

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

Reference Code: 2003/17/301

Title: Report in the Irish Times of a speech made by the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, in the course of a visit to Northern Ireland, in which he discussed the use of violence, constitutional arrangements, British expenditure on Northern Ireland, and the need for constructive dialogue between communities and political parties.

Creation Date(s): 16 November 1972

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 4 pages

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Access Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

16 November 1972

Text of speech made by the British Prime Minister Mr. Edward Heath, in Belfast, in the course of a visit to Northern Ireland (as reported in the Irish Times 17th November 1972).

I greatly welcome this opportunity of meeting and talking to such a representative gathering of leaders of political and economic life in Northern Ireland. It gives me the chance to discuss with you the future of the province in which you live, the province to whose interests you and I, in our different capacities, are dedicated.

As leaders in Northern Ireland in these present times, yours is a heavy responsibility. There are many who must look to you for guidance and reassurance. And it must fall to you to remind your fellow citizens of the resources and many striking advantages which Northern Ireland possesses: to remind them of the prosperity which a peaceful and just society in Northern Ireland could enjoy and to remind them that, despite the distress they now know from day to day, such a society is not some unattainable ideal, but one that can be brought about by ordinary men and women working together as we do in the rest of the United Kingdom.

In talking to you now, therefore, I should like to stand back from the day-to-day problems of the province and to consider our aims for the longer term and how we can achieve them.

Our aim can be stated quite simply. Since the introduction of direct rule, the purpose of Her Majesty's Government has been to find a basis for a new start in Northern Ireland: to deliver its people from the violence and fear in which they live, and to create the conditions in which they can develop their abilities and resources to the full.

The means of achieving this purpose can also be simply stated. We have to deal with violence and we have to stimulate constructive debate about the future internal Constitutional arrangements of Northern Ireland.

By publishing the paper for discussion, we have set the framework within which this constructive debate should be conducted. We are encouraged that the paper has been so well received, both within the United Kingdom and outside it, but I believe it deserved no less.

Of course there have been certain proposals from other sources - proposals, indeed, which have enjoyed some currency in Northern Ireland - that are contrary to the interests of Northern Ireland and of the United Kingdom. We have explained why we see no future for them. In particular, to those who urge that Northern Ireland should seize its own unilateral independence. I must say that not only would such an attempt bring a bloodbath, but that were it to succeed the British Government would not pay one penny of the £200m. a year now provided for the province to an independent country such as they claim to want.

But within the bounds of what is politically possible, there is still much that can be discussed.

Up to now, it has been for the parties in Northern Ireland to state clearly what they want. This they have done. We must now move on. And progress depends on the willingness of everyone in Northern Ireland to try to see the other man's point of view and to go some way towards meeting it. It does no good to state a view dogmatically and then to refuse to move from it. That way lies chaos and despair. If we are to reach a fair and effective solution, there must be understanding and realism on all sides. We must bring home to the people that in Northern Ireland today compromise and cooperation does not mean the betrayal of sincerely held aims and ideals.

-2-

This is the nub of the whole matter. Our fellow citizens in the rest of the United Kingdom are being asked to make immense efforts and considerable sacrifices on behalf of Northern Ireland. It is natural that they should look closely, day by day in their newspapers, night by night on their television, to see why and in what circumstances this effort and these sacrifices are required of them.

They see throughout Northern Ireland steadfastness, determination and suffering nobly borne by so many people. What they do not as yet find in Northern Ireland is the will to make an effective and lasting peace. What they do not as yet discern is a willingness to put on one side the violence and the passions derived from the past in favour of that decent cooperation between neighbours which alone can ensure the future.

If it is the wish of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland to remain as part of the United Kingdom, that wish will be respected. But with that right goes a clear and necessary obligation - the obligation to remain also within our traditional framework of law, of peaceful debate, of willingness to meet other points of view, that framework of which we in the United Kingdom are intensely proud and which I must tell you we are determined to preserve throughout our land.

You know as well as I do that we can get nowhere in Northern Ireland unless everyone is prepared to listen as well as talk, to concede as well as demand.

The institutions which emerge from the present debate must enable the majority and minority communities to feel a sense of common interest; enable both communities to take a full part in Government in the interests of the whole province. Thus we are providing the opportunity for Northern Ireland to establish institutions which, by being fair to all and by being seen to be fair, will stand the test of time.

Whether such institutions succeed or fail depends above all on the decisions and actions of the people of Northern Ireland. Her Majesty's Government, for their part, will continue to do all they can to provide the conditions most favourable to success. Over the years, we have provided very considerable financial assistance to Northern Ireland.

Since direct rule we have pledged substantial further support to agriculture and to manufacturing and service industries vital to Northern Ireland. This assistance amounts to more than £120m., to be spent over about three years. In addition, over £11m. has so far been paid out in compensation for malicious damage to property.

The total of special payments and subsidies to Northern Ireland in the current year will be about £200m., together with loan advances from the National Loans Fund estimated at about £100m. While others have been destroying factories, we have promoted new employment. While others have been attempting to destroy any kind of community life, we have encouraged new community projects. While others have destroyed houses, we have sought to build new and better homes. And at a time when - as I saw for myself this morning - the centre of Belfast has been cruelly scarred, we are going ahead with plans for the new Belfast of the 1980s.

