

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

Reference Code:	2003/17/271
Title:	Text of a speech made by the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch TD, when opening the Special Adjournment Debate in Dáil Éireann on the Northern Ireland situation. The speech refers to the recent events of 'Bloody Sunday', 30 January 1972, in Derry; subsequent attacks on the British Embassy in Dublin and actions by members of illegal organisations; proposals to alleviate the situation in Northern Ireland; and the necessary conditions for a united Ireland.
Creation Date(s):	3 February, 1972
Level of description:	Item
Extent and medium:	6 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

3rd February 1972

N1/2/1
Text of speech made by the Taoiseach, Mr. John Lynch T.D.,
opening the special Adjournment Debate in Dáil Éireann on
the Northern Ireland situation

On Monday night on television and again on Tuesday in the Dáil I expressed the nation's grief at the happenings in Derry last Sunday. I expressed sympathy with those who were bereaved, those who were injured and with the people of Derry generally. I think it is true to say that grief and sympathy were hardly ever more sincerely felt, nor more widespread in this country, certainly not in my lifetime. I also announced on Monday night that the Government had called for a special day of mourning and I appealed to everybody who could in any way contribute to, or facilitate, that mourning to do so. I should like to express my appreciation of the manner in which those in positions of authority facilitated the day of mourning.

I appeal to everybody to respond to these tragic events with dignity and with discipline. There were demonstrations of sympathy in every part of the country. People in their tens of thousands responded magnificently and they attended church services. Indeed, it is true to say that the entire nation mourned. What was important too, was that the vast majority marked yesterday in peaceful demonstration, a demonstration of their grief, of their sympathy and of their solidarity with the people who were bereaved and with their friends and, in general, demonstrated their sympathy and solidarity with the deprived minority in the North of Ireland. In this way they showed that in these difficult days there is a degree of unanimity and solidarity that was an example to the entire world and which gave encouragement and strength to the people in the North. For all this I commend all our people and congratulate them on the magnificent way they responded. I thank them for their wonderful gesture of solidarity and unanimity.

Regrettably, the situation had its dark spots. In Dublin yesterday many thousands of our people representing the different organisations, the trade unions, State bodies, students and, indeed, people from every walk of life showed their sorrow in a most disciplined way. However, a small minority - men who, under the cloak of patriotism, seek to overthrow the institutions of this State - infiltrated what was necessarily a peaceful demonstration, infiltrated essentially peaceful groups and fomented violence. As we know the British Embassy has been destroyed but I want to say that the nation gains no credit from such an action. It was the action of people who are dangerous, who, above all, are a danger to our freedom, our democracy and to our institutions of freedom and democracy.

Unfortunately that incident was not the end of the matter and since then other danger signals have manifested themselves. Groups proclaiming to be members of illegal organisations have gone around intimidating people and seeking to give the impression that these organisations are now to have a free hand here to do what they like by way of intimidation or destruction. At the outset of what I intend saying, I wish to reassure those of our people who, understandably, may be apprehensive or who may have become concerned at some of yesterday's events, that the institutions of this State will be upheld without fear or favour. The laws will continue to be enforced and those who seek to usurp the functions of the Government will meet with no toleration. I reaffirm those fundamental principles here today and I ask every member of the community and every Member of the Dáil to support the Government stand on this. The Government stand is the stand of the elected representatives of our people regardless of which side of the

-2-

House they sit and regardless of whether they are in this House or the other. In the days immediately ahead there is no doubt that those to whom I have referred will seek to play on the sympathies and on the emotions of ordinary decent people so as to secure support for their own actions and objectives. Many people in other countries - indeed throughout the world - are watching our reaction to the recent tragic events. The present situation is a test of our maturity as a nation. We must show the world that, with dignity and restraint, we can express our grief and our support for the minority in the North without, at the same time, playing into the hands of those who would destroy our own fundamental institutions. Therefore, I ask all men and women of goodwill and of responsibility and especially those in positions of influence and, perhaps, those who are engaged in the communications media, to be on their guard against the kind of danger to which I have referred.

