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Statement by the Taoiseach, Mr. Charles J. Haughey, T.D.,
on Anglo-Irish Relations in Dail Eireann on
Thursday, 23 November, 1989 at 10.45 am

I welcome this opportunity for a serious and comprehensive discussion on Northern Ireland. The issues arising are urgent, and of deep humanitarian concern. Our debate will, I am confident, reflect the gravity of the situation. The people of Northern Ireland would be rightly disappointed, if it were otherwise.

Political Progress

The problems of Northern Ireland are essentially political and therefore must be confronted and resolved through the political process. The search for a political way forward therefore is and must remain at the top of our agenda. But it is equally obvious that such progress will not be easily achieved, and that our efforts, if they are to succeed, will require genuine sensitivity to, and respect for, the positions of the parties within Northern Ireland.

But how can political progress best be achieved? There is an important point to be made at the outset. A willingness to listen to the position of others does not imply that one's own convictions and aspirations should be diluted or abandoned. Indeed, the opposite is the case; openness and clarity can only facilitate, not hinder, progress. A leading member of the DUP, Peter Robinson, said some weeks ago: "I have a much higher estimation for those who have even a directly opposite view from my own rather than those wishy-washy possessors of the middle ground who try to understand everybody but end up believing nothing".

We must neither deny the right of others to their beliefs nor be embarrassed by our own. In my party we believe in the noble objective of a progressive, enlightened, and fully democratic State, which will accommodate on a basis of equality all the traditions on this island. That concept, in its many different aspects and with all the guarantees involved, is clearly set out in the Report of the New Ireland Forum.

One of the fundamental realities identified by the Forum is "the desire of nationalists for a united Ireland in the form of a sovereign, independent Irish State to be achieved peacefully and by consent". It was also explicitly recognised that "such unity would, of course, be different from both the existing Irish State and the existing arrangements in Northern Ireland because it would necessarily accommodate all the fundamental elements in both traditions". Specifically, the Forum Report made it clear that the New Ireland to which we aspire would require a new constitution designed to ensure that the needs of all traditions on our island would be fully accommodated. The approach of the Forum Report is generous, forward-looking and genuinely intended to chart a way out of the prejudices and divisions of centuries.

Devolution

I want to demolish the suggestion that because Fianna Fáil have a vision of the future, which is for us the ideal, this in some way inhibits progress in the short-term. There is also the implication that devolution is the only way forward and that, with a change of attitude on the part of the Irish Government, it could be readily achieved.

Here let me point out that the Coalition Government, which was in office from 1982 to 1987, had nearly five years in which to promote the policy of devolution. Finding, however, that they could make no progress in that direction, they focused instead on the conclusion of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Joint Communiqué issued on the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement on

15 November, 1985, specifically stated that the Anglo-Irish Conference would concentrate at its initial meetings on:

- "- relations between the Security Forces and the minority community in Northern Ireland;
- ways of enhancing security co-operation between the two Governments; and
- seeking measures which would give substantial expression to the aim of underlining the importance of public confidence in the administration of justice."

The exclusive priorities therefore of the Conference were initially justice and security matters, not political developments, still less economic or social progress. That Agreement contains a reference to devolution but the matter was not so far as I can ascertain discussed at the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference at any of its 11 meetings between December 1985 and March 1987 - certainly the subject is not referred to in any of the Conference communiqués issued at that time. The position in regard to devolution prior to the change of Government in 1987 is, therefore, that no progress had been made towards devolution. It is clear that there is no basis in previous experience for advocating any facile approach to this proposal.

I have repeatedly stated my position on devolution by reference to Article 4 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the relevant language in the Review of the working of the Conference. Let me once again quote the relevant part: "It continues to be the British Government's policy, supported by the Irish Government, to encourage progress towards the devolution of responsibility for certain powers to elected representatives in Northern Ireland as set out in Article 4 of the Agreement. Both sides recognise that the achievement of devolution depends on the co-operation of constitutional representatives of both traditions within Northern Ireland".

