

SECRETARY OF STATE'S SPEECH TO TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN, DINING CLUB. LONDON 20 JANUARY 1994

Can any institution have made a more positive and substantial contribution to the educational, cultural, political and social life of Ireland over the last four hundred and two years than TCD?

A list of alumni would read like a Who's Who of Irish history - Dean Swift, Edmund Burke, Theobald Wolfe Tone, Thomas Emmett, Sir Edward Carson, Dr Douglas Hyde, the first President of Ireland, and, of course, the current most distinguished holder of that office.

That turbulent history has been reflected in Trinity's own development over the last 400 years. In its bloodstream history has conspired to fuse Irishness and Britishness in a unique and creative way. Founded by former Cambridge graduates, based on the model of the two English Universities of the day, Trinity's British pedigree is unchallengable. Yet what could be more quintessentially Irish than TCD? And now the opportunities offered by the College, once the preserve of the privileged, are now enjoyed by men and women, Protestant and Catholic, southerner and northerner, and people from all round the world as well.

It seems to me most appropriate, therefore, that at a time when relations between the different traditions in

Ireland, and relations between Britain and Ireland, are undergoing such rapid development, and are being set within a wholly new framework, I should set out today some thoughts about the background to those changes, and about their meaning and significance, to an audience of Trinity men and women.

The Joint Declaration made by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on 15 December has attracted warm support and praise from around the world: from the United States and Canada, from our European partners, from Australasia, India and Japan. It has been seen, and rightly, as marking an historic new beginning.

The background

But it didn't come out of the blue. Its background is the close and previously abrasive proximity of the two islands. Yet the Declaration is now simply the latest step in the development of what has become a particularly close working relationship between the two Governments.

No-one should really be surprised at British and Irish Governments working closely together. The people of Britain and Ireland have great diversities, certainly, but also a great deal in common. Their history, cultures and populations have been intertwined for many centuries. Illustrations are easily come by, but suffice it for me to

remind you that St Patrick was a Welshman, while that paragon of Britishness, the Duke of Wellington, was born in Dublin.

Today, the links between our two countries are innumerable. We are now partners, of course, in Europe. There is firmly established, as well, a practice of consultation and cooperation between our two Governments on a bilateral basis. British Ministers regularly visit Dublin and frequently receive their Irish counterparts in London or Belfast. A close working relationship extends to the highest political level, with the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister meeting formally at least twice a year, and often in contact in between. Moreover, for the last four years a British-Irish Parliamentary Body has been in place, providing an opportunity for Parliamentarians to get to know each other and work together in examining areas of common concern.

Perhaps, however, the strongest tie between our two countries lies in the Common Travel Area arrangements that have existed between us since long before the European Community was a glimmer in anyone's eye. More than two million people of immediate Irish descent have chosen to live and work in the United Kingdom, where they make a valued and lively contribution to our society.

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The British are not present in the Republic on anything like the same scale, but British companies play an important part in the Irish economy. Ireland is the sixth most important market for British exports. Many Britons visit Ireland as tourists, 1.7 million last year I think, and many homes across the Republic tune into television and radio programmes broadcast from the United Kingdom. Even in our despair at the endless repeats we are as one.

There is no point in pretending there are no difficulties in the relationship. No doubt precisely because so much of our history has been intertwined, our perception of each other has often focussed on caricatures, none too kindly, of what is different rather than what we hold in common. Our history proves a rich quarry for distrust, assiduously mined to this day by collectors. But I am glad to say that their numbers continue to diminish. Meanwhile only last year, while on one of her welcome visits, President Robinson became the first ever President of Ireland to meet the reigning Monarch of the United Kingdom. It was a most powerful symbol of the fact that we are indeed turning our backs on the unhappiness of the past, and coming together in the face of common challenges.

This is seen at its most vivid when we turn to Northern Ireland. The very status of Northern Ireland, and its historic origins; its divided society and the social and political blemishes deriving from it, including seemingly

endemic violence; all these over the last 70 years have been a source of often bitter conflict between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Yet in recent years, Northern Ireland has been the focus of some of the most determined and imaginative co-operation between our two countries, not only at the level of Governments, but between business and community groups as well.

