

Speeches made at meeting of 'People's Democracy' at Belfast City Hall on Wednesday, 18th October, 1968, commencing at 3.0 p.m.

Rory McShane, who acted as Chairman, said:-

We're here to-day to declare that we're not afraid of anything, even the rain, and we'll stay here to give our message (Cheers from crowd). We will stay here to give our message to the people of Belfast and also to these people over here (Cheers from crowd) who have been persuaded by the sectarianism of this community not to take part in this parade, but we'll persuade them, we'll persuade everybody else in Northern Ireland that our cause is just and deserves support (Cheers from crowd). This meeting has been called by the 'People's Democracy', I would hope that this meeting would be carried out in the way that meetings of the 'People's Democracy' are carried out. We will have various speakers here to-day who will talk on the question principally of Civil Rights and the question of the 'People's Democracy'. I would ask one of the organisers and one of the committee of ten, Mr. Boyle, to address the audience, thank you.

Kevin Boyle said:-

Members of the 'People's Democracy' can you hear me? Members of the 'People's Democracy' this is a very important event in our movement, at long last we have reached the City Hall (Cheers from crowd), at long last we have marched through our capital City, at long last we have established the right of conventional protest. Now that we have achieved this I am sure that we will not be beaten. Members of the 'People's Democracy' there are many here to-day who wonder what the 'People's Democracy' is, this body was formed one week ago to-day when a body of students sat down in Linenhall Street..... the right to peaceful protest. We could not march because of one man, and one man alone (Cheers from the crowd). The 'People's Democracy' means to stand out for their rights. On Wednesday evening the students at Queen's University, containing all shades of political and religious opinion, demand their Civil Rights, that principle was founded in the 'People's Democracy' We want Civil Rights for all people - one man one vote (cheers from crowd) and we demand as a Civil Right, free speech. Members of the 'People's Democracy' remember the main object of our procession to-day is the future of our movement. Let me tell you there are many people in this City who feel that now the students have got to the City Hall our marching is finished for Civil Rights. I would like to say from this platform to-day that they are very, very wrong (Cheers from crowd). The 'People's Democracy' does not cease at the gates of the City Hall it demands its Civil Rights (Crowd chanting "Civil Rights") and we demand one man one vote, free speech, more and better homes for those in need, and we will not in our society. These demands will need to be fought for, and the 'People's Democracy' will fight for them (Cheers from crowd). People of Belfast we stand before you with this message. Our message is about the marches to exercise our right to peaceful protest. I resent the ban that was put upon us when we attempted to claim our rights. We appeal to the people of Northern Ireland to support us for we have tried to stand for their rights. Members of the 'People's Democracy' I want to read you a letter we have sent to Church leaders of Northern Ireland. I want the people of Northern Ireland to listen so that they will know that we are able to get above sectarian and religious differences. "This letter comes from an organisation calling itself the 'People's Democracy'. This body is a group of young people mainly students, but including young workers. The organisation will struggle for true Civil Rights in our land, the first principle of the 'People's Democracy' is non-violence (Cheers from crowd). It is based on this principle and the general principles of democracy we have succeeded in rising above the background of distrust, division and all that have been experienced by this unhappy community. The 'People's Democracy' was successful in uniting members of every political and religious opinion that we may achieve fundamental rights and Civil Liberties in Northern Ireland. It follows that we believe that we must find a way of bettering community relations and fight for

equal rights for all citizens. We, therefore, earnestly request you to support our movement leading the people in the cause of Civil Rights, in the cause of

Members of the 'People's Democracy' we are the people who succeeded in uniting the people, we are the future in the eyes of the workless, the homeless, those that have been misled by politicians. We are the future in fighting for Civil rights that is our task and we should not shirk it.

Rory McShane then introduced Nicholas Round who, he said, "A lecturer from the University of Belfast, one who has been involved in this movement for Civil Rights for many years, who has been very prominent in this movement, Mr. Nicholas Round from Spanish Department."

