



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/49/258

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Accession Conditions: Open

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

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Dublin, Ireland)

For Immediate Release

December 1, 1995

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
IN ADDRESS TO THE IRISH PARLIAMENT

Dail Chamber at Leinster House
Dublin, Ireland

5:30 P.M. (L)

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Speaker Comhaile, you appear to be someone who can be trusted with the budget. (Laughter and applause.) Such are the vagaries of faith which confront us all. (Laughter and applause.)

To the Taoiseach, the Tanaiste, members of the Dail and the Seanad, head of the Senate: I'm honored to be joined here, as all of you know, by my wife, members of our Cabinet and members of the United States Congress of both parties -- the congressional congregation chaired by Congressman Walsh -- they are up there. They got an enormous laugh out of the comments of the Comhaile. (Laughter.) For different reasons they were laughing. (Laughter.)

I thank you for the honor of inviting me here, and I am especially pleased to be here at this moment in your history -- before the elected representatives of a strong, confident, democratic Ireland; a nation today playing a greater role in world affairs than ever before.

We live in a time of immense hope and immense possibility; a time captured, I believe, in the wonderful lines of your poet, Seamus Heaney, when he talked of the "longed-for tidal wave of justice can rise up and hope and history rhyme." That is the time in which we live.

It's the world's good fortune that Ireland has become a force for fulfilling that hope and redeeming the possibilities of mankind -- a force for good far beyond your numbers. And we are all the better for it.

2

Today I have traveled from the North where I have seen the difference Ireland's leadership has made for peace there. At the lighting of Belfast's Christmas tree for tens of thousands of people there, in the faces of two communities divided by bitter history, we saw the radiance of optimism born, especially among the young of both communities. In the voices of the Shankill and the Falls, there was a harmony of new hope which we saw. I saw that the people want peace -- and they will have it.

George Bernard Shaw, with his wonderful Irish love of irony, said, "Peace is not only better than war, but infinitely more arduous." Well, today, I thank Prime Minister Bruton and former Prime Minister Reynolds and Deputy Prime Minister Spring and Britain's Prime Minister Major, and others, but especially these, for their unfailing dedication to the arduous task of peace.

From the Downing Street Declaration to the historic cease-fire that began 15 months ago, to Tuesday's announcement of the twin-track initiative which will open a dialogue in which all voices can be heard and all viewpoints can be represented, they have taken great risks without hesitation. They've chosen a harder road than the comfortable path of pleasant, present pieties. But what they have done is right. And the children and grandchildren of this generation of Irish will reap the rewards.

Today, I renew America's pledge. Your road is our road. We want to walk it together. We will continue our support -- political, financial and moral -- to those who take risks for peace. I am proud that our administration was the first to support in the executive budget sent to the Congress the International Fund for Ireland -- because we believe that those on both sides of the border who have been denied so much for so long should see that their risks are rewarded with the tangible benefits of peace.

In another context a long time ago, Mr. Yeats reminded us that too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart. We must not let the hearts of the young people who yearn for peace turn to stone.

I want to thank you here, not only for the support you've given your leaders in working for peace in Northern Ireland, but for the extraordinary work you have done to wage peace over war all around the world. Almost 1,500 years ago, Ireland stood as a lone beacon of civilization to a continent shrouded in darkness.

It has been said, probably without overstatement, that the Irish, in that dark period, saved civilization. Certainly you saved the records of our civilization -- our shared ideas, are shared ideals, our priceless recordings of them.

Now, in our time, when so many nations seek to overcome conflict and barbarism, the light still shines out of Ireland. Since 1958, almost 40 years now, there has never been a single, solitary day that Irish troops did not stand watch for peace on a distant shore. In Lebanon, in Cyprus, in Somalia, in so many other places, more than 41,000 Irish military and police personnel have served over the years as peacekeepers -- an immense contribution for a nation whose Armed Forces today number fewer than 13,000.

I know that during your presidency of the European Union next year, Ireland will help to lead the effort to build security for a stable, strong and free Europe. For all -- all you have done, and for your steadfast devotion to peace, I salute the people of Ireland.

Our nation also has a vital stake in a Europe that is stable, strong and free -- something which is now in reach for the first time since nation-states appeared on the continent of Europe so many centuries ago. But we know such a Europe can never be built as long as conflict tears at the heart of the continent in Bosnia. The fire there threatens the emerging democracies of the region and our allies nearby. And it also breaks our heart and violates our conscience.

That is why, now that the parties have committed themselves to peace, we in the United States are determined to help them find the way back from savagery to civility, to end the atrocities and heal the wounds of that terrible war. That is why we are preparing our forces to participate there, not in fighting a war, but in securing a peace rooted in the agreement they have freely made.

Standing here, thinking about the devastation in Bosnia, the long columns of hopeless refugees streaming from their homes, it is impossible not to recall the ravages that were visited on your wonderful country 150 years ago -- not by war, of course, but by natural disaster when the crops rotted black in the ground.

Today, still, the Great Famine is seared in the memory of the Irish nation and all caring peoples. The memory of a million dead, nearly two million more forced into exile -- these memories

will remain forever vivid to all of us whose heritage is rooted here.

But as an American, I must say as I did just a few moments ago in Dublin downtown, that in that tragedy came the supreme gift of the Irish to the United States. The men, women and children who braved the coffin ships when Galway and Mayo emptied; when Kerry and Cork took flight, brought a life and a spirit that has enormously enriched the life of our country.

The regimental banner brought by President Kennedy that hangs in this house reminds us of the nearly 200,000 Irishmen who took up arms in our Civil War. Many of them barely were off the ships when they joined the Union forces. They fought and died at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. Theirs was only the first of countless contributions to our nation from those who fled the famine. But that contribution enabled us to remain a nation and to be here with you today in partnership for peace for you nation and for the peoples who live on this island.

The Irish have been building America ever since -- our cities, our industry, our culture, our public life. I am proud that the delegation that has accompanied me here today includes the latest generation of Irish American leaders in the United States, men and women who remain devoted to increasing our strength and safeguarding our liberty.

In the last century, it was often said that the Irish who fled the great hunger were searching for casleain na n-or -- castles of gold. I cannot say that they found those castles of gold in the United States, but I can tell you this -- they built a lot of castles of gold for the United States in the prosperity and freedom of our nation. We are grateful for what they did and for the deep ties to Ireland that they gave us in their sons and daughters.

Now we seek to repay that in some small way -- by being a partner with you for peace. We seek somehow to communicate to every single person who lives here that we want for all of your children the right to grow up in an Ireland where this entire island gives every man and woman the right to live up to the fullest of their God-given abilities and gives people the right to live in equality and freedom and dignity.

That is the tide of history. We must make sure that the tide runs strong here, for no people deserve the brightest future more than the Irish.

5

God bless you and thank you. (Applause.)

END

4:45 P.M. (L)