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THE AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL

SPRING TD.

SCHOOL OF

DIES.

1993.

John -

*I thought you might be interested
in this, and didn't know if you had
the text. Best, Val*

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All of our Irish traditions shared in that achievement, and pride
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"For them the American Declaration of Independence was not a
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ADDRESS BY THE TANAISTE, MR DICK SPRING TD,
TO THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF
ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,
6 PM, WEDNESDAY 17 NOVEMBER 1993.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for your generous welcome and honoured by the invitation to address the Paul H Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), which, like the Johns Hopkins University itself, has made such an important contribution to developing international awareness in American public life.

As an Irishman and a European - who had the good taste and the good sense to marry an American! - I am particularly sympathetic to the emphasis which Johns Hopkins places on US/European relations.

The special affinity which Irish people have for the United States has deep roots in history. America has reached out and embraced many successive generations of Irish emigrants. They in turn have made, and continue to make, an important contribution to the growth of your country.

All of our Irish traditions shared in that achievement, and pride in our links with the United States is a common thread which transcends all divisions in Ireland. At the most difficult moments of our history, the American democracy has been a source of hope and encouragement. F.S.L. Lyons, a distinguished Irish historian, observed of the early Irish emigrants to the United States:

"For them the American Declaration of Independence was not a tired formula, but an ideal to be reached out for and grasped. Moreover it was an ideal that was as valid for their native as for their adopted land".

The American experience showed that true strength comes from welcoming and cherishing differences within a framework of freedom and respect for the rule of law, and under political institutions responsive to the demand for change.

Since this ideal was first given practical form in the days of Washington and Jefferson, it has proved an ever more compelling model for people throughout the world. For those of us in Ireland who are striving to build new political structures on the island which will eliminate our dissensions while drawing strength from our differences, the instructive lessons of the American experience have lost none of their inspirational value.

To these human and political bonds between Ireland and the United States must be added the strong economic ties which have developed so rapidly in recent decades. These economic links with the United States have played no small part in the transformation of Ireland from a predominantly agricultural and protectionist society to one whose people are adapting readily to the age of technology, without, I hope, any loss of individuality or character.

A crucial factor in this transformation has been our membership of the European Union - as the European Community has been officially designated since the beginning of this month. This has exerted a profound influence on Ireland since we first joined the EC in 1973.

It has strengthened our self confidence as a Nation. It has formalised important new patterns of interaction with our European neighbours. It has enabled us to make a distinctive contribution to the formulation of a common European policy. It has given us access to European-wide markets and made a significant contribution to developing the infrastructure on the island.

It has also contributed to dismantling economic barriers within Ireland and offered new possibilities of North/South cooperation in a new framework acceptable to all.

Ireland is a country in transition away from the values which reflected the first stages of our development as an independent state, and towards the perspectives of a modern, self-confident and pluralist society which is ready to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century as an integral and committed part of the new European Union.

Ireland today differs in many respects from the Ireland familiar to our parents and grandparents. We are undergoing major political, economic and social transformation. I represent a new generation in Irish politics which wishes to prepare our country and our people for the challenges of a changed society and a changed environment.

At the same time, of course, we must be careful to preserve the rich human and cultural heritage which is our most precious asset.

As we seek to modernise our society and to chart a future course for Ireland, there is one crucial and unresolved question which we constantly face: Can we plan our future on the hypothesis that the Ireland of the twenty-first century will be an island at peace with itself, North as well as South?

Or must we instead resign ourselves to the depressing conclusion that, at a time when conflicts in South Africa and the Middle East are advancing towards resolution, the conflict in Northern Ireland will acquire a melancholy world record for longevity? The Irish Government is determined that the answer will be one of hope and not despair.

Our agreed policy programme puts the matter in a nutshell:

"The future welfare of all the people of Ireland is overshadowed by the conflict in Northern Ireland, which causes a heavy toll of human suffering and imposes a pointless and unwanted burden in terms of wasted resources and lost economic opportunity. A key element in the Government's programme will be the search for an end to this conflict. We will mobilise all the resources of the Government which can contribute to this process."

This element of our programme is a key priority, both for the Government as a whole, and for me personally as Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

This conflict has cost more than three thousand lives within Northern Ireland, and several hundred elsewhere, including in our own jurisdiction. The number injured is in excess of 30,000. The social costs have been proportionately severe. Habits of violence are becoming ingrained and beginning to infect society generally. Polarisation and self-segregation between the two communities in Northern Ireland have intensified.