The Challenge

The most basic challenge facing Ireland, North and South, derives from its geography. Lying on the north west fringe of Europe, its future prosperity depends on the ability of its business communities to trade successfully in the markets of Europe and the wider world. That instantly creates a common interest, North and South, in bringing down barriers to trade - both regulatory, through the single European market and GATT, and physical, through the development of modern transport infrastructures that will link us speedily, efficiently and cheaply to the markets for our goods.

The response

The challenge is immediate and severe. Unemployment plagues us. In Northern Ireland it is currently 13.6%, although a strong downward trend is welcome. In the Republic it is, I believe, something like 17.8%. The

statistics are chilling. But anyone who travels around Ireland, North or South, knows that there are plenty of grounds for hope - thriving companies, dynamic entrepreneurs, excellent labour relations, continuing inward investment - and cross-border cooperation has developed rapidly in recent years to maximise those advantages.

Northern Ireland's Industrial Development Board and the Irish Trade Board have now begun to mount joint promotions of goods produced North and South of the border. The first was held here in London in 1992, at Liberty's. Another, attended jointly by Lord Arran, the Minister for Agriculture in Northern Ireland and Charlie McCreevy, the Irish Minister for Tourism and Trade, was held in Chicago last summer. It proved highly successful.

The Irish Trade Board and LEDU, Northern Ireland's small business agency, are also cooperating in a joint marketing initiative for the Irish film industry, Ireland on Screen. Originally sponsored by the International Fund for Ireland, it provides a platform to sell Irish films and television programmes overseas.

And in the all-important field of research and technology, collaboration is making possible projects that neither the Republic or Northern Ireland could probably sustain on their own. The Institute of Advanced Microelectronics is

just one example, linking the Queen's University of Belfast and Trinity College Dublin. Queen's is also involved in work on micro-electronics in conjunction with University College Cork; and the University of Ulster in a research and development project with three Irish universities and another with the Irish science and technology agency. EOLAS.

I can report growth, too, in trade across the border. It used to be claimed, I don't know how accurately, that more people crossed the border to attend a single rugby international than crossed it in a whole year for business. Now exports to the Republic account for 5% of Northern Ireland's GDP, and exports to Northern Ireland for 3% of the Republic's. Of course, that still leaves a long way to go. A survey by the CBI in Northern Ireland and the Confederation of Irish Industries estimated that the potential for manufacturers north and south to increase business was perhaps worth as much as £3 billion and 75,000 jobs. Again, that is an estimate which is not incontestable, but it is clear that the potential is considerable and that both Governments, and both business communities, are accepting the challenge to bring the potential in line with actuality.

Improved transport infrastructures will certainly help. We have already reached agreement on the upgrading of the Belfast-Dublin rail link and most of the road north of

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Newry has been, or is planned to be, upgraded to dual carriageway status. But not all the obstacles to increase trade have been physical by any means. There have also been many misconceived or exaggerated perceptions about the difficulties of doing business on the other side of the border - problems of recovering debts, dealing with currency, different rates of VAT and different legislation. Once again business groups and public bodies have been working together to address the problems.

Inward investment

By reason, however, of the structural weaknesses of Ireland's economies, we also need inward investment. Both parts of Ireland have been extremely successful at attracting it, from North America, from the Far East, from Germany and France. Low labour costs, a skilled workforce, good infrastructure and a very high quality of life are a winning combination. To some extent, of course, north and south are in competition; often we are chasing the same individual investors. But in as much as we are both competing against regions more centrally placed in the European Community, or in central or eastern Europe, we have come to recognise that there is a common interest in promoting the benefits of the island of Ireland, whether they lie in the north or in the south.

Terrorism draws us together

The challenge of terrorism has also been drawing us closer together.

Last year alone 84 people were killed in Northern Ireland as a result of the continuing campaigns of violence perpetrated by Republican and Loyalist gangs. All were killed by terrorists, none by the security forces.

Hundreds of homes were damaged, countless shops and factories, schools and churches. Many, many lives were caught up in the misery, and will remain desperately blighted. Its tentacles have stretched to Great Britain. And there was, and is, a constant threat that Loyalists will bring the same grief to communities in the Republic.

For all the strong commitment of the Irish Government and the Garda Siochana, there is no doubt that the border continues to provide the terrorists with an invaluable asset, both when launching their murderous assaults and when escaping afterwards.

