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REMARKS BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,

MR. GERARD COLLINS, T.D.,

AT THE LUNCH IN HONOUR OF SPEAKER FOLEY

MONDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 1991.

Mr. Speaker, Congressmen, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Céad míle fáilte - "one hundred thousand welcomes" - is the traditional Irish greeting. There are some occasions, however, when these much-used words take on a special depth of meaning. Your visit, Mr. Speaker, and that of your distinguished delegation, is one such occasion. It gives me very great pleasure to extend to you and all your party a céad míle fáilte - a most heartfelt welcome - to Ireland.

Your presence here, Mr. Speaker, symbolises many different aspects of the bonds we cherish between Ireland and the United States. A visit of the Speaker is something very special for us in Ireland because the American democracy is itself something very special for us. It was an inspiration and a beacon to the Irish people in dark and difficult times. It was an important model for us when we won independence and set about drawing up a constitution of our own. The ideals of freedom, democracy and the rule of law, translated into political institutions by the vision and courage of the founders of the United States, continue to resound far beyond its shores. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you are an influential and informed participant in the foreign as well as the

domestic affairs of your nation. I can imagine the satisfaction you must feel in recent times at seeing the power and moral force of these ideals prevail so happily and so often against even the most elaborately contrived systems of repression. In welcoming you we pay tribute first of all to your high office and to the great democracy you represent. It is of course true that the actual working of this democracy is something some outsiders find baffling. Since we Irish are highly gifted politically - as of course in all other respects - and are in any case quite incapable of ever thinking of ourselves as outsiders - we have no difficulty following the complex working of the system. We must however marvel at the political skills required to operate it successfully. Your own role, Mr. Speaker, at one apex of that democracy, seems a little like the conductor of an orchestra required to produce a symphony even where all the players insist on writing their own parts - most of them no doubt resoundingly scored for trumpets and drums. I think I understand why in your leisure moments you take refuge in the refined mathematical precision of the music of Bach.

Mr. Speaker, you will have sensed in the course of your visit that it is a matter of intense pride to Irish people that this great office of the American democracy should be held by an Irish-American. In welcoming you, and so many Irish and friends of Ireland in your delegation, we pay tribute also to the achievements of the Irish American community. Their story

is a great human epic. They arrived in America for the most part with nothing except what they carried in their hearts or in their heads - their courage, their intelligence and their capacity for hard work. Their signal contribution to almost every field of endeavour in America is now a matter of history. They played an essential and pioneering role in endowing American politics with the responsive, flexible and innovative qualities which made it possible to integrate so many different waves of immigrants into a successful and stable democracy. They rightly saw no conflict between their passionate American patriotism and their fierce pride in their Irish origins, and in this they were wiser and more far-sighted than their critics. Their generosity to the cause of Ireland and to their fellow Irish people was legendary. These early immigrants would surely have recognised and approved the spirit of commitment shown by so many of their descendants in political office, including you Mr. Speaker and so many of your colleagues here, in securing the enactment of new immigration legislation. You have ensured that Irish people who choose to make their living in the United States can now develop their talents in their adopted country untroubled by the problems of status and procedure which weighed so heavily on so many of them in the past. The Irish Government and the people of Ireland, and very many young Irish people living in the United States, owe you a direct debt of gratitude for this achievement.

Circumstances have changed, Mr. Speaker, since the days when your forbears, and those of many of your colleagues, made their way from Ireland to the United States. What has not changed is the great importance to us in Ireland of the interest, understanding and support of the United States and of the Irish-American community, which you and the Friends of Ireland in Congress have done so much to foster. Nowhere is this support more valuable to us than in relation to the problem of Northern Ireland.

Our history has left us a tragic legacy of conflict and bitterness, concentrated into the narrow ground of Northern Ireland. This has taken a severe toll of death and human suffering for more than a generation now. To find a way out of this conflict is the most serious challenge facing the Irish and British Governments. The informed interest and sympathy of the United States, so well exemplified by you Mr. Speaker and your delegation around this table, is of the utmost importance to us in our endeavours to ensure that this grave problem is given the priority it deserves, and is not neglected through indifference or despair. We welcome your emphasis on the need to eliminate every vestige of inequality and discrimination and all sense of injustice in Northern Ireland, since these must always offer fertile ground for violence and confrontation. We are particularly appreciative of your strong and principled stand against violence and terror. It is becoming clearer with each passing year that



violence and terror can achieve nothing except to increase the tragic burden of human suffering in both communities. This has indeed been blindingly obvious to the vast majority of Irish people from the very beginning of the troubles, but even many of that small minority who support violence must by now be aware that this approach is profoundly mistaken and leads not to progress but only to a murderous cul-de-sac.

The road to progress and a solution lies in a different direction. It is to build in the things which unite all the people of this island and to respond to concerns shared alike by people North and South, in particular a shared concern for peace and prosperity in the new European context in which we find ourselves. In this respect I should pay particular tribute to the work of the IFI which, thanks to American generosity, and the tireless support of our friends in Congress, is helping to alleviate the poverty and economic despair of many deprived areas in Northern Ireland. The path to progress must also be found through building on the overarching interests shared by the British and Irish Governments in regard to Northern Ireland - a joint interest in solving a conflict which is so costly to both peoples in human and material terms. Both Governments accepted as far back as 1980 that the problem cannot be understood or tackled solely within the context of Northern Ireland alone. In addition, both Governments at that time agreed that a settlement must be approached within the context of the

totality of relationships between the two islands. The Anglo-Irish Agreement reflects their joint determination to work together for progress and to refuse to allow their common efforts in this regard to be blocked either by those who resort to terror or violence or by those who seek to nourish ancient hatreds and bigotries. It was regrettable that roundtable talks had to be brought to an end last summer without coming to fruition. I believe however that the vast majority of people of both traditions wish the process of dialogue to continue, and accept that it should address all the relationships involved - those between the two communities in Northern Ireland, between North and South and between the two Governments. In the course of those talks, the Irish Government showed our willingness to take account of the sensitivities of all participants. Consistent with our commitment to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, we will maintain the same positive and flexible attitude in the future. Our objective is to work in close cooperation with the British Government, and as far as is possible, with all parties in Northern Ireland who respect the democratic mandate, to secure a transformation of relationships on this island. The United States is deeply admired by both traditions in Ireland. It is bound by close ties of friendship to both Governments. Because of this American support for progress towards peace is uniquely important. We are deeply grateful to you Mr. Speaker, and to your Congressional colleagues from both parties who have worked so hard to ensure that sympathy and



practical support in such abundant measure.

Mr. Speaker,

Towards the end of his life our great national poet, W.B. Yeats visited the Municipal Gallery in Dublin and mused over the portraits of his many friends hanging there. The poem he wrote then concluded with the lines:

"Think where man's glory most begins and ends  
and say my glory was I had such friends".

Ireland, like Yeats, is fortunate in her friends and that is especially true of our friends in the United States. It is above all as true and dedicated friends of Ireland that I welcome you Mr. Speaker, and your colleagues here today.