Is anyone now seriously suggesting that devolution can somehow be imposed without the co-operation and consent of the constitutional representatives of both traditions? Are they not aware of the constantly reiterated claim by Unionists that one of their principal objections to the Anglo-Irish Agreement is that it was imposed? Those who would claim to adhere to the principle that constitutional change must be by consent seem, when it comes to Northern Ireland to advocate instead an imposed solution. It should also be noted that some of those in Northern Ireland who seek devolution in some form have made it clear that they would regard an initiative by the Irish Government on devolution as counter-productive.

Can the leader of Fine Gael really believe that he is playing a constructive role in trying unilaterally to force an initiative on devolution in present circumstances? He must know that the preconditions do not exist and that there is no enthusiasm for it in any main political grouping in Northern Ireland at the present time. One cannot escape the conclusion that the Fine Gael leader's stance is related more to party politics down here than the realities in Northern Ireland.

Let me now turn to the argument that devolution is the sole way forward and that "all roads forward pass through devolution". This approach is clearly restrictive and has the major disadvantage that it rules out all other possibilities of progress along other avenues. Those who advocate the "devolution only" approach must be unaware of the movement in thinking currently taking place in Northern Ireland, and the indications of an increasing acceptance that the problems of Northern Ireland will have to be addressed in a wider context. An analysis of the inter-relationships on these islands, including a recognition of the importance of the North-South relationship, is beginning to enter mainstream Unionist thinking. I would like to see this debate explore a wider field of possibilities and not be confined to the traditional narrow ground. Given the existing political realities in the North, it would be a serious mistake for us to

tie ourselves into any one restrictive formula or focus exclusively on devolution as necessarily offering the only way forward.

The second issue I mentioned are the prospects for the achievement of devolution. While both the Agreement and the recent Review, make it perfectly clear that the achievement of devolution depends on the co-operation of the constitutional representatives of both traditions in the North, that precondition is manifestly absent at present. It is naive to try to dispose of this inconvenient reality with the suggestion that all that is needed is for both Governments to define a devolutionary structure "which leaves no excuses for refusal to either of the political traditions". To suggest that any of the parties on the Northern scene decide their course of action on the basis of the availability or otherwise of excuses for inaction is, to put it mildly, disingenuous.

Rather than characterising attitudes as "excuses for refusal", we need seriously to ask ourselves why there is no great enthusiasm on the part of many politicians in Northern Ireland for devolution in current circumstances. Not to explore and understand the reasons for these current attitudes would be short sighted and would appear to demonstrate further a predilection for the imposed solution.

The Unionists for their part have made their position perfectly clear. One of their major concerns about devolution is that they see it as in a sense mandated under Article 4 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Mr. Molyneaux stated very trenchantly in an interview on the 22nd October that "there cannot and will not be any movement on power-sharing devolved Government until the present Anglo-Irish Agreement is replaced". He repeated the same argument in a further interview on 1 November.

Much as we may disagree with Mr. Molyneaux's analysis, we must accept that that is his stated position. If it is claimed that

"all roads forward pass through devolution", it is as well to acknowledge the roadblocks and craters that are strewn along them at present. To enhance the prospects of political advance along any avenue it is essential that we recognise and understand the barriers that exist along the way and that must be surmounted if progress is to be made.

The SDLP position has also been made quite clear. John Hume expressed his party's views cogently and comprehensively at the recent SDLP annual conference. In outlining his party's proposals for talks, he said: "In the SDLP view, the central relationship, the one that goes to the heart of the matter, is the Unionist people's relationships with the rest of this island or rather their distrust of the rest of this island. Until that relationship is resolved and that distrust is removed, then, in our view, nothing will be stable or lasting. That view is drawn from our experience, from standing back and asking ourselves the reasons for past failures."