In the second half of last year alone there were at least five bomb attacks in Northern Ireland using vehicles stolen in the Republic. Last January an army unit at Mullan Bridge came under fire from across the border. In October soldiers in Middletown suffered a similar attack.

After a carefully prepared and executed attack on helicopters at Crossmaglen, the perpetrators probably escaped across the border.

Common cause made

Bringing violence to an end is one of the most pressing priorities facing both Governments. It has produced an unprecedented level of cross-border security co-operation, and a determination to ensure that, faced by a criminal conspiracy of great technical sophistication and reckless savagery, we are increasingly imaginative and flexible in working together to respond effectively.

For our part we are extremely grateful for the continuing high level of cooperation which exists between the Garda Siochana and the RUC. Working relationships have never been better. When I am visiting RUC stations in the border areas, I am always told about the invaluable assistance which the Garda are providing.

Finds such as that made at Ballybofey, Co Donegal, on 4 August, when 1,500lb of home-made explosives were recovered, or that at Omeath on 29 September when a number of firearms were uncovered at what appears to have been a training camp, have undoubtedly saved lives. It is as basic and as simple as that.

I believe that those South of the border can now discern in the North strong and determined Government policies that combine to build confidence in the future, and to remove the grounds for fear that are at the root of so many of our difficulties. The confrontation of terrorist crime, the encouragement of inward investment, the promotion of employment, the provision of health care, housing and education - all these complement one another. And they find their counterparts in the South.

Political development

How does political development fit into this? It is central to our primary objective of achieving peace, stability and prosperity in Northern Ireland, achieved within a harmonious relationship with the Republic of Ireland, a fellow member with us of the European Union. I believe we are better placed now than for many a year to support our ambitions with real substance and achievement.

We have to work within a context produced by that long and turbulent history. Political violence in Ireland has never been far from the surface, and has frequently erupted. Two traditions with opposing national aspirations have long vied with one another. Many things have been done that are now the subject of real and general regret.

Yet we have a great deal going for us on the island of Ireland that is not always found in other parts of the world where national rivalries lie at the roots of popular conflict. In particular, there is an overwhelming desire for peace, properly attained, amongst the vast majority in both main traditions. It is shared by two Governments totally committed to working together in the interests of securing it, by means of agreement and progressive reconciliation. We will not allow history to stand in the way of a better future. We will not allow an often bloody history to rule us from the grave.

The talks process

It is this determination which, together with patient persuasion and preparation, led to the launch of the three stranded talks process in 1991. In Peter Brooke's words, the two Governments were "setting out to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland, and between the people of these islands". This process is based on the premise that a stable, durable and widely accepted settlement requires consent and, ideally, the involvement of the two Governments and the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland committed to the democratic process.

Strand 1 of the political talks process concerns relationships within Northern Ireland, including between

any new institutions there and Westminster. It is a democratic imperative that Northern Ireland should have local political institutions which allow its people to have a fair and appropriate voice in the government of the Province - and which enable their elected representatives to take on the responsibilities of government. But this must be achieved in a way that commands wide support across both traditions - there can be no going back to a system which has the allegiance of, and is operated by, only one part of the community.

Given the geographical and political realities, it is not enough to think in terms only of structures internal to Northern Ireland. So strand 2 of the Talks process concerns relations among the people of the island of Ireland. These must be addressed in any comprehensive agreement - and in a way which takes account of the aspirations and concerns of both traditions.

The third strand concerns relations between the two Governments.

The joint objective is ambitious but necessary - to secure agreement on all three strands. An enduring accommodation must reach out to every aspect of our complex and inter-connecting relationships.

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Two extremely useful rounds of intensive multi-lateral discussions have been held already, within the formula described in my predecessor's statement to the House of Commons on 26 March 1991. All the participants have been drawn into a constructive process of focussing, analysing, articulating and defending their positions. Irish Ministers sat down opposite the Unionist leaders in London and Stormont, put their case - and heard what the Unionists thought of it. The Ulster Unionist Party, for their part, travelled down to Dublin - to go through the same experience. Much ground was broken, much progress was made. I do not doubt that, with proper preparation, this continues to be the most promising way forward.

The Prime Minister and Northern Ireland Ministers, principally Michael Ancram, have all been involved in a lengthy series of bilaterals with the political parties, aimed at explaining their positions and identifying areas where further work is necessary. We set great store by this kind of valuable, sustained preparatory work. We must do all we can to secure success, achieved within an acceptable timescale, once multi-lateral round table discussions resume - as they will at the right time.

