



Northern Ireland Office

Press Notice

Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AJ. Telephone Enquiries 01-930 4300 ext. 276 or 277
Stormont Castle, Belfast, BT4 3ST. Telephone Enquiries Belfast 63011

NIO/2/16

Stormont Castle, Belfast
28 February 1977

THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF A SPEECH BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, RT HON ROY MASON MP, AT A LUNCHEON FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF NORTHERN IRELAND WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS AT STORMONT HOUSE TODAY (MONDAY 28 FEBRUARY 1977):

Within the past few weeks I have had the opportunity to have further talks with a number of the principal political parties in Northern Ireland. I thought it would be useful to review the situation as I see it.

Since I took office in September of last year I have encouraged local political parties to seek common ground on which devolved government could be built in the Province.

Those of you who know me - and that I think means most of you - know that I don't waffle. I must say to you frankly that I see little sign as yet that the major parties are willing to come together or reach a compromise on the areas of disagreement which exist. I find it regrettable, but it is a fact, that constructive discussion among the political parties appears for the moment to have ground to a halt.

Over the years there has been movement on all sides. I believe that the majority of the people of Northern Ireland would like to see that movement continuing. The parties and the people of Northern Ireland wish to see the return of a regional government to the Province.

Perhaps not enough credit has been given for the efforts which have been made within the parties to arrive at some common ground. Certainly, neither of the main groupings gives the other enough credit for concessions or even gestures. The SDLP have shown that they are willing to work within the framework of Northern Ireland as part of the UK. The Unionist groupings have offered a far greater possibility of minority participation than, eg in 1969. And four of the seven main political parties (SDLP, Alliance, UPNI and NI Labour Party) now favour partnership in Government.

I welcome these movements. What we are really talking about now is the bridging of the remaining gap between the communities. The Government of the United Kingdom is concerned that that gap should be bridged.

The obstacles are the unwillingness of some politicians to move away from certain established positions. On the one hand some have taken their stance on simple majority rule; others have insisted on certain institutional arrangements. Now everyone must realise that a devolved government in Northern Ireland cannot be achieved while people take up such entrenched attitudes. Recent history demonstrates that in the circumstances of Northern Ireland there must be some form of flexibility on all sides, allowing for partnership in government if it is to be viable. A refusal to recognise this fact encourages the men of violence to believe that they can pre-empt the role of the politicians of the Province. And you all know that the conspiracies of the evil men of violence cannot be allowed to succeed.

Parliament speaks for the people of the United Kingdom - I emphasise: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. And Parliament has clearly said - indeed all the major parties in Parliament have clearly said - that there should be a devolved government in the Province based on co-operation and partnership. Northern Ireland has repeatedly asserted its right to remain as a part of the United Kingdom. This right is clearly recognised in British Government policy and in Acts of the UK Parliament. Northern Ireland will therefore remain within the United Kingdom for as long as the majority of people here wish it to do so. But that right carries with it both privileges and responsibilities. And that includes the responsibility to accept the will of Parliament.

I am not talking here only to that majority section of the population which places emphasis on the Union. I am addressing also those members of the community who regard themselves as the minority in those terms. They, too, have privileges and responsibilities within the UK. They have every right to retain their political views. But they must also recognise that they are members of the society within which they live. Those who represent them have a duty to take the broad view of the need to sustain the forces of law and order within the community and to accept the will of Parliament.

It is worth recalling that in 1969 the Stormont Government of the day, faced with widespread riot and disorder, asked for help from the forces of the United Kingdom. That help was readily given. It continues to be given and we must all be grateful to the security forces who do so much to protect the community. But at what sacrifice of lives of policemen, soldiers, UDR men and reservists. It should not be forgotten either that violence did not begin with the introduction of

Direct Rule; death and disorder already stalked the streets and for three years of the 'troubles' there was a Stormont Parliament with majority rule in existence. I say this in no sense of recrimination. I merely wish to put in perspective the fact that the causes of violence in Northern Ireland cannot be laid at the door of successive Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland or of the security policies followed by successive Governments. The initial causes were deep-seated. Many of them have since been eradicated not only by the Government at Westminster but also, I readily acknowledge, by the Stormont Parliament itself. I think, for example, of 'one man, one vote' at local government elections, of fair housing allocations and so on.

Yet the violence goes on. Today surely it must be obvious to all that it is violence which is doomed to failure. The terrorists must clearly understand that it is precisely their campaign of murder and destruction which ensures the continued presence of British forces on the streets in Northern Ireland.

We are now embarked on a clear course of action: to take all steps within the law as established in a democratic society to put an end to wanton violence. The security forces required to deal with such violence will remain for as long as they are needed. The community has my assurance on that. But the British Government has no wish to keep its soldiers in action in Northern Ireland for one day longer than they are needed to maintain the security of the Province. When the level of violence is such that they are no longer needed they will be withdrawn to their garrisons - but not before.

Let no-one believe that the Government or the people of the United Kingdom will be intimidated or forced to give way in the face of violence. The terrorists must clearly understand that they cannot - and will not - achieve any objective through their vicious campaign of murder and destruction. Now it would obviously be quite wrong to discount the fact that many people are imbued with Republican ideals. But do they fully realise how those ideals have been devalued and disgraced by the activities of those who have deserted the ballot box and resorted to violence? Their use of violence cannot advance the Republican cause. Quite the reverse.

There have been throughout the history of Ireland, and there still are, people who would wish to see a United Ireland and who are prepared to work by political means to achieve that. Others are diametrically opposed to this objective and they are equally entitled to hold their views. In terms of real politics, where there is no prospect of long-term agreement on matters of principle, there is a choice between confrontation and co-operation. The past few years in Northern Ireland have shown where confrontation can lead. Can anyone now

doubt that any support which the terrorists may have received in the past has rapidly faded. Witness the spontaneous rise of various across-the-board movements for peace, amongst Trade Unionists, students and ordinary citizens throughout the Province. Witness, too, the conviction of some 900 terrorists last year in the courts - the result of co-operation not only between Army and police, but of the security forces and the community at large.

The community as a whole has realised that the terrorists stand for nothing, that they are achieving no political aims and are on the road to nowhere, leaving a trail of sorrow and anger in their wake. If there is a political cause, those who believe in it must take political steps to bring their views into the area of public sympathy and understanding. They may not succeed. But at least they may contribute towards the general understanding. They may help persuade some of those who at the moment regard the Republican ideal as synonymous with violence. If Republicans want to politicise, then they must give up their bombs and bullets and act through the ballot box.

Now finally, if the political parties in Northern Ireland are not prepared to come to a community of view; if the tiny minority of people who seek to follow the politics of violence are not prepared to accept that there is another way, then Northern Ireland must face a long hard road. But I believe it is possible to create an agreed framework within which a devolved government can be achieved.

In the meantime I fully accept the responsibility of governing Northern Ireland and guarding its interests within the context of the United Kingdom as a whole. But let us be quite clear: the future of Northern Ireland in terms of a devolved government lies in the willingness of the people of Northern Ireland to work together within it. That fact must be faced realistically and the sooner the better. It must be the aim of all true democrats to get on with the job of achieving an agreed solution as soon as possible.

A spokesman for the Department said the drive to achieve greater energy efficiency was even more important in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom due to the significantly higher costs of energy here. The Department hoped that the wider availability of Government grants would encourage the implementation of more energy conservation projects.

The Scheme applies to most non-domestic energy consumers with the exception of public and local authorities. Examples of projects likely to be eligible are:-