

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR BRIAN FAULKNER, ADDRESSING THE
CLEVELY COMMITTEE AT A MEETING IN THE STORMONT HOTEL, 7 30 PM,
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The events in Londonderry at the weekend were a tragedy. They were tragic in themselves, in that there was considerable loss of human life. What is also tragic is that those events are being used as a lever to prise the two sections of the Ulster community further apart. Yet one must hope that when people have had time to reflect on what has happened that they will be drawn up short before this situation and forced to rethink their attitudes.

Regrettably, in the meantime, while good sense is numbed by shock, there are all too many people willing to exploit grief, to play on emotions and to sweep ordinary citizens along paths which can only lead to further misery, bitterness and suffering. These propaganda vultures who feed on a people whose suffering they have brought about bear a grave responsibility. For there is no getting round this fact: if there had been no marching in defiance of the law in Londonderry on Sunday there would have been no confrontations and there would have been no deaths. Some months ago ^{Mr Fitt,} the Leader of the Opposition, reviewing the situation then, wondered aloud whether all the agitation in which he had taken part had been worthwhile. How much more forcibly must he and others like him ask the same question of themselves today.

Once again we have seen Mr Lynch's Government jump in at a time of stress in Northern Ireland to act as a disruptive and divisive catalyst. The Dublin Government seem unable to resist the temptation to get in on the act when Northern Ireland is in the headlines. Their only contribution in terms of policy is to pretend that they could swallow the Ulster problem by absorbing Northern Ireland into the Republic, when anyone with any sense of economics, politics or military strategy knows that what Mr Lynch proposes would be not only a disaster for the citizens of Northern Ireland but would cripple the whole island in almost every sense of the word. This time Mr Lynch's contribution is openly to provide finance for subversion in Northern Ireland. We know from bitter experience what this entails. On the last occasion, barely two years ago, on which his Government set aside money for Northern Ireland, it was officially earmarked for the relief of distress in Northern Ireland. It is no secret that large sums of this money were used to provide guns for murderers in Northern Ireland. How much more should we therefore be wary of funds being voted in Dublin for "political action".

All that Mr Lynch is doing - or indeed anyone who dangles into the political arena the prospect of a united Ireland - is to postpone a very necessary

political stocktaking by the minority in Northern Ireland which will show them not just that they cannot hope to coerce the million or so Unionist-minded majority - that is the negative side - but also that there is a worthwhile place for them in Northern Ireland.

The tragic events not just of Londonderry but throughout Northern Ireland over the past two years or so must bring both sides of the community in Northern Ireland face to face with one basic fact: our problems can only be satisfactorily solved through agreement between sensible, responsible Ulstermen of both religious persuasions. As I have said, Dublin could not solve the problem and, although London can give and has given tremendous help, solutions cannot come from there either. Direct rule, sometimes advanced as a panacea, would certainly create more and lasting problems than it would solve. And as to removing security powers to Westminster I can only say that it is my considered opinion that this would be "back door" direct rule, possibly even less desirable than straightforward direct rule and it would make matters decidedly worse in Northern Ireland. Those who have advocated the removal of security powers to Westminster in the aftermath of the gun battle in Londonderry and the confrontation of marchers and security forces must realise that last Sunday's security operations in Londonderry would not have been affected in the slightest by such a transfer of powers. For does anyone imagine for a moment that if the British Government - of either Party - held direct security powers in the present situation that they would not have put a ban on all marching and parading, in the interests of public safety? Of course they would have introduced a ban - it would be a gross dereliction of duty not to do so. And having imposed it could a Conservative or a Labour Government have allowed agitators openly and massively to have flaunted the law. Again, the answer is of course not. So on that particular issue, which has been highlighted this week, the practical difference which would have flowed from security being handled from London would have been precisely nil.

The propaganda persists - and is parroted on all sides - that political deadlock exists in Northern Ireland and that some great shake-up is required to break this deadlock. But is that true? To me the word deadlock suggests that two sides in an argument have reached the position where neither is prepared to go any further in the direction of the other's position. That is certainly not the case in the Northern Ireland situation. The Northern Ireland Government may be slandered every day of the week as a fascist junta anxious only to beat the Catholics into the ground and achieve a military victory. But the fact of the matter is that the elected representatives of the minority have no need to voice their case or their views on the streets, thereby endangering public safety - they have the forum of Parliament and they have an open and pressing

invitation from the Government - who, let it not be forgotten, are the democratically elected representatives of the majority, to sit down and reach sensible agreed solutions to our problems. There is no use their demanding Unionist capitulation - that will never be given. There is no use their making impossible pre-conditions to talking. They must come, as we are already willing to come, not as the victors or as the vanquished but as equal citizens of Northern Ireland willing to play their part in re-vitalising our community and to rebuild for the future.

PROPOSAL FOR INTER-PARTY TALKS

I wonder, therefore, if the needs of the country do not justify a further new approach; a serious attempt to bring the various political interests represented here together, for frank and wide-ranging discussion. Nothing, of course, could be expected of any such initiative if those involved were not prepared to accept certain ground-rules. In effect, we would have to accept a limited period of political self-restraint. The following conditions would also, I think, have to be satisfied:-

- (i) The discussions would have to be genuinely broadly-based and representative of the full spectrum of views in both Houses of Parliament.
- (ii) They would be open-ended as to time, and in this respect the Recess might be very suitable.
- (iii) While those Parties with a policy of seeking constitutional change would not, of course, be expected in any way to derogate from that policy the discussions could not be expected to make headway unless conducted in terms of the existing constitutional framework - that is to say, Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom with its own Government and Parliament.
- (iv) A condition of taking part would be an agreement in advance that any statements made from or about the discussions would be agreed statements, even if in the event they merely had to record failure to agree.
- (v) The purpose of discussions would be to seek some measure of common ground in restoring peace and stability, and resuming social and economic advance.

I now invite representatives of all Parties and interests in this House to give this experiment in quiet and patient discussion a serious trial; and I will be in direct touch with all of them to see whether we could get these talks off the ground.

I am, I hope, a realist, I expect no instantaneous agreed solutions to all the problems which have divided us. On many matters we would no doubt continue to differ, and resume the party conflict which is a feature of democratic life. But let us also see if there is at any rate some area of common ground, however small. I think that is no less than our duty to the concerned and anxious people who have sent us here to represent them.