Round said:-

My friends, my colleagues, my brethren, fellow students, this is your moment. But it is not your moment only nor is it the last of such moments that you or your movement will have. The patience, the determination and the wisdom that you have shown over this past week only hold steady that balance of courage and good-will and you will accomplish all that you have set out to accomplish. Let me remind you what that was. The Civil Rights movement here began because too many people in Northern Ireland were made aliens within their own society. Their right to hold jobs had been trifled with, their chance of enriching their lives together These incredible follies the Minister of Home Affairs chose to the explosion these people of their Civil Rights, by accepting as a principle the primitive doctrine Mr. Craig has ~~substituted~~ in Belfast. In Unionist Belfast let him learn it in Derry and let the Unionist minority in those towns learn from the generosity, courage and honourable understanding that the vast majority of Unionist people in this City have shown, and will continue to show to this movement. I detest those people who write anonymous letters to the newspapers, I detest those people whose painful lack of education in humanity and good manners has so obstructed us over the past week let us all learn from the diversity of politics and religion in this demonstration, and from the single-minded purpose and restraint by which all of its members (Cheers from crowd). To-day we begin to fulfill the purpose of our University to educate the community to which we belong in justice, in comradeship and in the pursuit of truth (Cheers from crowd). Last Wednesday the students at Queen's shared in full measure the frustrations of the homeless of Dungannon and the disenfranchised of Derry. To-day we celebrate a freedom which will soon be theirs in great things as well as in small, but the incompleteness of that freedom is in itself the symbol of its urgency and our undone task that the should have been kept off the unattractive flagstones of Shaftesbury Square by the antics of a moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church, and he is neither moderate nor Presbyterian (Cheers from crowd). by a gimcrack Doctorate from a tin-plate American University (Cheers from crowd). It would have been more appropriate if he had been licensed in Montvideo for undischarged bankrupts (Cheers from crowd). That in itself is a mark of the mental sickness which affects the whole intellectually conscious but entrenched section of our society. (Latin quotation unreadable). Let us leave it to prosterity as a concession to a well known local imbecile. (Cheers from crowd). To-day's demonstration has helped to put it there. They have a generation against them, they will not prevail. (Cheers from crowd). We will endeavour to turn the tide with the urgent strategies of our task. Our task is this, we initiate on behalf of the deprived and unrepresented in this province the betterment of conditions, houses, the jobs, the votes, for which unaided they would and do despair. This is the beginning of our efforts, not their climax, we shall make urgent and more urgent the clamour for action We will prepare and discuss and issue across the statute. We shall get them discussed and passed in Stormont and Westminster, if necessary (Cheers from crowd), and in doing so we shall give this province the true example of what it has never yet had, a body politic, which accepts all its members equally. A movement of non-violence and the democracies which is truly of the people (Cheers from crowd).

Rory McShane said:-

The next speaker we have on is Mr. McKeown, who has taken part throughout /the

the discussions on the question of Civil Rights.

Kieran McKeown said:-

We demonstrate to-day, not only got to the City Hall, not only did we exercise to parade the streets in the face of many provocations we demonstrate to-day a new phenomenon, a new massive political phenomenon in Ulster (Cheers from crowd). The moderate must come out, he must be vocal, he must be more vocal, than he was and more than the extremists, the Paisleyites, the Craigs, the Faulkners, and those standing in the wings even now. (Cheers from crowd.), we will shout them down. We are inspired for once by something which is beyond Northern Ireland, we see something beyond the six counties. This generation is far more aware of this than the last generation. That two-thirds of our contemporaries live in daily misery, they live in daily injustice and this is the perspective in which we see our task. One third of a million people, three hundred thousand in war and preparing for war in this community, in this little embittered community, this bigoted little community has a golden opportunity, it's its last opportunity and its the opportunity to use to prove that the community which is divided by hatred can solve its problems by peaceful means. You have given them an example and I would ask you, I would plead, that there is one simple motto which we can have in this movement even though we may say it time and time again, that we are in favour of Civil Rights, let us remember it, that civility is not a sign of weakness and sincerity is always subject to proof. (Cheers).

Rory McShane said:-

Our next speaker is the young lady who was courageous enough in the first instance to file for a march to the City Hall to-day. I would ask you to remain silent while Miss Bernadette Devlin addresses you.

