the Irish sea. During the second world war, we made sacrifices, just as many people in this part of the United Kingdom, and we did it without conscription. During the first world war, Ulster gave of its best for Britain. After watching the Ulster Volunteers on the Somme when 5,000 Ulstermen lost their lives at the enemy's hand, a great British general—General Spender—said, "I am not an Ulsterman but there is no one in the world whom I would rather be after seeing the Ulster Volunteers in action." In peace and in war Ulster stood by the kingdom. That has been the way of loyal Ulster.

I never believed that I would see a British Government who were prepared to damage Ulster's position in the United Kingdom. Our resolve has been hardened by the bitter times in past years when a terrorist campaign was aimed at undermining our position in the United Kingdom. There would never have been a Hillsborough castle agreement if the IRA had not been bombing and shooting. That is a fact of life. Can one blame the people of Northern Ireland for thinking that violence works? It makes the task harder for those of us who chose the way of constitutional politics to tell people not to involve themselves in violence.

I wish that the House had a sense of the deep feeling of anger and betrayal in Northern Ireland. Yesterday, while I was waiting in an ante-room in No. 10 Downing street before meeting the Prime Minister I saw on the wall a portrait of Rudyard Kipling, who was a great patriot. I recall the words of his poem "Ulster 1912", which begins:

"The dark eleventh hour
Draws on and sees us sold
To every evil power
We fought against of old."

Later, it states:

"The blood our fathers split,
Our love, our toils, our pains,
Are counted us for guilt,
And only bind our chains.
Before an Empire's eyes
The traitor claims his price.
What need of further lies?
We are the sacrifice."

6.3 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Listening to some of the hon. Members who have spoken in the debate one could have been forgiven for thinking that we were not discussing a serious problem, but, after listening to the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), one should not be in any doubt that we are discussing a serious problem.

I was glad to see a full House at the beginning of the debate. That is the first achievement of the Anglo-Irish conference. It shows that the serious human problem facing the peoples of these islands has at last been given the priority that it deserves. It has been put at the centre of the stage.

I was glad also that a meeting took place at the highest level between the British and the Irish Governments at which a framework for ongoing discussion was set up. In an excellent unionist speech, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) told us what we already knew—that he was a committed unionist and that he did not particularly like to associate with the loud-mouthed persons with whom I have to live. We did not learn from him of the problem in Northern Ireland—that we have a deeply divided society. The hon. Gentleman did not bother to analyse why we have a deeply divided society and the political instability and violence which the agreement seeks to address.

This is the first time that we have had a real framework within which to address the problem. The problem is not just about relationships with Northern Ireland. One need only listen to the speeches of Northern Ireland Members to know that it is about relationships in Ireland and between Ireland and Britain. Those interlocking relationships should be addressed within the framework of the problem. The framework of the problem can only be the framework of the solution, and that is the British-Irish framework. There is no road towards a solution to this problem that does not contain risks. The road that has been chosen by both Governments is the road of maximum consensus and is, therefore, the road of minimum risk. We should welcome that.

Our community has just gone through 15 years of the most serious violence that it has ever seen. Northern Ireland has a population of 1.5 million people. About 2,500 people have lost their lives in political violence—the equivalent of 86,000 people in Britain. Twenty thousand people have been seriously maimed. When I say "maimed", I mean maimed. That is the equivalent of 750,000 people on this island. About £11 billion worth of damage has been caused to the economies of Ireland—North and South. In 1969, public expenditure by the British Government in subsidy, subvention or whatever one calls it was £74 million; today it is £1.5 billion. Two new prisons have been built and a third is about to be opened—our only growth industry. There are 18-year-olds who have known nothing but violence and armed soldiers on their streets. Young people reach 18 and then face the highest unemployment we have ever had. Forty-four per cent. of the population is under 25.

If that is not a time bomb for the future what is? If that is not a problem that needs the serious attention of the House and the serious attention that the Prime Ministers of Britain and of the Republic of Ireland have given it in the past 18 months, what is? Is this not a subject that screams out for political leaders in Northern Ireland to take a good look at themselves, their parties and the leadership

that they have given? There is only one clear-cut lesson to be learnt from this tragedy—that our past attitudes have brought us where we are. Unless we agree to take a hard look at our past attitudes, we shall be going nowhere fast and we shall be committing ourselves to the dustbin of history, clutching our respective flagpoles.

We are being given some choices. The agreement gives us no more than an opportunity to begin the process of reconciliation. The choices offered to the people of Northern Ireland are the choices offered by hon. Members here present. The unionist parties have consistently sought to protect the integrity of their heritage in Ireland—the Protestant heritage—and no one should quarrel with that. A society is richer for its diversity. My quarrel with the unionist parties has been that they have sought to protect their heritage by holding all the power in their own hands and by basing that on sectarian solidarity. That is an exclusive use of power which is inherently violent because it permanently excludes a substantial section of the community from any say in its affairs.

