

AS DELIVERED

Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. John Bruton, T.D.,

at a Commemoration Ceremony

at the Irish National War Memorial Park at Islandbridge

on Friday 28 April, 1995 at 11.00am

It is time, fifty years later, to pay tribute to those Irish people who fought and died in the British forces in the last war. 150,000 Irish people, north and south, volunteered to fight against Nazi tyranny in Europe. At least, 10,000 were killed while serving in British uniforms. Some may still ask why they fought.

They fought to liberate Europe from the worst tyranny mankind has known, a tyranny that caused the death of 6 million Jews, simply because of their Jewish faith.

Those who seek to understand the justice of the struggle against Nazi tyranny will find no better understanding than that contained in the recently published book, by Mary Rose Doorly, containing the personal recollections of survivors and witnesses to the holocaust, now living in Ireland.

In this book, they will find a poem entitled "The Children of Auschwitz" by Laura Hillman which sums up the grievous wrong that the liberation of Europe brought to an end. I quote some lines from this poem.

I wake up at night
hear their cries
still children,
always children
walking to the crematoria.

They carried their
dolls
teddybears
wide-eyed
or sleepy-looking
bewildered
crying out
Mutti
Mama
Mamutchka
Mama
where have you gone?

I hear their measured steps
tramping on to the crematoria
watched by SS guards.
They rule their world now
had taken their mothers and
fathers away

The door of the crematoria is shut.
One last cry
Now silence.

We must constantly remind ourselves that that crime against humanity was committed within the lifetime of many of us here. It was committed in a civilised Europe by educated Europeans. But it was also brought to an end by the courage, the struggle, and the sacrifice of Europeans, some of whom were Irish, whose bravery we remember today.

In recalling their bravery, we are recalling a shared experience of Irish and British people.

The sacrifice in the last war, and in the first world war, are part of a larger shared experience going back for a thousand years. This was summed up in a paper published some years ago by Liam De Paor. He said

"the element of shared experience is enormous; but in the South we have liked to forget about the British parts of our inheritance; in the North we have tried to forget about the Irish parts".

In this commemoration we remember a British part of the inheritance of all who live in Ireland.

In the First World War approximately 250,000 Irishmen, all volunteers, served in the British Army. This beautiful memorial garden commemorates the 49,000 who died in that war and was raised by voluntary public subscription in a country which had only just emerged from a bloody war of Independence and a Civil war.

As somebody who was born in 1947, two years after the end of the Second World War, I believe it is important that we find a new way of expressing our heritage that is inclusive of the feelings of all who make up this country. We have benefited enormously from the participation in our public and social life of members of the Irish-Jewish community. We have benefited too, from the patriotism of Irish families, whose members have served in the British Army.

Only when we acknowledge, and harness, all the strands that go into the making of the Irish tradition, will we as a people working together, achieve our full potential. What we need is not uniformity, but diversity.

I hope that in recalling, 50 years later, the appalling loss of life in the Second World War, we will rededicate ourselves to eradicate the cause, both of war, and of the persecution of minorities. That cause of war and persecution is latent in the character of every one of us. Indifference, the pursuit of convenience, attachment to status or possessions, a desire not to

stand out from the crowd - these characteristics - found in each one of us, are the characteristics which allowed people to surrender their freedom to dictators, allowed them to close their eyes to atrocities in their midst and allowed them to close their doors and their ports to Jewish refugees.

People, who might have been willing to take a stand against a sudden threat, failed to make any stand, because the threat crept up on them slowly over a number of years. There was never a right time to make the stand.

I can only hope that the memory of the Holocaust will give us all, in this generation, the clarity of mind and the courage of conviction, to take our stand against tyranny in time to make a difference.