There is a political and moral imperative to seek a solution to a conflict which is causing so much avoidable human misery. There are also the strongest practical reasons for the Irish Government to pursue energetically and urgently a solution to a problem which originates outside our jurisdiction but exerts a poisonous influence on so many areas of our endeavour.

How, then can we succeed in this vital task? We must begin by recognising that Northern Ireland is a conflict of two sets of rights. The unresolved legacy of Anglo-Irish history has become embodied in two communities nationalist and unionist, confronting each other within the "narrow ground" of Northern Ireland.

Both look proudly on their history. Here in America where the Ulster Protestant stock has made such a distinguished contribution, including some ten Presidents, I know it will be accepted that unionist pride in their rich and authentic heritage is no less justified than nationalist pride in theirs. The two identities are equally valid.

Both communities are passionately convinced of the justice of their cause. Both are deeply fearful of being abandoned by the wider entities they relate to, symbolised by London and Dublin, and of languishing as the ultimate minority on the island.

An essential condition for peace and stability in Ireland is agreement between the nationalist and unionist traditions about how they can live together on the small island which is home to them both. Anything else, however significant, can only be a stage on the road to that ultimate and necessary goal.

We have never succeeded in constructing a political framework which matched the complicated realities of the relationship between both traditions on the island, and which both could accept.

Our present patterns originated in the fraught and emotional circumstances of the Irish war of independence. Faced with the adamant refusal of the unionist community then to operate any framework in Ireland - even limited "home rule" within the UK - where Nationalists would be in a majority, the British Government of the day established Northern Ireland as an area where Unionists had local dominance. Unfortunately this approach, designed to cater for the unionist minority on the island, merely inverted the problem. It produced a proportionately greater new minority in the shape of the nationalist community locked into Northern Ireland.

Four generations on, that nationalist community has little or no sense of "ownership" of the structures set over them in Northern Ireland. There is little or no prospect that they will ever redefine themselves as British to conform with the official doctrine of their State. Just as unionists cannot be coerced into Irish unity, nationalists in Northern Ireland have, in the words of the recent independent Opsahl Report, "the critical mass to resist imposition".

Without denying in any way the reality of the clash of allegiance which led to the division of Ireland, we must surely accept that previous approaches to solving the problem have failed. It is surely time now to test whether these fundamental issues can be addressed in new and more successful ways, and with a new realism on all sides.

Realism means we must of course take account of the intractable divisions which did, and do, exist. But we must also address, in a way the original approach did not, the political interactions between both parts of the island. The most obvious of these is in the sense of solidarity of the nationalist populations on both sides of the border.

Less obvious, but no less important, is the reality that unionist politics, while British in expression, are rooted in Irish conditions. Their dominant impulse is a deep rejection of Irish nationalism. They certainly could not be said to flow from present circumstances in Great Britain, where a mere 18% of the people in a recent opinion poll considered that Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK in the long term.

It was a political tragedy for both parts of Ireland that the unionist community for so long was enabled to refuse the reality of the nationalist tradition, rather than to engage with that reality.

Instead of accommodation with nationalism, they sought to defeat it through patterns of domination and discrimination. The politics of assertion and denial and the categories of victory and defeat made both communities prisoners in Northern Ireland. The strengths and richness of each tradition were cut off from each other. The symbols of identity became challenges, rather than a source of pride and self-expression.

That must be changed, through a new and constructive engagement. Temporary conjunctures at Westminster do not change the underlying political realities on the island of Ireland. The relationships with the nationalist community is the surest guarantee to overcome unionist fears, and ultimately perhaps the only real one.

I believe, in spite of the many obstacles in our path, that it is possible to resolve this conflict. I believe that many or all of the elements of a workable accommodation are already to hand, if only the two Governments and the two communities in Northern Ireland can muster the courage and skill to fit the pieces together, having learned from our collective mistakes in the past.

We know that violence will never resolve this conflict. It only deepens old wounds and opens new ones, postponing greatly the day when our divisions can be healed. We will continue to oppose the use of violence for political ends with all the resources of the law. It is evil in itself and profoundly hostile to the welfare of everyone in Ireland, nationalist and unionist alike.

At the same time we must recognise clearly that this is not a problem which can be solved by security means. Terrorism will never succeed, but neither will a security response which ignores the political nature of the problem.

We have learned also from the mistakes of the past, not least in Northern Ireland, that a solution will never be found in patterns of domination and subordination, or notions of victory and defeat. Neither tradition in Ireland can dominate or subordinate the other, whether in a Northern Ireland or in an all-Ireland context. We have not yet succeeded in making the effort needed to build new political structures to reflect that key reality.