The Government share the sense of urgency, indeed impatience, that exists on all sides for political progress in relation to Northern Ireland. We want to remove the causes of distrust. We want genuine progress towards durable solutions and are prepared to devote the time and patience necessary to achieve it. We recognise that there is no easy or simple way forward. As I suggested earlier, if we are to secure political progress and succeed in sustaining it, we must begin to develop an integrated approach in which arrangements within Northern Ireland are seen as part of a wider landscape. In this regard, I am encouraged by the increasing acceptance, in a spirit of realism, that no political initiative, be it devolution or otherwise, could be sustained in isolation from the wider structure of political relationships on this island, and indeed from the totality of relationships within and between these islands. That was my position in 1980, when I met the British Prime Minister and her Ministers in Dublin Castle. Events since then have re-inforced it. What is happening in Europe to-day makes the position, in my

view, unassailable.

There has been some controversy over the recent comments by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Peter Brooke, on the circumstances in which Sinn Fein might be included in some future talks on a political solution. I understood Mr. Brooke to have made it perfectly clear that a precondition for any Sinn Fein involvement in such talks must be the ending of the IRA campaign of violence. This is very much in line with what I said in my Ard-Fheis speech earlier this year: "If violence were to cease, the possibility would open up, as it did in the New Ireland Forum, for a broad consensus among nationalists on how to achieve political stability based on justice. Our efforts, supported by a large majority of Irish people everywhere, could then be constructively directed to persuading our Unionist countrymen that their future lay with us in a partnership of equals and in convincing the British Government that the future of Ireland could and should be left to all the Irish people to decide for themselves."

Violence - from whatever source - has scarred the lives of countless people in Northern Ireland and exacted a terrible toll in human suffering; it is futile, and it has the effect of undermining all efforts to secure political progress. If violence were to cease a very different political landscape would emerge. New horizons will - as I have already said elsewhere - be opened up, and new possibilities will present themselves.

Change is sweeping across the continent of Europe. Who can be unmoved watching these great historic events, and seeing the outpouring of happiness and elation as hundreds of thousands of people glory in their first taste of freedom?

Even at a distance we can feel the great uplifting of the human spirit that comes when the barriers that have kept people apart are torn down. Can we in Ireland not join this mood: and become part of what is happening all over Europe? I personally feel a

wish to reach out to all the people of the North at this time and say to them, we too can break moulds and tear down barriers. Let us get around a table and talk our way out of these troubles and difficulties and find a new way to live together on this island in peace and mutual self-respect.

The climate worldwide today provides us with a unique opportunity to respond generously in our own circumstances to the international mood, make a break with the past and begin a new era of dialogue and cooperation.

Operation of the Agreement

I would now like to deal with the implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the conduct of the Inter-governmental Conference in recent months. In particular, I would like to address the criticism that the Conference is being used primarily for crisis management and has focused too narrowly on security related issues.

The Conference, as I see it, operates on two levels. In the first place, it seeks to bring about reform in areas of urgent concern in Northern Ireland and to secure changes of policy and in administration for this purpose. In this regard there is a full, on-going programme of work which covers the whole spectrum of issues addressed in the Anglo-Irish Agreement. In addition, there will always be incidents and developments which by their very nature are difficult to anticipate and which, when they arise, demand immediate attention. It is the business of governments to recognise and manage crises, not to ignore them or minimise the importance of the issues at stake.

It is therefore appropriate and necessary that, when critically important issues arise, they should receive priority on the agenda of the Conference at that particular time. Any other approach would rightly invite criticisms that the Conference was becoming irrelevant and its credibility being eroded. Once the

Conference exists, it should be used for any useful purpose that presents itself, including dealing with any crisis that may arise from time to time. To the extent that it is possible to do so its existence should also be availed of to pursue longer term aims and objectives and this was in fact envisaged in the Report of the recent Review of the working of the Conference.

