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Address by the Taoiseach, Mr. J. Lynch, at Garden of Remembrance  
Ceremony, Dublin, 11th July, 1971

Today we mark the 50th Anniversary of the Anglo-Irish Truce which came into effect on the 11th July, 1921.

It was the ending of centuries of conflict with England and heralded the beginning of Irish independence.

In the 50 years which have elapsed it becomes possible to see the Truce as the beginning of a new relationship between the English and the Irish and not just a temporary end to violence and bloodshed. For the first time in this ancient connection the will of the Irish people, democratically expressed in their own choice of their political leadership, had achieved a response from a British Government which admitted that the arrangements between the two islands should be discussed and negotiated. Whatever happened thereafter in Ireland, whatever the mistakes made, whatever the goals unreached, there stands out clearly the fact that on the 11th July 1921 Britain had finally been brought to agree to recognise the Irish nation.

How have we used the measure of freedom achieved? Each one of us will answer this question by reference to his or her own appreciation of the aims of the generations gone before us; by reference to his or her own contribution to the present and by reference to his or her own expectations for the future. For myself, I would consider it fair to recall that in the lifetime of many of us we have survived civil war, economic war and world war. By our own efforts, in these past 50 years, we have established an economy which is so far in advance of the position 50 years ago as to bear little comparison with our condition when Dáil Éireann first began to assume the responsibilities of governing. I would also consider the contributions we have made and continue to make in international affairs and to world organisations - by no means inconsiderable in relation to our human and material resources. I would consider also the great and heartening increase in the number of young people who now remain at home and to whom responsibility for the country can safely be passed in their time with full confidence in their qualities and abilities. I would consider too the prospect awaiting us of entry to the European Economic Communities if the Irish people should so decide. In such an exercise of sovereignty they are free, thanks to the men and women whom we commemorate today, to decide for themselves where the future of Ireland lies.

Having considered these, among other things, my reply would be that we have justified the struggle for our freedom and that we have fulfilled many of the hopes and aims of those who fought for our freedom and maintained our separate identity through centuries.

But there still remains the division of Ireland. As long as it lasts the North remains unable to contribute its energies, its skills, its resources to the Irish nation - and the whole country is the poorer for that.

In looking today at the predicament which afflicts contemporary society in Northern Ireland and affects the public mind and tranquility throughout the whole island I see no advance to be made by engaging in discussion as to whose was the greatest responsibility 50 years ago for the failure then of political thought and action in these islands out of which our country became divided. It must



be clear now, even if it was not admitted then, that in a country of such diverse traditions as ours, so intermingled physically and culturally, geographic separation could not and cannot solve the kind of problem that we have. There are many different kinds of Irishmen; there are not two separate Irelands.

To anyone who holds otherwise, it should be sufficient to say that hardly more than 60% - if even that - of the Northern population feel any sense of hereditary obligation to another sovereignty; that they form a majority in less than half the area of part of our Northern province and that their greater loyalty is to their own idea of themselves. None of those things warrants breaking Ireland in two.

Perhaps the national majority need to examine their consciences in relation to the national minority. Have our political concepts been sufficiently wide to include them? Have we been considerate enough about the things they believe in as passionately as we might believe otherwise? Do we agree that as John Hewitt writes, they "have rights drawn from the soil and sky" which are as good as any title held by any previous migration into Ireland?

If we can answer these questions to their benefit, then we are entitled to suggest that the constitutional predilections of the Northern majority should take second place to their being Irish. I believe that the notion of being Irish is not the prerogative of sectional interests; it is not a private possession. To make it so is further to divide.

The division of Ireland has been compounded in no small measure by thoughtless misrepresentations on all sides. The resort to casual violence and the deaths of many people are frightening realities. Those who allow themselves to be caught in webs of intense feeling do not understand their own situation. To hold seriously to the view that Partition is a paper wall, to be unmade by a stroke of legislation, is to indulge in an irresponsible and dangerous flight from reality. It fails to gauge the true condition and temper of the Irish people, North and South.

We should never forget that each act of violence, by whomsoever or in whatever manner done, is a declaration of intent that peaceful progress will not be tolerated. The national majority have the primary duty and responsibility if they wish to make progress towards the achievement of Irish unity by agreement. They must come to terms with the fact that the process will be slow, sometimes frustrating and sometimes painful. In searching for common ground we must take account of these things which work against understanding. Among these, fear ranks first. It is an all pervasive thing. Violence is born out of fear, fear of the truth, fear for the future, fear even of understanding. Many people, North and South, are afraid of what a united Irish society might mean for them. They fear what change might do to them, to their families, to their way of life. They fear to admit the legitimacy of opinions of which they cannot personally approve.

Perhaps this derives mainly from a past which has all too frequently been characterised by mutual suspicion. It is, nevertheless, also a past in which we take our several pride. For the present and for the future of our country there should be no shirking the fact that society, being a live and varied thing, responds to change and must be



responsive to change, when change comes about in terms of Irish unity.