The Talks process which ended inconclusively last year gave grounds for hope. They reflected agreement that progress could be made only by addressing all strands of the problem. They rested on acknowledgement of the need for a "new beginning in relationships".

We do indeed need such a fundamental shift - a new beginning in the truest sense - if, to borrow an eloquent phrase of Archbishop Robin Eames, we are to find ways "of removing those barriers and breaking those chains which have for too long held people prisoner in Ireland".

The talks allowed each tradition to define for the other the full dimensions of the positions which must be reconciled in any lasting settlement. However, the unionist parties now refuse to return to the table until there is prior commitment to change those elements of the Irish Constitution which they interpret as a territorial claim to Northern Ireland.

We have confirmed that we are open to asking our electorate to change these aspects as part of an overall package. Since however Northern nationalists take the opposite view to unionists on this issue, it is not reasonable to insist that this crucial issue should be resolved in the unionists favour as a precondition for even entering talks. Viable compromise must be based on a fair balance between the two positions as they truly are, not as one side or another might wish them to be.

The British Government have now moved away from the notion of getting the parties around the table, and is pursuing for the moment low key bilateral soundings.

We consider these can only be helpful, and I have myself repeatedly made clear my hope that unionist leaders will agree to talk also to the Irish Government. However, it is fair to say that very few expect them to lead to a breakthrough. The problem of Northern Ireland goes deeper than a refinement of the current administrative procedures there. People want above all else to see an end to the violence.

There is, however, a significant new factor. That factor is the possibility that those engaged in violence on the nationalist side may be coming at last to recognise what the vast majority of nationalists have always known. Their violence is not only a profound moral wrong in relation to Northern Ireland. It is also, in the precise meaning of the word, counter-productive.

It manifestly widens the divisions within Northern Ireland, and indeed between North and South, which must be bridged if nationalist aspirations are to be realised. The sickening atrocities in Northern Ireland show unmistakably that violence breeds only more violence. The yearning for peace everywhere among the people is palpable and overwhelming.

Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come, and there may now be an important opportunity to create a framework for peace. If that is so, and if peace could be within grasp, those with any influence on the situation will not easily be forgiven if they fail to do the utmost to realise it.

There are grounds for hope and encouragement in the speech given by the British Prime Minister, Mr John Major, on Monday night. This provided a welcome confirmation that he, too, recognises

that a window of opportunity now exists and that the development of a framework for peace is now a key priority for him and his Government also. If the widespread hopes for peace are to be realised it will indeed require, in the Prime Minister words, all concerned "to show courage, court unpopularity, break down old barriers and take risks". In pledging that commitment himself, the Prime Minister has earned the right to demand it of others.

The Irish Government for its part will not be found wanting. The same commitment is called for by all those with an influence on the situation, including the paramilitary forces who have it in their power to put away the guns which have caused so much needless anguish and suffering, including in their own communities.

There are of course strict constraints on what Governments can do. They must avoid legitimising violence in any way, and they must safeguard the democratic principle that power comes only from the ballot box.

In addition, both the Irish and British Governments are totally committed to the principle that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people there.

If however those who are at present locked into violence show a serious desire to seek a way out, we believe strongly that this must be tested and facilitated in every way that does not infringe basic principles.

A resolute opposition to violence, and the wish to end it, leads logically to an effort to construct a meaningful political alternative, as John Hume is so very courageously trying to facilitate.

The public response to his endeavours shows that the hope of peace touches a deep chord in both islands which compels an urgent response from both Governments. We must not become side-tracked into debate regarding partial and comprehensive approaches to the problem. Progress must be sought urgently on all fronts, as and when it becomes possible. Provided the goal is a deep and lasting accommodation, rather than marginal changes, all approaches are complementary. It is clear however that people may be willing to take greater political risks for peace than they would for some lesser goal.

We need a framework for dialogue which would enable all those who resort to violence on both sides to agree that violence must no longer have any place in resolving differences between those living on the island of Ireland, no matter how deep and intractable these differences may be. That is why we have suggested a number of times that there will be a place at the table at which our future is negotiated for all those who lay guns and bombs to one side, and who commit themselves to the task of persuasion rather than terrorism.

There can be no going back to the past - and that applies to the unionist tradition as well as to anyone else. The protection of the unionist position depends on securing agreement with the large and growing nationalist community within Northern Ireland. Given the political realities on the island, this almost certainly can be achieved only through agreement with the nationalist tradition in Ireland as a whole. An exclusively or predominantly internal approach to the Northern Ireland problem is unlikely to succeed.