This debate, perhaps, has been precipitated by the tragic events of last Sunday. Before the Government took action on Monday, we had received reports from sources that we believe to be absolutely reliable and since then we have been able to check these reports against more reports and especially against reports made by people who were eye-witnesses of these events, people who were actually on the spot. In this respect I would like to refer to the claim by the commanding officer of the British Forces in Derry last Sunday that 200 rounds were fired at his troops as well as nail bombs and other missiles. So far as I know and so far as has been stated publicly, not one of these troops was injured either by bullets or nail bombs. They may have sustained minor injuries in scuffles but there were no casualties as a result of these alleged shootings and the throwing of bombs. The same officer claimed that shots had come from flats, that there were snipers on the roofs of these flats which, I understand, were high rise flats in the immediate vicinity, but the stark fact remains that all those who were killed or injured were people on the ground and people who were about to attend, and some of whom had already attended, a public meeting which had begun already. Therefore, to that extent, what these people were doing then was not illegal according to the decrees of the Stormont Government. The march was banned. Therefore, one presumes that under their laws it was illegal to take part in the march but it had concluded at the time the paratroopers fired on these people attending the meeting who, at that stage, were about their lawful business and demonstrating in a lawful way even by Stormont's standards.

As I have said, reports that we received were confirmed by other independent sources and I would direct the attention of Members to the statement of an Italian journalist who must be regarded as being completely impartial and who, so far as I know, said that no shot was fired from the crowds that were demonstrating before the British paratroopers opened fire. I would direct the attention of the House also to a statement made by a very prominent journalist of a very prominent British newspaper who said that he was there all the time, that he thought he heard one shot that might have come from the direction of where the meeting was being convened. He wrote in his notebook "sniper" after which he put a question mark. This gentleman has said that that was the only shot he heard before the paratroopers fired and, obviously, by his own admission and by the record in his notebook, he was not convinced that the shot had come from the direction of the demonstration. It was on these facts that the Government took their decision on Monday to withdraw the Ambassador from London, to instruct our diplomats abroad to inform the Governments to which they were accredited of the facts of the situation as we had got them.

-3-

I also put forward the three proposals with which the House is familiar. I should like to repeat them because I believe they are essential if any move forward is to be made. First, the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Derry and other areas in the North of Ireland where there is a high concentration of Catholic homes and the cessation of the harassment of the minority population. I believe that it was because of raids and repressive measures by the British troops in these areas that much of the violence that since has come about in the North of Ireland was caused. In speaking about harassment, I intended to cover the cratering of Border roads, which, I am convinced now more than ever I was, have no military effect or benefit whatever. It was done, as a result of repeated statements by a junior Minister in Stormont, to appease him, in the first instance, and to embarrass us in the second. Not only has it done both - it obviously has appeased the one and embarrassed the other - but it has incensed decent people on both sides of the Border against this type of activity, and has not prevented one person who had evil intent from crossing the Border. Therefore, not only was that kind of action undertaken for the reasons I said but it is militarily futile. The other two proposals I made were the end of internment without trial and a declaration of Britain's intention to achieve the final settlement of the Irish question and the convocation of a conference for this purpose.

I recognise that some of these proposals may not be immediately possible. I am certain that the withdrawal of the troops from the areas I mentioned is immediately possible and would be a first step towards the restoration of peace and the elimination of violence in the North. The second, too, the end of internment without trial, obviously will take some time because if those who are interned are brought to trial a suitable tribunal will have to be established. When I mentioned, having spoken to Mr. Harold Wilson on last Monday week, that I thought it might be possible to find a formula to induce the Nationalists and the SDLP Members of Stormont into talks, and that this might be one of the ways, I want to say clearly that I was in no way dictating to these minority leaders as to what their attitude should be.