Thus we reaffirm our faith in the future of the province and in the future of its people.

/..

During my present visit I shall be talking to those political parties whose representatives I have not recently seen in the course of the continuing debate on the future of Northern Ireland. I shall be meeting leaders of industrial and commercial life, many of whom are here today. It is great credit to you and your firms that, despite all the difficulties, industrial output in the province is going up and other countries are still buying Northern Ireland's goods.

But I want to do more than this. I want to see at first hand the sufferings of Northern Ireland. Let me tell you that my colleagues and I are in no way remote from what happens here. Your sufferings haunt us day by day.

I see daily the reports from the security forces, with their grim statistics of death and injury. I receive the tragic accounts of damage to property and to factories. Wherever I am, in whatever part of the world, the reports are flashed through to me. I understand the fear which many families must feel as they go about their ordinary business from day to day.

I want to express my personal sympathy to the whole people of Northern Ireland and my support for them in all they have to endure. I admire the courage which they have shown in carrying on their normal lives in the midst of such desperate difficulties. The people of Northern Ireland can have no doubt who are responsible for their sufferings.

The Provisionals allege that they kill and maim to bring about a united Ireland. Indeed, they take credit for it. But they only deepen the division in Irish society, and because of this they are further from their aim than ever before. The Protestant extremists say that they want to protect their own people and preserve their institutions. But all they do is to strengthen the IRA and make a mockery of loyalty to the Crown.

When I read reports of how many tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of people are going to fight for the independence of Northern Ireland or fight for the cause that Northern Ireland should remain in the United Kingdom, I say - 'what is the point of all this?' - because no one has threatened this. Indeed, it is embodied in law and supported by all three parties. They are talking about fighting about something that has never been challenged.

Violence destroys, but it cannot build, so there is no doubt who are the enemies of Northern Ireland. They are those who think that they can achieve their muddled aims through atrocity and murder. They stand in the way of a just and lasting solution.

Her Majesty's Government are doing everything we can, within the framework of democratic society, to deal with terrorism. The courage, determination and devotion to duty of the security forces have been quite outstanding. And results can now be seen. The trend of deaths, injuries and explosions has decreased considerably over the past three months. We must all work for this improvement to be maintained and extended.

This is also the occasion for me to pay tribute to all that the Secretary of State and Mrs. Whitelaw have done for Northern Ireland as a whole in the eight months since direct rule. The Secretary of State's responsibilities, both here in Northern Ireland and in the House of Commons at Westminster, impose a heavy load: but it is a burden which he has accepted at all times willingly and cheerfully. In all he is doing he has the wholehearted support and admiration of myself and my colleagues in the Cabinet, and, I believe, the support and admiration of every reasonable man and woman in the United Kingdom. He has often made an appeal to the people of Northern

Ireland which I repeat today: if terrorism is to be eradicated, they must provide all the help and support they can for the security forces. It is not enough to sit behind closed doors and pray that the gunman will pass you by. Violence will only stop when those who are against violence act to defeat it.

Terrorists must be given no help or encouragement, money must be refused to them, and they must be denied any safe haven within the community from which to operate. And by terrorists I mean not just the expert gunman, but also the gangs of louts who throw stones and petrol bombs, burn down houses and assault innocent civilians. Over the past few years there have been a few - a very few - occasions which have offered the real prospect of a breakthrough and the establishment in Northern Ireland of a society at peace with itself. Each time the opportunity has been lost and the cycle of violence and counter-violence has continued. Following the recent successes of the security forces and the publication of the paper for discussion I believe that another of these opportunities may well be opening up.

Such an opportunity must be firmly grasped. For if we let it slip the consequence will be that more innocent people will be killed, more homes and factories will be destroyed. We are determined to play our part in making full use of this opportunity.

We intend, after consultation, to put forward our proposals for the future institutions of Northern Ireland. These proposals will offer a fair deal to every section of the community. And throughout this time, and for as long as it may be necessary, we will continue to do everything in our power to stamp out terrorism, from whatever quarter it may come. But in the last resort, whether this opportunity is taken or rejected depends on the resolution and the good sense of the people of Northern Ireland. It is the people of Northern Ireland who must decide on the territorial status of the province. It is the people of Northern Ireland who must build and support new institutions which can provide the Constitutional basis for a just and peaceful society. It is the people of Northern Ireland who can make clear to the extremist that the gun and the bomb offer no solution and are totally rejected. It is the people of Northern Ireland who will determine success or failure. I believe you have the will and the ability to succeed, for it is you yourselves, your families and your children, who have most to lose from failure, and most to gain from success.

We have had many hard and difficult decisions to take, but we have taken them unflinchingly and we shall continue to do so. Whatever decisions are required to be taken to ensure the restoration of peace in Northern Ireland and to bring about the inauguration of new Constitutional measures which are fair to all, these decisions we will also take absolutely unflinchingly, because we are determined to see this thing through.