In my speech last July on the eve of the Orange parades I mentioned "the other great tradition in Ireland and in our history - that of the majority in the North". Those who share in that tradition need no reassurance from us. For many reasons that tradition refuses to enter the main stream of the cultural life of our country. It is a source of sadness to me as an Irishman thus to see its perspective dimmed; to see it severed from its own cultural hinterland; to see it set adrift without adequate moorings either here in Ireland or in Britain. It too, must change in the direction of tolerance and brotherhood and away from provocation.

The Government have stated, many times, our view that Ireland should be united. We have made it clear that the unification we seek is one obtained by agreement. There is no threat in this way to any fair demand of the national minority. In these circumstances and in the light of the friendly relations which exist between the peoples of Ireland and Britain we consider it unwise to continue the kind of guarantee to the North which makes intransigence a virtue and silences reason. The Ireland Act, 1949, pledges British support, financial and military, as well as British prestige, in a manner which is inconsistent both with the decisions taken and what George V said 50 years ago. Its principal result, in its present form is to encourage infamous conduct, represented again and again, on the streets of Belfast and Derry and elsewhere throughout the North.

It would take nothing away from the honour of Britain or the rights of the majority in the North if the British Government were to declare their interest in encouraging the unity of Ireland, by agreement, in independence and in a harmonious relationship between the two islands.

This second historic step would forward the work begun fifty years ago when Britain and the Irish nation agreed to a Truce. If it were taken, men of goodwill, in or out of office, North and South, could begin to discuss their differences without the constant threats of unholy crusades.

We commemorate today the men and women, some of whom sacrificed their lives, others their liberties and others their health or fortune to bring us to the historic decision which the Truce represented. Some of them are, happily, still with us; having served Ireland first as soldiers, they later served as politicians, administrators and in many other capacities. Some died when brothers later fought against each other. Others died in the fulness of time having contributed their entire lives first to attaining freedom and then to the management of our affairs.

This Garden of Remembrance and the statue we have today dedicated to the men and women who gave their lives - so that we should be free - and gave their talents - so that we should use our freedom well - are the least tokens of a nation's respect and gratitude. They would ask of us, and expect of us as well, a new determination to make our country worthy of the history whose greatest chapters include them.

It is still our earnest desire to bring about a lasting peace between the peoples of Ireland and Britain. But we still await the necessary political decisions elsewhere.



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I quote from a letter addressed to Lloyd George by President de Valera on 10th August, 1921:

"As regards the question at issue between the political minority and the great majority of the Irish people, that must remain a question for the Irish people themselves to settle. We cannot admit the right of the British Government to mutilate our country, either in its own interest or at the call of any section of our population; we do not contemplate the use of force. If your Government stands aside, we can effect a complete reconciliation".

This still represents our hopes, our motives, our convictions.

Surely enough bitterness and unhappiness have resulted from the division of our country to demonstrate that policy cannot continue along a negative path and that enough time has passed for statesmen to set positive forward-looking guidelines. The recurrence of bloodshed and bigotry in the North demonstrates the unwisdom of continuing policies which encourage the perpetuation of the influence and even authority of the least attractive elements among the Northern community. It is clear that the reconciliation which President de Valera called for 50 years ago with the endorsement of men like Collins, Brugha and Griffith and of all of you who fought together; that reconciliation which now again is increasingly advocated by men of goodwill whatever their political principles might be, remains fundamental both to peace in the North and to harmony in Ireland. Surely we have shown in all the decades of our independence a sufficient care for other men's beliefs to convince Britain and the Northern majority that the unity of Ireland carries no threat to any of their real interests.

The imposed "settlement" of 50 years ago was unwelcome for various reasons to all parts of Ireland. To have given it a new and different guarantee almost 30 years later, in the Ireland Act, 1949, was out of accord with the prospect begun by the Truce of establishing permanent relations of friendship between Ireland and Britain based on the unity in independence of Ireland.

Let us today rededicate ourselves to reconciliation among Irishmen, North and South. Let us also rededicate ourselves to the management of our affairs in such a way as to continue to increase the happiness and prosperity of all the Irish people. Let us do these things in a spirit of goodwill and with respect for human dignity.

This is how we can best honour those whom we commemorate. This is what they would demand mostly of us.

Ag féachaint siar dúinn, is ro-shóiléar nach bhfuil deireadh fós leis an saothar ar cuireadh tús leis caoga bliain ó shoin ach, mar a dúirt mé ar ócáid stáiriúil eile, guím go raibh sé de dhóchas againn go dtabharfar dúinn an naisiun seo a thabhairt slán tré gach fadhb agus gach deacracht a thiocfaidh anuas orainn ionas go dtuillimis buíochas na nglúine a thiocfaidh inár ndiaidh, faoi mar a thuill ár sinsear an onóir atá a thairiscint dóibh ar an láthair seo inniu.