However, since the events which gave rise to these proposals resulted out of a demonstration to establish civil rights, I would add one other proposal which I think would also be very quickly implemented. As Deputies are aware, especially Deputies who are delegates to the Council of Europe, some time ago the Council of Europe Assembly made a recommendation to the Committee of Ministers:

(1) To instruct the Committee of Experts on Human Rights to draft an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights which would secure the equal treatment of persons in the enforcement of the law and prohibit discrimination in the exercise of the following rights:

- (i) the right to participate with equal voting rights in national and local elections based on the fair delineation of electoral boundaries;
- (ii) the right of access to employment, particularly in central and local government services, in State and semi-State companies and public bodies financed wholly or partly out of central or local government funds and in private industries partly financed or subsidised by State or local funds;
- (iii) the right to the equitable allocation of dwellings and of resources required to provide dwellings wholly or partly financed out of public funds;
- (iv) the right of access to the public service.

-4-

The Assembly in their wisdom thought it necessary to add these to the Convention on Human Rights. I would now suggest to the British Government that they could amend their Northern Ireland legislation, which they have authority and power to amend, that is, the Government of Ireland Act, 1920 or the 1949 Act, to include these specific principles, so that, instead of depending on the goodwill, the declaration, or whims, as the case may be of an administration in which people have lost all confidence, these people would legally enjoy those rights, and enforce such rights if they were not accorded to them. This, I suggest, could be done by simple amendment and done very quickly.

May I say in reference to demonstrations that I hope it will be possible to hold next Sunday's demonstration in a way that will not provoke the kind of action that we saw last Sunday in Derry, that it will not provoke the deliberate shooting down of innocent people by paratroopers. It may be that such a demonstration could be held within the law and equally effectively. That is not a matter for me to decide, but it is a consideration I would urge on those who are responsible and who rightly want to demonstrate to achieve those rights. It is known by now that I had a visit from the British Ambassador and this is one of the questions we discussed. It is not for me to say what passed between us. We also discussed the burning of the Embassy and I reiterated the Government's regret and our intention, as is the practice, to provide full compensation. He did not indicate to me whether there was any response so far to the proposals that I put to the British Government last Monday.

I want to refer to the suggestion that the Leaders of the three parties should go to London, which Deputy Cosgrave raised in the House here on Tuesday. I had intended to discuss this matter with Deputy Cosgrave and Deputy Corish, but unfortunately the changed Order of Business and the visit of the British Ambassador precluded me from doing so. However, I hope to discuss it with them later. We, as political parties representing the people here, have publicly stated our unanimity and our solidarity and I would say we have the support of the vast majority of the people in our approach to this question. It may be that such a visit would endorse this solidarity, that as Deputy Cosgrave said, the meeting may do good but not do harm. I should like to consider this very carefully before I would make any comment on such a visit.

Mr. Corish: The Taoiseach will make a decision before the weekend?

The Taoiseach: Not before I discuss the matter with Deputy Corish and Deputy Cosgrave. There is more we can do in this present situation. As I said, we are all solid and united in our approach to this problem. We are committed to a peaceful solution of the Northern Ireland situation. In talking of the future of Ireland, it is impossible not to reflect also on present policies being pursued in the North. Those lie at the heart of any discussions that we may have here among ourselves or otherwise.

The attempt to reimpose traditional Unionism, whose vision is narrow and self-defeating, will certainly end in total failure. I have no doubt about this. The political leadership of the non-Unionist community in the North have no doubt about it. Indeed, no objective observer - even though he might be British - European, American, or otherwise, doubts that this cannot happen either. It would be fair to say, in fact, that the published comments of most journalists, and the private views expressed to me and to the Minister for Foreign Affairs by most political leaders in other countries, are insistent that the policy of return to monopoly Unionist Government is now impossible.