The recent evidence of collusion between members of the security forces and loyalist paramilitaries clearly falls into the category of issues requiring immediate and urgent attention. This was a crisis that demanded urgent management. It occupied the greater part of the time at three consecutive conferences. The clear proof of the existence of this type of sinister collusion seriously undermined the already fragile level of confidence that existed by the nationalist community in the security forces, particularly the UDR. We see this as a key political issue.

Confidence in the apparatus of the state and especially the security forces and the administration of justice is essential for the well-being of any society, but it is of overriding importance in a divided society. If any large section of any community has good reason to regard those responsible for their safety and security as not being trustworthy, reliable and impartial, that society cannot regard itself as fully democratic and will certainly not enjoy a normal peaceful stable existence.

The security forces do face difficulties and dangers, and in some respects certain progress has been made in improving relations with the community. But it is totally unacceptable, and destructive of trust and confidence, if individual members of the security forces act in collusion with those engaged in a campaign of sectarian assassination. Such practices strike at the very roots of a democratic free society. That is why we have called for a comprehensive review of both the basis and role of the Ulster Defence Regiment, which is almost exclusively recruited from one side of the community. Whatever short-term remedial

action is to be taken, and we welcome some of the steps that have been announced, a more fundamental appraisal is required in the medium-term into organisations that show no reasonable prospect of commanding public confidence on a cross-community basis.

The Government seek an end to the existence of partisan practices by elements in the security forces. An essential step must be to establish some credible process through which the security forces can be made answerable to the general public. The Conference has already devoted considerable time to dealing with these issues, which have a major impact on the issue of confidence.

The whole Anglo-Irish process first initiated at the Dublin Castle Summit in 1980 shows a manifest willingness on our part to make progress on a step-by-step basis. I believe we should without undermining in any way our overall aim, use all available means to improve the day-to-day lives of the people of Northern Ireland, to improve their situation, and to protect their safety and their welfare.

On taking office in early 1987, the Government sought to direct the attention of the Conference to the economic issues that are at the forefront of the concerns of ordinary people in Northern Ireland. We placed considerable emphasis on the issue of fair employment. We have pushed for special programmes for the most economically deprived areas of Northern Ireland. In the Review document, we placed particular emphasis on the further development of cross-border economic and social co-operation.

The Government regard the area of the economy as of crucial importance. Political change is, as we can see in Europe today, very often related to economic circumstances. We can also see the powerful attraction that a prosperous Community can offer. Since 1987 the Government have taken decisive steps to strengthen our economy, and to radically improve our economic performance. Ireland today is moving ahead, and investment confidence is at its highest for at least a decade. We have at present the best

opportunity, perhaps, since independence to make Ireland into a prosperous, successful society, a society whose rising levels of prosperity by itself can provide a powerful incentive to unity.

Economic difficulties affect both sections of the community in Northern Ireland. Recent figures indicating Northern Ireland's deteriorating economic performance and prosperity relative to the UK average are a cause of concern in both communities. It is not healthy for any society, as we know from our own recent experience, to be excessively dependent for the maintenance of living standards and employment on high public expenditure. Northern Ireland must also confront the challenge of 1992, and time is passing quickly.

European Community

My invitation to Unionists to join in discussion on the challenges and opportunities we confront in the European Community is becoming a matter of urgent significance. This invitation has no political overtones. It is simply a straightforward and open suggestion that there are mutual interests and concerns which we should discuss together. As the borders are dismantled, the economic structures of North and South, and the problems and opportunities facing them, are converging. We will have a common interest in seeking similar policies and programmes at EC level in sectors such as agriculture, transport, tourism, energy, and investment.

With the Commission already discussing the allocation of residual Structural Fund monies, we have an obvious interest in securing significant Community support for an imaginative and comprehensive cross-border programme which would radically improve the quality of life in border areas. We are actively considering at present, with the Northern Ireland authorities, the submission of such a programme for consideration by the Commission.

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At a time when the Community is undergoing radical change, and particularly when additional encouragement is being given to the development of cross-border programmes, there is much of substance for us to talk about. On 1st January next, Ireland assumes the EC Presidency. The period of our Presidency can be availed of to give particular attention to the economic problems of Northern Ireland and to explore between us how the challenges can best be met and the opportunities exploited.