Bernadette Devlin said:-

Members of the 'People's Democracy', people of Belfast, my dear friends on the other side of the street (Cheers from crowd), I have come here with the blessing of the 'People's Democracy' to ask for your, you the people of Belfast, for you the people of Ulster, for us that we have a proper community. I put it to you, people of Belfast, does the ordinary human rights, does it interfere with your society and if it does, people of Belfast, people of Ulster, there is something terribly sick with your society (Cheers from crowd). I put it to you, people of Ulster, what we are asking for is in the simple interests of every man. Is it against a normal social society that every man above the age of twenty-one and possibly eighteen should have the right to make his own opinion felt by having a vote, a say in his own society (Cheers from crowd). I put it to you that by having a vote they are not preventing a healthy society they are making for it. Members of the 'People's Democracy', people of Belfast, does it affect your society that those who need houses, irrespective of their religion, their wealth, or their politics, that families should not have homes. I ask you is it against a normal society to keep people out of their houses simply because building houses for them might interfere with the way you get your votes (Cheers from crowd). I put it to you, people of Belfast, is it fair that the housing question in this community should be evaluated on how many people are likely to vote the people who are in back in again. I put it to you should people be left on the streets simply because in one ward there isn't enough room for them and the government are not willing to put them in another ward (Cheers from crowd) I ask you, people of Ulster, is it fair that people should not be allowed to earn their living like strong Christian men. Should people be deprived of their right to a day's work simply because they go to a different place of worship, is this a healthy society. I put it to you is it in the interests of society that the weaker people get the jobs but the fitter people are left out. If you give a job to a person because of the Church he goes to, because of his politics,

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the job will be done because the best man does not have the job, thereby society is weakened, thereby we as a whole are weakened and on this point we will fall. People of Belfast, I ask you to support jobs for those who gets them on their ability to carry them out (Cheers from crowd). People of Belfast, I ask you is it not a shame that by the Special Powers Act anything that those in power do not agree with automatically becomes illegal, is this the way in a healthy society (Cries of 'No' from the crowd). People of Ulster, my friends across the street, this Special Powers Act will be used against you when you begin to question the Gods in power. (Cheers from crowd). We are all in this, we are the people of Ulster, we have the right to decide if we want the Special Powers Act not half a dozen men sitting in Stormont, it is our decision and we do not want it (Cheers from crowd), therefore, if this was a healthy democratic society, and the majority do not want it, it must go (Cheers from crowd). People of Ulster, we have established here to-day the right of free speech in the future we will establish the right of freedom to process where we will irrespective of sectarian boundaries. This, people of Belfast, is another step in our movement towards Civil Rights. We do not want the kind of community. We do not want ghettos, Protestant or Catholic, we want a healthy, normal society where people can live like Christians, irrespective of what Church they go to (Cheers from crowd). I call on you, members of the 'People's Democracy', people across the street, dear friends, people of Ulster, to support us in demanding, not a political issue, not a sectarian issue, but a human issue. We have the right to protest and we will use it. (Cheers from crowd).

Rory McShane said:-

Our next speaker from the meeting is someone who would prefer to remain nameless, but is someone who has participated very fully in the 'People's Democracy' and in the Civil Rights Movement, I leave it up to yourselves to judge who he is. (Kevin Finnegan of Belfast appeared at the microphone wearing a cap pulled down to his ears and dark sunglasses).

Finnegan said:-

Let me emphasise that it has been a victory, it has been a success, but further let me emphasise that there is a vast number of things that remain to be done. Until we get out of having to parade inside barriers it will remain a sectarian organisation like it or not and that is our aim, there is only one thing we must do make a Civil Rights movement. But let us remember what happened during the week was that Mr. Craig and the Rev. Paisley got together, we never got the details of that, and Mr. Paisley got his Civil Rights, Mr. Craig got his Civil Rights, let those Civil Rights be extended to everybody else (Cheers from crowd)

 this is about Civil Rights for every person in Ulster
 but let everybody here, and let every citizen in Belfast recognise the fact that the efforts must not be lessened, we must continue with the Civil Rights movement and emphasise that it is non-sectarian.

Rory McShane said:-

Our next speaker will be Mr. Joe Martin.