The State itself was founded for the purpose of ensuring the ascendancy of one community there at the expense of another. I do not know of any other State - until the Eastern European countries were established after the last war - which was deliberately founded on the basis of keeping in power permanently one section of the population. I do not know either of any State which is less representative of the true meaning of Protestantism than the Northern State. The right to freedom of conscience was a fundamental of the Reformation. The practices of Government in Northern Ireland are certainly not in accord with these principles of Protestantism.

I know from many contacts I have that a great many Protestants in Northern Ireland seek peace and justice as much as their Catholic neighbours do. I also know that many of them have come to the belief that, within the limits of the Northern State, it is not possible to find peace with justice and that their minds, therefore, are turning in the direction of Irish unity. I should like to assure these people publicly, as I have done privately, that the unity which we seek is one which will be determined to find room for their talents as well as their sensibilities.

They owe it to themselves as much as they owe it to their neighbours to state how they would wish the institutions of Ireland to be formed. They will be their institutions as much as anyone else's. It is right that they should have a say in how they should be formed. If we are expecting moves or sacrifices from the Unionist majority in the North we, too, will have to face up to some change from our present stance and policy. In turning away from a failed system of government which was unworthy of them, if they do so, they will free themselves to undertake a task which is worthy of them, that of discovering out of the chaos of the present time the way forward to an Ireland which has been theirs for centuries and will be theirs again, as well as ours.

In addressing them publicly in this manner I am asking them to share in and to play an essential part in determining what Ireland should be. I have said harsh things about Unionism in so far as it has manifested itself in mis-government in the North. It has never been my purpose to show hostility to Unionists, nor have I ever had any such feelings. To me the distinction is a vital one. Unionists are Irishmen who, to my mind, took the wrong course when the Irish nation insisted that Ireland should take charge of her own affairs. A moment of choice has come around again and Unionists can recapture their place in Ireland or continue down a road which will leave them without identity, without influence, and without happiness.

There are movements in Unionist circles which encourage me to believe that the right choice is on the brink of actuality. Certainly many Unionists - perhaps most Unionists - are prepared to support a non-sectarian State in the North. Many have the courage to advocate this despite the pressures exercised on them within their own society. In doing this they represent and speak for people Ireland needs in order to set in train Ireland's fulfilment. I would put a question to them: If the North should become a State capable of embracing the two communities there, in what essential manner could this context not properly be applied to the whole of Ireland?

It may be said in reply that the whole country is incapable of the resolution of problems in a manner satisfactory to the Northern majority for economic, social and other reasons. Laying aside the selfishness involved in a decision to keep a country divided for economic reasons, I consider that it can be truly argued that a united Ireland would not adversely affect the economic well-being of the North. In recent decades our economic development has been

-6-

substantial, so much so, that far from being afraid of entering into the European Community - which among other things is a vast free trade area - we look forward to it confident of the acceleration of our economic expansion.

So far as social reasons go, Irish unity implies and, indeed, insists on a state of affairs equally satisfactory to the basic beliefs of all sections of the whole community. The North has nothing to lose from that. Therefore I would urge those thinking in the terms I have outlined, to take the further step towards agreeing that their intention should be enlarged from trying to find a solution within Northern Ireland to one in which they will acknowledge that the proper goal is to find a solution for Ireland as a whole, agreeable to the Irish people as a whole.

I realise that I am limited to half an hour so I will just conclude. I want to refer again to the march next Sunday in Newry. I said that I hoped it would not provoke the same kind of reaction as the Derry march did. I also want to say that I hope it will not provide any cloak or alleged excuse for the British Army to behave again as they did in Derry last Sunday.

Finally, I want to say again to our own people: let not present emotion, absolutely justified and justifiable, turn them away from what the overwhelming majority of the people know to be the only way towards unity. Above all, let not people who wish to exploit that emotion turn them away from what the great majority of our people seek, that is, the peaceful reunification of our country, the maintenance of our institutions, and the maintenance of our democratic institutions above all, so that all Irishmen, North and South, can enjoy living in economic well-being and happiness in a united Ireland.