That was spelt out clearly by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneux) when he said that he offered an act of leadership. He was sincere. He said that the majority should assure the minority that they would be made part of society. He tells me that it is an act of leadership to make me and the people I represent part of our society 65 years after Northern Ireland was created.

We have been lectured about democracy and the democratic process by hon. Members from both unionist parties. They are practitioners of the democratic process. I do not want to spend too much time on examples of their practice, but they were the masters of gerrymander. Today their voices are somewhat muted, but they have not changed much.

In Belfast city council not one position on any board has gone to a minority representative. One council has even apologised to the electorate because it made a mistake in appointing a member of the SDLP to one position out of 105.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The hon. Gentleman is complaining because his party cannot win elections. Many people here have to face the fact that their party cannot win elections. It is a fact of life, but it is not a reason for power sharing.

Mr. Hume: I thought that the hon. Gentleman's intervention might be intelligent. I shall not lecture him on how Northern Ireland was set up, how it was deliberately created and how from day one it has been run on a sectarian basis. The only way to break that down is through partnership.

Hon. Members from both unionist parties have lectured us about democracy. That brings us to the heart of the Irish problem. The sovereignty of this Parliament is the basis of the British system and of the rule of law. The sovereignty of Parliament has been defied only twice in this century—on both occasions by Ulster Unionists.

In 1912 the Ulster Unionists defied the sovereign wish of Parliament to grant home rule. That was only devolution within the United Kingdom. They objected and accepted instead home rule for themselves. That taught them a lesson which they have never forgotten—that if one threatens a British Government or British Parliament and produces crowds in the streets from the Orange lodges the British will back down. Others learnt from that that if

one wins by the democratic process the British will back down to their loyalist friends and then they say, "Why not use force instead?" Those two forces are still at the heart of preventing a development in relationships within Ireland. Those who threaten violence are those who use it. The same two forces are opposing the agreement today.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that in 1969 he brought on to the streets of Ulster the hordes who, when he left them alone, fell into the hands of violent men? The hon. Gentleman says that he is not allowed to share responsibility in Northern Ireland, but I have told him before that the SDLP refused to put their names forward for membership of the council of which I am a member and tried to nominate Sinn Féin members. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will apply his mind to that.

Mr. Hume: I am applying my mind to the record of the unionist parties, the members of which have spoken today. I shall apply my mind to my own party later. I am expecting everyone to do a little rethinking.

The logic of the road down which the unionist leadership is taking its people is inescapable. Unionists once again are prepared to defy the sovereign will of this Parliament. When they come back after their elections and Parliament says that it refuses to back down, what will they do? Where will that lead us? They are going down the UDI road. That is their logic. They say that they are loyal to the United Kingdom. They are the loyalists and they must accept the sovereignty of Her Majesty's Parliament. But they do not.

What would happen if London Members resigned, were re-elected and returned saying that the majority in Greater London wanted to keep the Greater London council? That would lead to a complete breakdown of parliamentary sovereignty. That is where the unionists are leading us and they must know it.

It is sad in 1985 to meet people who are suspicious of everybody. They are suspicious of London, suspicious of Dublin and suspicious of the rest of the world. Worst of all, they are suspicious of the people with whom they share a little piece of land—their neighbours. It is sad that they never talk of the future except with fear. They talk always of the past. Their thoughts are encapsulated in that marvellous couplet

"To hell with the future and Long live the past.
May God in his mercy look down on Belfast."

That is more relevant than the words of Rudyard Kipling.

There has to be a better way. However grand we think we are, we are a small community. We cannot for ever live apart. Those sentiments were expressed in 1938 by Lord Craigavon, one of their own respected leaders. What are we sentencing our people to if we continue to live apart? People are entitled to live apart, but they are not entitled to ask everyone else to pay for it.

The other opposition to the agreement comes from the Provisional IRA and its political surrogates. They murder fellow Irishmen in the name of Irish unity. They murder members of the UDR and RUC—fellow Irishmen. Those members see themselves as protectors of their heritage, but the Provisional IRA brutally murder UDR and RUC members in the name of uniting the Irish people, the heritage with which we must unite if we are ever to unite Ireland.

