

**Dermot Nally
Papers**

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**SPEECH BY DICK SPRING TD
 TANAISTE, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
 LEADER OF THE LABOUR PARTY
 TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE
 LABOUR WOMEN'S NATIONAL COUNCIL
 Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, Saturday 4th December 1993**

EMBARGO: SATURDAY 4th DECEMBER 11.00 am

Yesterday's seven-hour meeting between the British and Irish Governments has put the search for peace in our island on to a new plane. Both Governments are now totally committed to securing a formula, if it is at all possible, that will enable both traditions in Ireland to embark on a new era of trust.

I am not saying this to minimise the difficulties that still face the peace process. Very profound questions of principle and language still divide us. What we are trying to do is made more difficult by the fact that we are each trying to reach a different audience - and those audiences are far from being reconciled to one another.

But the work of peace that has been going on for many months is now reaching a new intensity. And I want to emphasise that the work we are engaged in is about peace - nothing more. Those who, like Dr Paisley in Dublin yesterday, accuse us of plotting a takeover of Northern Ireland are fooling themselves and misrepresenting their own people.

The settlement we want, and the peace formula we seek, is one that threatens nobody. It is not about taking over anything. It is based on one thing, and one thing only - that too many people have died and suffered already, too many families have been shattered. This process is about putting a stop to that - and that's all. There is no hidden agenda.

And so, this annual meeting takes place at a sensitive and, possibly, at an historic time. I can think of nothing more appropriate than that women should come together to make the kind of contribution to reconciliation that is so necessary.

In its seminal report, the OPSAHL Commission said:

"In Northern Ireland, as elsewhere, poverty often wears a female face. Women are more vulnerable to poverty than men, and it is mainly women who bear the burden of managing poverty, which can be both stressful and time consuming. Their alienation from the political system is more acute than men's. Yet it is women who are often the mainstay of community groups and the kind of informal politics that they can represent."

If it is true, as I believe it is, that women bear more of the burden of poverty, then it is also true that women pick up the pieces left by violence, hatred, and fear.

It is women who have to cope with grief, women who have to put families back together, women who have to carry on, often alone. No one has more right than women to shout stop to the endless cycle of violence. No one has more right to demand that peace be given the highest priority.

The priority of peace is now, as I have said, the priority of both Governments. The pressure has come from a moral imperative. But it has been emphasised by the huge community support, and the overwhelming demand from people in all parts of this island to bring hate to an end.

The only possible way forward is through reconciliation. The only agreement that can sustain itself over time is an agreement between the two traditions in Northern Ireland.

That agreement must be freely entered into. It must be about how the two traditions can live and work together on the island that both call home. It must be based on a respect for *difference* - an agreement which is imposed on the communities, and which seeks to crush the differences between them, is a recipe for continued violence.

Further, it must be based on the recognition that the rights and allegiances of both communities are equally valid. That means something a great deal more profound than it might seem. It means that we in the Republic of Ireland must be prepared to recognise, and to preserve and protect, the rights of Unionists as British subjects and citizens. In effect, the guarantee that they have now that their status can only be changed with their consent is something that we must be prepared to honour.

The work that the two Governments are engaged in is the noblest work of all. It is the work of peace. What the two Governments are trying to say to the communities is this - "look, what you agree is up to you. Nothing will happen without your consent to it (and that applies to both communities). Our task is to enable you to talk to each other, and to agree with other if possible, against a background free of violence."

That's all. As I said earlier, there is no hidden agenda in the discussions between the Governments. The Irish Government has said, again and again, that it is not trying to determine the future of Northern Ireland.

That is a matter for the people of Northern Ireland, and then alone. What the peace process will do - if it works - will be to create a climate, in which fear and hatred might recede into the background, and in which reason and dialogue can replace them.

The communities are war weary. The politicians are war weary. Even, perhaps now, the terrorists are war weary. If there is an opportunity to capitalise on that, to persuade the terrorists to lay down arms without compromising fundamental principles, then it must be grasped. What we want is an end of hatred, and the beginnings of working together.

For us, "Ireland without its people means nothing". That's why we argue that peace is a high prize, and that's why we say that the future has to have hope in it - the hope of reconciliation, trust, and dialogue.

If women are entitled to demand peace, then they are entitled to demand as well that there should be a peace dividend. If equality between communities and traditions is to be the cornerstone of our future, as it must be, then other forms of equality must underpin that concept. Above all, the principle of equality between women and men must be used to underpin any new dynamic in Ireland.

We have made some progress. For instance, we are placing an emphasis on second-chance education to enhance equality. We are stressing the importance of equality and equity at every level of our education system. We are determined to ensure the provision of adequate childcare facilities to make the aspiration of a second chance in education a reality.

Throughout our Programme for Government equality is a key word. The legislation and structures that we are putting in place are aimed at ensuring

that the principle of greater equality informs all our dealings - and that principle must include not just women, and not just women at work; but travellers, emigrants, young people, people with a disability. It must include all aspects of the life of the community, ranging from education to housing, from work to sport and play.

I believe that peace is a great prize, a prize worth taking risks and making sacrifices for. I believe that peace is worthwhile for its own sake, but also for the dividend it will give us all.

The dynamic that will flow from peace, the psychological breakthrough it involves for everyone living on this island, will give a new and added impetus to the work that each of you do. It will make a deep and durable commitment to equality part of our culture. It will unleash energies that have lain dormant for years. Above all, it will free us all from the pain and grief associated with, to use the Taoiseach's recent phrase, "walls of wilting flowers and an eternity of tears".

Before concluding, I want to refer briefly to the book we are launching today. It is called "Confronting Intolerance" and we are publishing it in co-operation with the Party of European Socialists. While the book is essentially a collection of speeches, it sets out to address, in as honest a way as we can, many of the issues that divide people - in Northern Ireland, and throughout the island of Ireland. While racism has never been a feature of Irish life, there are too many areas where intolerance has contributed to our problems, and too many areas where tolerance would contribute to a better Ireland.

No where is that more true than in the general area of the search for equality, and in the particular area of the search for peace, which are both bound up with one another. I hope therefore that this record of the Party's position in relation to these fundamental issues will make its own contribution to the building of a more tolerant and equal society.

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