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Reference Code: 2021/99/12

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THE ANNUAL FIANNA FÁIL ARBOUR HILL EASTER RISING
COMMEMORATION ORATION BY THE LEADER OF FIANNA FÁIL
MR. BERTIE AHERN TD, SUNDAY, 27 APRIL 1997 AT 1 PM APPROX.

A mhuintir Fhianna Fáil, agus a chairde Gael, is mór an onóir domsa mar Séú
Ceannaire ar Phairtí Fhianna Fáil, teacht anseo ar maidin, chun labhairt libh mar
gheall ar Aiséirí na Cásca, agus bunú na Poblachta i Naoi déag a sé déag.

Tadiseach
To see file.
Abb 28/4

Ag deireadh dráma "An Rí" scríobh Padraig Mac Piarais, deir an t-Abb:

**"Ná caointear libh an leanbh seo, mar cheannaigh sé saoirse dá
chine. Déantar libh na gártha maíte."**

Ag teacht anseo, bliain i ndiadh bliana, déanaimid comóradh agus smaoineamh ar
an saoirse sin.

Rinne fir agus mná na haoise sin, éacht ar son na hÉireann. Lena saoil, agus lena
mbáis, cheannaigh siad saoirse na hÉireann dúinn. Is luachmhar an duais í sin, agus
is mór an dualgas atá orainn, sa ghlúin seo, ár gcuid a dhéanamh ar son ár dtíre,
thuaidh agus theas.

Each year, in this hallowed place, we commemorate the founders of our State, the
signatories of the magnificent Easter Proclamation, who sacrificed themselves so

that Ireland might be free. As Pádraig Pearse so poignantly expressed it in a poem,

'What if the dream come true ? and if millions unborn shall dwell

In the house that I shaped in my heart, the noble house of my thought'.

As Pearse noted with great satisfaction, the 1916 Rising gave Dublin a splendid name in Irish history. Dublin over the centuries developed out of the Pale into a patriot capital. Next year we will focus on its role in 1798. The Liberator was Lord Mayor and was revered by the people of Dublin. The embattled Parnell at a great rally in 1891 referred to 'the illimitable power of our race which has shown itself on these streets of Dublin tonight'. In 1920-1, the authorities in Dublin Castle finally gave up the fight, and as we saw in a famous scene in the Collins film it was evacuated and handed over early in 1922. Today, in more peaceful and prosperous times, I still appeal to the national spirit of the people of Dublin to elect a new Government, which has a pride in the traditions and the destiny of a risen people.

The Americans celebrate 4 July as their Independence Day; when they declared their independence, not when the British recognised it. In December 1921, the Countess Markievicz, later a founder member of our party, corrected Piaras Beaslaí, when he gave the Dáil to understand that the Treaty 'was the beginning of something great and that Ireland is struggling to be born'. Her reply was : 'I say that the new Ireland was born in Easter Week, 1916, that Ireland is not struggling to be born'.

This party has no desire to revive tragic differences, which blighted politics for a generation or to diminish the contribution of others. Pearse's attitude to the countermanding order, which militarily crippled the Rising, was exemplary :

'Both Eoin MacNeill and me have acted in the best interests of Ireland'.

When we consider the successful struggle for independence from 1917 to 1921, we should honour the achievement of all those who took part. De Valera and Collins, both great men, shared the same goal, an Irish Republic. Their difference was one of means. Collins' concern was to have the British army evacuated from Ireland, and then Ireland would be free. De Valera and his followers considered it unacceptable to renounce, even temporarily, the declared Republic. The Irish Free State was established, not without internal conflict. Subsequently, our party was formed to participate in its institutions and to transform them from within. This was successfully accomplished in the 1930s.

I regret that the Taoiseach chose to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Irish Free State as a partisan event. It was an important stage in the evolution of our independence from 1916. There is a constant whinge that the first Cumann na nGhaedheal Government has been written out of history. That is not true, least of all today, if you look at the school text books. We can

acknowledge their achievements, but we cannot make them greater than they were.

The Governments of W.T. Cosgrave, including men of stature like Paddy McGilligan and Kevin O'Higgins, did much to build a working and stable constitutional democracy that was indigenous in all important respects. But equally it is to the credit of Eamon de Valera and a large majority of his colleagues that after 1923 they never looked back and adopted a realistic and pragmatic attitude to their political task. The Countess Markievicz in 1924 stated :

'All properly constructed governments should be based on the consent of the governed I want to always stand for the democratic principle We want the people to have confidence in us, and it would give them confidence in us if we reaffirm that principle'.