[Mr. Hume]

The IRA's political wing is full of contradictions. I hope that no one in the House has any sympathy with it. Its members blow up factories and yet complain about unemployment. Its political spokesmen complain about cuts in public expenditure and in the same evening the military wing blows up £2 million of public expenditure in one street. A motion rightly condemns the execution of a young South African poet, but the IRA then shoots in the back of the head a young unemployed man and puts bullets in the head of a young man and his wife in west Belfast. The IRA complains about Diplock courts and yet runs kangaroo courts. What does that offer Ireland?

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) asks about Irish unity. In the late 20th century it is nonsense that there should be divisions. If European nations which twice in this century alone have slaughtered one another by the millions can build institutions that allow them to grow together at their own speed, why cannot we do the same? He quoted me in an interview as saying that I was working for Irish unity, but I went on to say that those who think that Irish unity is round the corner are wired to the moon.

The divisions in Ireland go back well beyond partition. Centuries ago the leaders of Irish republicanism said that they wanted to unite Ireland by replacing the name of "Catholic-Protestant dissenter" with the common name of "Irishman". That was in 1795. Thirty years before partition Parnell said that Ireland could never be united or have its freedom until the fears of the Protestant minority in Ireland could be conciliated. This is a deep problem. It will not be solved in a week or in a fortnight. The agreement says that if Ireland is ever to be united it will be united only if those who want it to be united can persuade those who do not want it to be united. Sovereignty has nothing to do with maps but everything to do with people.

The people of Ireland are divided on sovereignty. They will be united only by a process of reconciliation in which both traditions in Ireland can take part and agree. If that happens, it will lead to the only unity that matters—a unity that accepts that the essence of unity is the acceptance of diversity.

Our third choice is the agreement. For the first time it sets up a framework that addresses the problem of the interlocking relationships between the people of both Irelands. It is the approach of maximum consensus. It is the way of minimum risk. For the first time—this is a positive element in the agreement—it respects the equal validity of both traditions. That is what the right hon. and hon. Members of the Unionist party are complaining about. It is not a concession to me or to the people whom I represent. It is an absolute right to the legitimate expression of our identity and of the people I represent. Nobody can take that from us. The recognition of the equal validity of both traditions removes for the first time every excuse for the use of violence by anybody in Ireland to achieve his objective. A framework for genuine reconciliation is provided. Both sections of our community can take part in it.

Several hon. Members have said that the SDLP has a double veto on devolution. I have already said several times to them in public, but let me say it again so that they may hear it, that I believe in the partnership between the different sections of the community in Northern Ireland.

That is the best way to reconcile our differences. By working together to build our community we shall diminish the prejudices that divide us. The agreement means that I am prepared to sit down now and determine how we shall administer the affairs of Northern Ireland in a manner that is acceptable to both traditions.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hume: No. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I noticed that the right hon. and hon. Members of the Unionist parties were allowed to speak without interruption. When they were interrupted, they did not agree to give way.

The second question that appears to excite people about my party's attitude relates to the security forces and to policing in Northern Ireland. Our position—this is not a policy but a statement of fact that applies to every democratic society—is that law and order are based upon political consensus. Where political consensus is absent there is an Achilles heel. Violent men in Northern Ireland take advantage of that Achilles heel. For the first time the Intergovernmental Conference will address that question. It has committed itself to addressing that question. It has also committed itself to addressing the relationship between the community and the security forces. I want to give every encouragement to the conference to do so at the earliest possible opportunity. If it does so, it will have our fullest co-operation. I want the people whom I represent to play the fullest possible part, as do any citizens in a democratic society, in the process of peace and order. While we await the outcome we shall continue to give our full and unqualified support to the police force in impartially seeking out anybody who commits a crime in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) has a position to state in this argument. I may not happen to agree with him, but just as it was wrong—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman has raised this point of order before. He knows that it is at the discretion of the hon. Member who has the floor to decide whether to give way.

Mr. Hume: What is the alternative to the process of reconciliation and the breaking down of barriers? Why should anybody be afraid of the process of reconciliation? Anybody who is afraid has no confidence in himself or herself. It means that they cannot engage in a process of reconciliation. If they cannot retain mutual respect for their own position as well as for that of somebody else, they have no self-confidence. Therefore, they should not be representatives of the people of Northern Ireland. The only alternative is the old one of hopelessness, tit-for-tat, revenge—the old doctrine of an eye for an eye which has left everybody blind in Northern Ireland.

This is well summed up by a better poet than Kipling, the good, honest voice of the North, Louis MacNeice. Describing the old hopelessness, which is what we are being offered by those who will not take this opportunity, he said:

"Why should I want to go back
To you, Ireland, my Ireland?
The blots on the page are so black
That they cannot be covered with shamrock

I hate your grandiose airs,
Your sob-stuff, your laugh and your swagger,
Your assumption that everyone cares
Who is the king of your castle.
Castles are out of date,
The tide flows round the children's sandy fancy,
Put up what flag you like, it is too late
To save your soul with bunting."

