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PRESS RELEASE

Peter Robinson MP
29 October 1991

Since Mr. Molyneux addressed his party conference last Saturday several people in politics and the press have been critical of his comments. I do not wish to be listed with his detractors. I have no doubt about his loyalty or his dedication and I refuse to minimise his role as a unionist leader. But different people often see the same subject in different lights; and, therefore, I hope that it will not be judged disrespectful to him, if, entertaining as I do, on one subject to which he referred, an opinion of a character very opposite to his, I shall proclaim my view freely and without restraint.

For the most part I found no problem with Mr. Molyneux's speech though I confess that I find it hard to get unduly excited about the prospect of a Westminster Select Committee. Nonetheless, Northern Ireland is, in my view, entitled to expect such a committee to be set up - but it will not save the Union, nor is it a substitute for proper devolution. It was, however, the concept that the Union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain was getting stronger every day that I could not accept. Mr. Molyneux's address was peppered with passages supportive of this notion.

Last week I drew attention to the many startling revelations contained in the Fitzgerald memoirs. In particular I observed the graphic account of the willingness of the Conservative government to concede much more than they did but for one check - the reaction of unionists. Dr. Fitzgerald provided us with a quotation from Mrs. Thatcher, that exposed her government's attitude.

"The problem was to find a way through the difficulties in a manner and at a rate that would not cause it to blow up in our faces."

It was not, and we must assume, still is not, the substance of concessions to be made to Dublin that causes difficulties for the government. They are prepared to make any concession provided it will not occasion a drastic reaction. In short anything they can get past the unionist community. It is only the method and timing of a surrender that is of concern, the conclusion is acceptable to them.

The intrusion of judges from the Republic of Ireland into our Courts is revealed as a step both governments wanted to take but which was blocked mainly by the opposition of the then Lord Chief Justice Lord Lowry but the Irish were consoled by the British advising them that action here would best await the departure of Lord Lowry. Both government's willingness to embrace Joint Authority of Northern Ireland was stemmed by the fear of unionist reaction. The intention to abolish or remove the part-time element of the UDR was included in the negotiations as was the proposal to recruit separate police forces from the nationalist community to police nationalist areas. Dr. Fitzgerald boasts of his ability (and success) in interfering in appointments to Northern Ireland's judiciary and unashamedly admits his ongoing efforts to change the composition and name of the RUC and set up an all-Ireland Law commission and an all-Ireland Police force - both of which were acceptable to the British side in the negotiations.

Most important when we are considering the "State of the Union" is the Fitzgerald account of the assurances from the British Government negotiators that he should consider the proposals as "building blocks for future political arrangements"; they were subject to "development" or as Dr. Fitzgerald reports Geoffrey Howe putting it,

"The agreement would concede to the Irish Government a

right of involvement in Northern Ireland that he (Geoffrey Howe) believed would be the start of an evolving situation of historic significance."

None of this fits neatly with the idea of a Union growing stronger day by day. I remind you that it was a Conservative government involved in the negotiations. The Labour Party are at least open in their espousal of a united Ireland. To me it seems self-evident that neither a Conservative government nor a Labour one can be trusted or expected to strengthen the Union. While they are left to govern Ulster so long will this Province be treated to creeping integration with Dublin.

It is natural for man to indulge in the illusion of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth. The painful truth is that the union no longer exists - at least in any worthwhile or recognisable form.

When the Anglo Irish Agreement was signed in 1985 I asserted that Ulster was on the window ledge of the union. In truth she had been pushed in that direction for many years before that black day but no-one should doubt the acceleration of the process since then. I want us to look at Ulster under the union of today. I will give you my observations . . . and the conclusions that those observations compel.

Take Dublin's role in the decision taking process. The British Government will take no decision of any importance without the approval of the Republic of Ireland. Dublin has a greater role than unionists in the decision making process in Northern Ireland. As for the I.R.A., they dictate where the security forces may walk. They determine with whom businessmen can do business.

Dublin adjudicate on what flags and emblems can be displayed; they make appointments to Boards and Quangos and have forced the introduction of legislation that in turn has led to gross discrimination against Protestants. They have succeeded in having the UDR - who are law enforcers - disbanded because they are not acceptable to nationalists while at the same time the IRA - who are law breakers - has its members, who are patently unacceptable to unionists, in membership in our Council Chambers as if they were respectable democrats.

Who will deny - with all the evidence available - that our partner in the union has embraced a course that can only lead to the destruction of the Union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain?

Who - with all the evidence available - would be disposed to argue that the Union is being strengthened day by day.

The message I send today is that we are being edged into a United Ireland and the Union, as it presently exists, is the instrument of our conveyance.

Am I being too pessimistic? Am I being alarmist? If anyone thinks I am then I challenge them to look at the policy that has been adopted by the Tory Party over the past decade and look at the policy that is to be implemented by the Labour Party if they get to power.

Ulster stands between the hawk and the buzzard!

I know there are some voices - and at least a few of them, I admit, are influential voices - that counsel for "patience" and call upon the unionist community to "bide its time." "Things will get better," they tell us. "After the election it will be different," they claim. "Now is the time for Ulster to keep its nerve," they proclaim. "Wait," "Hang on," "Delay."

Will those politicians tell me what it is that causes them to believe the present trend is being reversed by unionist activity at Westminster?

Noel
X/g
Ref

The destructive policy that has brought us to this sorry state is the product of a process planned and executed outside Westminster. One incidentally, which succeeded while unionists were active at Westminster. I do not counsel against action at Westminster but I contend we are long past such trifling activity as the basis of our policy.

I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided; and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of forecasting the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I want to know what there has been in the conduct of British Governments - both Conservative and Labour - for the past twenty years to justify the hopes with which those gentlemen are pleased to solace themselves and sedate the population.

Unionists should open up dialogue with the Government to establish whether the Union can be regained on a satisfactory basis or whether the "southerly direction" of government policy will remain. I for my part cannot advise the Ulster community to sit chloroformed on a vehicle that is propelling them into a united Ireland.

What I have said should not be construed as anything other than a call for action to be taken to save the union. We should face the situation as it is not how we would like it to be. Are we disposed to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things that so vitally concern our survival? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the worst and provide for it.