The current talks will now be intensified and we shall seek to given them more focus and direction in order to move forward the process of achieving widespread agreement. There are promising signs. The Taoiseach has recently looked to an early resumption of the talks. Once the exchanges currently taking place with the

constitutional parties show that we have indeed reached the appropriate stage, events could move very quickly.

The Joint Declaration -

The Joint Declaration issued by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on 15 December is not a settlement in itself, but rather is a framework for peace. It complements and underpins the talks process. It reflects the long held beliefs of both Governments without compromise or fudge, and promotes the interests and aspirations of both main traditions in Ireland. As nations we can regret the mistakes of earlier generations. But we cannot allow them to hold us back. We have to shape the future, and that is what the Joint Declaration does.

I can put it no better than Cardinal Daly, who said: "The Declaration excludes no-one and predetermines no single political or constitutional future. Nothing is excluded except the use of violence for political ends". [17 December 1993, speaking at the launch of "Peace: Now Is The Time"]

The Declaration offers a framework so as to allow all to make a constructive contribution to securing reconciliation in Ireland who may wish to do so.

The Declaration is founded on the principle of consent. It is profoundly for democracy, and profoundly against violence. I wholeheartedly endorse one of the main thrusts of the Taoiseach's

speech to the Irish Association on 10 January, which was that coercion - whether from within the island or from outside - has no place in the future of Ireland.

:reassurance to nationalists

It is above all a balanced document. Let me demonstrate that. To those who aspire to a sovereign and united Ireland, the Declaration sends a message that should reassure. Lest they suppose the British Government would pursue narrow colonial or strategic ambitions to their detriment, it says the Government have no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland.

It says our primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island. Accordingly, with the Irish Government we will work to achieve such an agreement, one that will embrace the totality of relationships. We will do everything in our power to encourage, facilitate and enable that to be achieved, through dialogue and co-operation based on full respect for the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland. Agreement between the people living in the island of Ireland, North and South, is the key.

No outcome is ruled out. We accept a binding obligation to introduce the necessary legislation to give effect to any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland. But, equally, the outcome cannot be predetermined.

If that agreement involves agreed structures for the island as a whole - so be it.

If it is, or ever shall be, the democratic wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland that there be a united Ireland, that is a matter for them and for the people of the Republic to determine without external impediment. For our part, we have already undertaken that we would introduce and support in Parliament the legislation necessary to give effect to that wish.

In addressing the Dail on 17 December, the Taoiseach said "I do not know of any fairer statement that has been or could be made by the British Government with regard to Nationalist ideals than what is set out in paragraph 4 of the Declaration". John Hume has described the Declaration as one of the most comprehensive that has been made about British-Irish relations in the last 70 years.

: reassurance to unionists

But now what of the other side of the balance? Let me turn to the Declaration's message to those who wish to maintain the Union. For them, too, there can be reassurance.

The Declaration first restates the constitutional guarantee. The Prime Minister reaffirmed that the British Government would uphold the democratic wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland on the issue of whether they prefer to support the Union or a sovereign united Ireland. The Declaration makes it crystal

clear that it is the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland on this point that are and will remain decisive. The Taoiseach for his part expressly affirms that it would be wrong to attempt to impose a united Ireland, in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. And in the event of an overall settlement, the Irish Government undertake to put forward, and support, proposals for change in the Irish Constitution which would fully reflect the principle of consent in Northern Ireland.

I will take this opportunity to make clear that all the people of Northern Ireland can continue to count on the wholehearted commitment of the British Government to their welfare, on a basis of equity and parity of esteem, unless and until by the democratic process described in the Declaration they should cease to be citizens of the United Kingdom.

Agreement, and self-determination

Agreement is a concept which, like a golden thread, runs through the Declaration. It is for those involved in the talks process to come to agreement on the totality of relationships, on the basis of democracy and consent. We will commit ourselves wholeheartedly to this and, with the Irish Government, will seek to create a framework within which agreement can be reached in a reasonable time-scale. We will not allow those who have the opportunity to participate, yet decide not to do so, to apply a brake to progress.