I believe that it might be helpful if at this stage we were to prepare a paper setting out our thinking on how, in the context of our common island status in Europe and the shared challenges of 1992, the areas in which a common approach might be developed for the benefit of all Irish people, North and South. We will now prepare such a paper and put it forward in a non-political context as a constructive contribution to the preparations which are needed North and South for the Single Market.

The three Northern Ireland Members of the European Parliament recently made joint representations to the responsible Community Commissioner on the subject of the Northern Ireland allocation from the Structural Funds. Such joint representations clearly reflect similar concerns and agreed objectives in relation to Community policies. In the context of Ireland's assumption of the EC Presidency, I would suggest that the three MEPs might also find it helpful to communicate their views to me on issues of common concern to them at this time. It would be helpful if I could meet with them at an early date to discuss these matters, which are of vital importance to Ireland North and South. I will be writing to them shortly to invite them to a meeting for this purpose. The important thing is that I should know at first hand from them the concerns of the Northern Ireland representatives so that they can be fully taken into account as a range of important policies and programmes are decided upon in the coming months.

East-West Issues

I have, so far, dealt mainly with developments in the North-South relationship. I would now like to touch briefly on some issues arising in our relationship with Britain, the East-West aspect.

Let me first of all warmly welcome the recent decision to establish soon the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, envisaged under the 1981 Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council. I have great confidence that this new Body will provide a useful forum for exchanges between parliamentarians of both sides and will contribute both to strengthening existing contacts between them and creating a still wider circle of friendship and understanding.

The release of the Guildford Four brought a widespread feeling of relief throughout this country. At the same time, the revelation that such serious miscarriages of justice can occur has caused equally widespread feelings of unease and dismay. It has major implications for the case of the Birmingham Six. I believe that the arguments for re-opening the Birmingham Six case are now so persuasive that they are impossible to withstand. The Guildford and Birmingham cases are not identical, but the similarities are such that the revelations in the Guildford case must enormously reinforce the grave doubts that have always existed about the Birmingham Six convictions, and, taken with other developments, must reinforce belief in their innocence. Responsible people in Britain as well as in Ireland are increasingly questioning whether the finding in the 1987 Birmingham Six Appeal could now be sustainable in the light of developments in the Guildford case. Public opinion throughout these islands - and indeed further afield as demonstrated by the debate scheduled for today in the European Parliament - has been aroused and alerted by the final outcome of the Guildford Four case and will no longer be satisfied with standard formulae, or stock replies. They want the British authorities to respond quickly in the entirely new situation that has now been disclosed. One tragic miscarriage of justice has been established. As the Birmingham Six enter their sixteenth year in

prison nobody can any longer be certain that another is not still being perpetrated. This appalling possibility must in conscience be removed.

Conclusion

Summing up my contribution to this debate, I would say this. The issues are complex, requiring the utmost care and sensitivity on our part. Our concern is to improve Anglo-Irish relations over the whole spectrum but in particular to explore every opportunity to make progress on what must surely be recognised by all as the major outstanding issue between our two countries. In seeking to achieve political progress in Northern Ireland, it is important that we listen to and learn from what responsible politicians in the North are telling us. I listen carefully and attentively to what they have to say because they have to live with the stark reality of the situation. This will help to ensure that we do not act or speak rashly or undertake initiatives that are not carefully considered and thought through. The issues are too important, and the consequences of mistake too serious, to permit any other approach.

The Government's policy is, in the best interest of our ultimate objective of unity, to make whatever progress we can now, for its own sake. We are working patiently for the development of dialogue and reconciliation within a framework that embraces all the people of this island. We seek an urgent end to violence. Through the structures of Anglo-Irish cooperation that have been developed over the last decade we seek reform in the institutions of state, advances in economic and social development, and better understanding between the peoples of these islands.