Many Unionists will privately acknowledge that stability may require a new balance, and a position for Northern Ireland as a whole which accommodates more clearly the rights of the other tradition. They hesitate to acknowledge fully the inter-Irish

dimensions of the problem, for fear of being thought to endorse an all-Ireland solution.

Similarly, there is widespread understanding in the nationalist community that the unionists cannot be coerced, and have in any case a different sense of allegiance as well as individual and community rights which must be respected. Nationalist extremists, of course, hesitate to acknowledge these realities fully or openly. They fear that to do so would fatally compromise the ideological tenet that Britain has no rights over Ireland, a tenet for which they kill, and sometimes are killed themselves.

In both cases the quarrel may be less with the underlying realities, which cannot be wished away, than with the political or theoretical framework in which they are expressed. The challenge is to find a framework where all the realities can be acknowledged in a way that is compatible with the traditional or inherited positions of both sides. These, as we know, focus squarely on both sides on the perceived legitimacy or otherwise of the British presence in Northern Ireland.

A framework which vindicates one position at the expense of the other is unlikely to provide a generally acceptable avenue toward resolving our differences. The question for both sides is whether the British position inclines to one side or another, or is even-handed as between the two. The balance expressed in the British position is therefore a crucial factor.

The two Governments must seek some new and fairly-balanced basis through which both sides can reciprocally acknowledge these realities and explicitly respect each others rights. To find the negotiating framework to begin this process is a classic challenge of politics and statesmanship in its widest sense.

I have tried myself to suggest the outline of basic principles, which taken as a whole and further developed, might offer a basis for this process. These sought to balance acknowledgement of the right of the people living in Ireland, North and South, to determine their own future with the principle that any decision involving a change in the present status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the freely expressed consent of the people there.

The political or diplomatic challenge of creating a framework for peace is first and foremost for the two Governments, who between them carry responsibility for the administration of all of the island.

The urgent and overriding need is for a just and lasting accommodation. The constructive interest which President Clinton personally and his Administration have taken in Northern Ireland, and the valuable practical help given by the United States through the International Fund for Ireland, is already a precious resource for both Governments as they grapple with this tragic problem.

It is a measure of the President's personal commitment that, in spite of other great pressures, he nevertheless made time available to meet me and to express his support for our efforts to advance prospects for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. I want to put on record here the deep appreciation of the Irish Government to the President, and to all the friends of Ireland both in Congress and in the country generally, for their consistent help and understanding.

If we could once establish such a framework for peace, I believe negotiations and agreement on practical arrangements and structures could soon follow. These would certainly include constitutional change.

Northern Ireland is unique. Unlike the situation which prevails elsewhere throughout Britain and Ireland, there is a fundamental absence of constitutional consensus among the people there. Yet this key reality is not reflected in the respective British or Irish constitutional doctrines, which formally presume a consensus where at present there is none, whether in terms of membership of the United Kingdom or Irish unity.

Both Governments should be open to change in this area so as to reflect more accurately the realities of a divided society and to encourage the process of agreement. The Irish Government, for its part, will not be found wanting in this respect.

Any lasting accommodation in relation to Northern Ireland will require new structures to match the three sets of relationships. It will call for internal arrangements in Northern Ireland that rest on the support of both communities. It will call for North-South institutions that make sense of the political, economic and geographical interrelationships on the island.

It will build on a partnership between both sovereign Governments consistent with the goal stated in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of reconciling and acknowledging "the rights of the two major traditions that exist in Ireland, represented on the one hand by those who wish for no change in the present status of Northern Ireland and on the other hand by those who aspire to a sovereign united Ireland achieved by peaceful means and through agreement".

To achieve its objectives it must ensure that both unionist and nationalist objectives are given equally meaningful operational expression and opportunity. If these important objectives can be pursued in an atmosphere of peace, rather than against the fraught background of violence and the security measures necessary to repress it, the prospects of lasting accommodation and stability will be greatly increased.

It is a task of political leadership to work against the forces of fragmentation and division and to seek to build on what binds a community, in all its diversity, together.

We in Ireland - of both traditions - share much more in common than we sometimes admit to ourselves. The quarrels and antagonisms handed down to us should never be a legacy for us in turn to hand to succeeding generations.

Our shared task now is to build and to heal. We have to travel not only with hope but with a determination to show the necessary imagination and openness to create the new beginning we aspire to. For both Governments and for the representatives of both traditions in Ireland, there is no more urgent challenge than to secure a lasting peace.

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