Mainstream Irish Republicanism was never about militarism for its own sake. As Pearse once wrote to Griffith, 'Nobody will remain in membership of a society in which he is not offered freedom of speech'. The 1916 Proclamation is explicit that 'a permanent national Government' would be 'elected by the suffrages of all her men and women'. There may have been marginal figures, whose commitment to democracy was suspect - the first leader of Fine Gael in 1933 General Eoin O'Duffy springs to mind - but they were very much the exception.

Fianna Fáil did not see force as the solution to any problem. An election advertisement in 1927 stated : 'What Fianna Fáil does NOT STAND FOR. Attacking the North-East..... It will accept existing realities, but will work resolutely to bring partition to an end'.

The challenge facing us in the North today is to create a widely acceptable political order that enables everyone, be they Republicans or Loyalists, to play a full part in democratic life by exclusively constitutional means. Partition itself, majority rule under Stormont, direct rule, none of them were underpinned by democratic legitimacy, let alone consensus. A divided community made the majoritarian democratic models of other societies inappropriate. We need a political accommodation in and with the North, which for the first time can command the consent of both traditions. The British Shadow Secretary of State Mo Mowlam is correct in saying that 'the status quo is not an option'.

I have paid tribute before and will do so again to the work that John Major did with a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach to help create the peace process, including the Downing Street Declaration and the Framework Document. The vision faltered, not only because of difficulties with the Unionists, but because there was not the same passionate conviction and firm guidance coming from the new Government in Dublin. Peace was declared unconditionally by the IRA, on the public

understanding that after a few months and post-Framework Document Sinn Féin would be admitted to talks. The Taoiseach permitted a fatal prevarication by the British, on that commitment, using the red herring of decommissioning. He refused to meet the leaders of Northern Nationalism together to discuss the difficulties. Despite much honest endeavour, which we supported, the peace was lost. The Taoiseach boasted in 1994 that he was the best person to make peace with Unionists. Two and a half years on, he has made no progress. Fianna Fáil as a party that represents Nationalist Ireland is better placed to reach an historic compromise with Unionism, if anyone can. The Downing Street Declaration was the first Irish-inspired initiative to win widespread Unionist and Loyalist support.

No party leader has condemned the resumption of IRA violence more strongly than I have. Our party in Government has always been tough on violence from all sources. Continued IRA activity, even if less lethal than in the past, makes the task of rebuilding the peace process harder, and fosters huge distrust that is a real barrier to progress. In Government, our task will be to work with a new British Government and with the political parties to try to restore peace.

Sinn Féin seeks unconditional recognition of its democratic rights and mandate. It also has democratic obligations. The quid pro quo for full participation in democratic life remains an unconditional and lasting cessation of IRA violence.

Given that, the British Government and the Unionist community cannot exclude a substantial section of the population from full participation in democratic life. We want peace. We want accommodation. We want cooperation, not coercion. The outline of an agreement is there to be negotiated.

We all have a role in building confidence. The gross injustices of the past must be revisited. The prisoners issue will also have to be seriously addressed. Weapons arsenals and military installations must be removed. The revolting punishment beatings and arson attacks must stop. The right to parade is a civil liberty. But what is wrong with showing respect to the sensitivities of others and not going where one is not welcome, the normal rule of civilised co-existence ?

I will seek to build bridges, to use all the experience of partnership and conciliation that I have acquired in twenty years in public life. Inner city Dublin has much in common with inner city Belfast. We share the challenges of creating social justice and equal opportunities together. Ireland North and South, Britain and Europe, are all changing rapidly. We need to review our relationships, and whether there are any good reasons today for sustaining the costly ancient antagonisms.

People in the North know that direct rule is rule by English politicians and civil servants. It is for us to see over time, whether a shared future on this island can

offer the people of the North something more attractive. Are the people of Northern Ireland content to look for a devolved assembly that may be regarded as little more than an English parish council, sovereignty over which resides with English MPs ? Part of the balanced constitutional change we seek is to make all the people of Ireland, North as well as South, sovereign over their own political destiny on the basis set out in the Downing Street Declaration and the Framework Document. I would like to see in an atmosphere free of threat or coercion a debate open up on the totality of relationships in these islands. Fianna Fáil stands behind the principle of consent, reciprocally applied. The only unity of Ireland and its people that we wish is one that can be achieved in peace and agreement. We have taken Tom Kettle's advice that in order to become deeply Irish, we must become European. We have made great material progress in recent times. What we need now to give a new impulse to the whole island, is the spirit of peace.