Another golden thread is self-determination. In any territory containing a mix of different traditions and national aspirations, this is a difficult and complex concept. Its application must reflect political realities and democratic principles. We believe the Declaration gets it right. It says "The British Government agrees that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish." (The emphasis is mine.)

This is not about coercion, nor any power to impose a veto. It is about founding a resolution of our troubles upon the principles of agreement, consent and democracy. This is endorsed by the Taoiseach, who says "We have all to recognise that any promising future for the people of this island, not just a united or agreed Ireland, needs to be based on broad agreement and compromise between the different traditions and communities." [10 January, address to the Irish Association, Dublin Castle]

As John Hume has said, "past reasons given by the republican movement for armed struggle no longer exist". [4 January, press statement]

Meanwhile, business as usual

Whatever Sinn Fein's response proves to be, progress is going to continue. The work of strengthening Northern Ireland's economy

will be carried on. The Industrial Development Board will continue to seek out inward investors and to work closely with existing companies. The two Governments, and business organisations north and south of the border, will continue to deepen their co-operation and to develop both cross border and international trade links. Successful companies - like Shorts, Moy Park, Mivan - will continue to improve their productivity and competitiveness. Unemployment, down again this month, to below 100,000 for the first time in 2½ years, will continue to be tackled vigorously.

The invitation to Sinn Fein, to contribute to all of this, is on the table. But no-one has a veto on jobs and prosperity.

As I have pointed out already, if the violence ends, the security arrangements that it has necessitated will, by definition, become unnecessary. But if the violence continues, the work of opposing it will of course continue with the utmost vigour. We shall work to ensure that the law is strong enough to counter these criminal conspiracies, that the police have the necessary resources in terms of manpower, equipment and military support, and that co-operation between the two jurisdictions is as creative and pro-active as possible.

Sinn Fein have been given an opportunity to bring peace to Ireland, but neither they nor anyone else has a veto over the security and safety of the people of Northern Ireland.

Nor do they have a veto on political progress. The three stranded talks process continues, providing a vehicle for building a broad agreement that addresses all the relevant relationships - within Northern Ireland, North/South and East/West. Within the last few days Michael Ancram has again been engaging with the constitutional parties, narrowing the ground between the various viewpoints, identifying areas of potential convergence. At the same time officials of the two Governments have been addressing the complex issues of strand three.

The work is painstakingly slow, but no-one should under-estimate how far we have come in the last two and a half, nearly three, years. There is a momentum for agreement, a hunger for the dignity and responsibility of deciding and governing local affairs, a determination to work together. Sinn Fein can join in, or stay out, but they can't stop it.

The opportunity for peace and full participation is there, in an inclusive process which seeks the agreement which will underpin a permanent peace. The leadership of Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA should now recognise that the violence they say they want to end is useless. It can achieve nothing. If they want to make, and to be seen to make, any contribution to the progress of the people of this island, they need to renounce violence for good and commit themselves exclusively to the democratic process.

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If Sinn Fein grasp this chance then, as has been made clear, within 3 months we can be engaged in exploratory dialogue. We set out the purposes of that dialogue in our message of 5 November, which I published on 29 November.

I repeat them again here:

to explore the basis upon which Sinn Fein would come to be admitted to an inclusive political talks process to which the British Government is committed but without anticipating the negotiations within that process;

to exchange views on how Sinn Fein would be able over a period to play the same part as the current constitutional parties in the public life of Northern Ireland;

to examine the practical consequences of the ending of violence;

That is what would then be explored. That is where clarification could be appropriate, not of the Joint Declaration but of the processes we described in November. There is here a real opportunity for these prisoners of the past to get off their treadmill of violence, and enter the community of democrats. It is there, and will remain there, for the grasping. There can be, and there has been, no negotiating of the political

future with those who use or justify the use of violence. So the choice for them could not be clearer.

Meanwhile, whatever their decision, business in Northern Ireland will and must continue. If crimes of violence go on being committed, their perpetrators (and those who direct them) will be relentlessly pursued. The constitutional parties, with the two sovereign Governments, will in the talks process drive on towards their declared goal with renewed determination. The Declaration, and the realities which it affirms, will stand. And those influences now at work that are drawing all of us in these islands in the direction of concord and away from discord - these will go on getting stronger, for it is the will of the people that concord shall be achieved. It is futile to oppose that will by violence. Let it therefore be abandoned now, and let peace and democracy prevail, with all the blessings they will bring.