It is far too late for the people of Northern Ireland to save their souls with bunting or with flag waving. We should note that the followers of those who wave flags as though they were the upholders of the standards of those flags paint their colours on kerbstones for people to walk over. In other words, there is no leadership and no integrity in that approach and no respect. The alternative that we are offered is an opportunity which, like others, may fail. It poses great challenges and risks. The challenges are daunting and difficult, but the choices are not. There is no other choice. There is no other road.

6.28 pm

Mr. Adam Butler (Bosworth): I do not have in my voice today the power of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), but I hope that I can emulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow). Even if I speak quietly, I hope that I can speak as much sense as he did. So far there have been three contributions from those who represent different parties in Northern Ireland. They make me believe that I was right the other night to vote for the televising of the proceedings of this Chamber. If the television cameras had been here, the viewers, whether in Northern Ireland or in the remainder of the United Kingdom, would have obtained a much better appreciation of the problem and of the advocates of the various points of view.

I served as a Northern Ireland Minister for nearly four years. Since then I have had the opportunity for reflection. Perhaps my views are now a little more objective than they were then. Whatever my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior) said, although there was mistrust of English Ministers when we first appeared, I hope that I and my colleagues and friends who served with me in Northern Ireland left the impression that we were seeking to do our bit and to make our contribution to the resolution of the problems of Northern Ireland. I know that my right hon. Friend did that.

I have already expressed my view, on the occasion of the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last week. It is one of general welcome for the agreement. However, I cannot say that I like it, or necessarily welcome one of its fundamental points. Why should I, as a British citizen, automatically like and welcome the fact that advice can come from a Minister of a Government of a foreign state. That is the technical position of the Republic of Ireland, whatever history tells us.

However, I accept the agreement, for a reason that lies in what the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) said. This is where I fall out with my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne and others who have spoken. This point is probably the fundamental point at issue in the Northern Ireland problem. Are we talking about a democratic system, or part of a democratic system, where a simple majority should sway, regardless, where first-past-the-post should rule and 50 per cent. plus should win the day? If so, life would be easy, but Stormont tried that for 50 years.

I believe the reason to be that stated by the hon. Member for Foyle, and that is the difference within Northern Ireland between the two communities. There is a division now that has been made worse by recent history. I do not need to lecture hon. Members about the position in Northern Ireland. However, one has to recognise certain basic facts. Two thirds, or less now, of the population are fundamentally unionists and loyalists, looking to London and Westminster, while the remainder of the population, on the whole, are nationalists, some republicans and nearly all Roman Catholic with a distinctive regard for the South and the Republic. It is with that that we have to concern ourselves, and that is what the agreement seeks to recognise.

It is no good saying to the people in the minority that, as they are in a minority in part of the United Kingdom, they must think like us, become totally British and prefer the Union flag, not the tricolour. Those people found themselves, because of a stroke of history, north of the border, thanks to the Boundary Commission of that time.

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): If the right hon. Gentleman believes that a simple majority rule is not appropriate in Northern Ireland — I can understand arguments along those lines — why should I accept, through article 1 of the agreement, that a simple majority should take me out of my citizenship of the United Kingdom and into a united Ireland?

Mr. Butler: That point is somewhere among my notes to be dealt with later. If, by some magic, there were a 51 per cent. majority today, the position would be just as bad in terms of divided communities. The fact is that a majority in favour of leaving the United Kingdom — if such a situation should ever arise — is many years away. It is important to grasp this point because it is no good the Republic of Ireland saying that it has only to wait a little while longer, or for the minority in Northern Ireland to say that it has only to wait for a little while. It must be the greatest consolation to the unionist population that it is a question not of a few years but of many decades, if at all. Therefore, the imperative is on both sides to get together to work out their future.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Is not the advice of the Northern Ireland Office to all those who visit Northern Ireland that demographic changes within Northern Ireland will lead, perhaps within the next 20 years, to the nationalist population becoming the majority? Has that not been said? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Butler: I am reinforced in what I believe — that there are no such official forecasts — by the remarks of other of my hon. Friends. There are those who see a trend that will lead that way, but I re-emphasise the point that nobody as far as I am aware, believes that a simple adverse majority — now I am a unionist — could arise within several decades, if at all.

In looking at the options that should be considered, I have in the past taken seriously the possibility of repartition, because that is the only other option if the two communities will not resolve the problems themselves. Frankly, it is not an option. Anybody who knows the demographic map of Northern Ireland knows that in every square mile of every part of the Province there is a significant minority population. The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) would