Joe Martin said:-

Members of the 'People's Democracy' I think I might rephrase that to the Students' Democracy, I want to congratulate you all on coming here. I must say it's a splendid success we've had in just being allowed to stand here in front of the City Hall, in front of a bastion, of what stands for Government status quo, I don't think that we should be content with this. I was one of the people who took part in the Derry march which was supposed, they say, to have started this all. When we were marching that day we had as our objective one man one vote, we had as our objective a house for every family; in Derry you must remember there up to six people living in condemned

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houses, we had as our objective a job for every man no matter what his religion, therefore, I do not think that this movement should be allowed to rizzle out, because we now find that we are allowed to stand in front of the City Hall in Belfast (Cheers from crowd), because, remember, standing here, if we're only going to do this is hardly going to do much to get the people in Derry jobs and houses. We must show the Government that we are not going to be bought off by any bribe (Cheers from crowd), we must emphasise to the Government that we are going for more determined than ever before. I would like to point out to the people here to-day that here in Belfast to-day there is an election going on in 'Pottinger, one of the things that we are protesting about here that at the local Government level one man does not have one vote and I leave it up to yourselves what action you should take in this election. Democracy is not being practised in 'Pottinger to-day.

Rory McShane:-

I now call on someone who's a former Chairman of the Conservative and Unionist Association at Queen's University but will speak to us in favour of Civil Rights, Mr. Louis Boyle.

Mr. Louis Boyle said:-

Members of the 'People's Democracy', people of Belfast, I am a Unionist and in company with a number of Unionist colleagues of mine I took part in this march to-day because I believe in Civil Rights (Cheers from crowd). I took part in this parade, this march, to-day because this march is non-sectarian (Cheers from crowd), this march is non-political (Cheers from crowd), this march was peaceful and completely law-abiding and I know that there are a number of members of my party who will deeply criticise me for doing this but I want to say to them that I have a right to take part in this Civil Rights march. The Prime Minister, the members of the Cabinet, the members of the Unionist Party, have in the past have taken part in the Twelfth of July Orange Demonstration (Cheers from crowd) and I would ask them on the way home that there will be no political slogans in this march to-day (Cheers from crowd).

Rory McShane said:-

We have had a message, a message of support and congratulations, from people from Derry, from Mr. John Hume (Cheers from crowd) on the success of this march to-day, and giving them courage for their people who will have a peaceful sit-down next Saturday in Derry (Cheers from crowd), and those are the scheduled speakers we have. Is there anyone here who would like to address the meeting?

Unidentified student - Northern Ireland accent:-

Fellow students and well wishers from Ulster we are standing at Belfast City Hall to-day, it is not by the grace of Mr. Craig, it is not by the grace of District Inspector Bradley, and it is certainly not by the grace of a man well known who calls himself Dr. Paisley. We are here by the grace of our own determination for Civil Rights in a country which doesn't know what Civil Rights is (Cheers from crowd).

Unidentified man, not a student, local accent:-

Hullo, everybody. The black gestapo tried to arrest this man for nothing a few minutes ago. For those agitators who try to push down your throats and our throats, the Paisleyite crowd, this man was pushed about and they were trying to get him arrested by the gestapo, R.U.C.S.S. Have we no Civil Rights. Ulster people support you and grind the black gestapo into the ground (Prolonged cheers from crowd).

Ross, an English student, said:-

Over here this might be seen as something you can argue about. You apparently can argue about Civil Rights and about one man one vote, this must be the only country in western Europe where you could argue about one man having

one vote. I want to make it clear to the Paisleyites we just don't want one vote for one man, Protestant or Catholic, we want them for the Paisleyites, we want them for everyone. There are many people over there, supporters of Paisley, who are jeering against us, let's now make it quite clear to them we want all them to have a vote, all of them to have their say too, we want proper democracy, not just for one section of the community but for all the sections of the community (Cheers from crowd). There are also many people who say you can't achieve democracy by marches such as this but it's not much good sitting on your backside doing nothing so we come out to tell people what we are trying to do. This is what we have done to-day, three thousand members of the University, more than half of the students in this University, supported by many members of the public are doing more to-day than has been done in all the years up to now. Thank you all very much for turning up and I hope that you won't let this matter drop, that we'll keep going until Civil Rights have been achieved for everyone. (Cheers from crowd).