

1 SEP 1988

DAIL EIREANN

BAILE ATHA CLIATH 2  
Dublin 2

WREATH LAYING AT CURR BERAGH, CO. TYRONE

In placing a wreath at Curr Beragh, Co. Tyrone where 8 British Soldiers were killed, Deputy Paddy Harte, Donegal North East, said -

"This wreath which I place on this spot in memory of those who were killed - they were called British soldiers but they were really teenage boys - is a non-verbal expression of my detestation of violence in all its forms. I place it on behalf of all Irish people who reject violence as a means of settling disagreement.

Words have proven to be unsuccessful in the past, words, words and more words. Wise words, well intentioned words, careless words, uninformed words, seditious words have all been spoken. The time has come to progress from words to action - action which will speak louder than words.

This wreath represents solidarity with those who were killed. It reminds us of all the violence around us and the futility of violence. It reminds us of all the other people who have lost their lives as a result of violence. It represents sympathy with the fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters of all those who died and the community from which they came.

It represents hope, an aspiration, a desire and a prayer for peace. It is made of flowers which yesterday adorned the gardens of our Irish countryside which today were cut and pruned to create its beauty. Tomorrow it will die and fade and be no more. This wreath is a microcosm of life itself, its beauty, its potential and its tragedy.

Irish society - North and South - has already paid too high a price for the menacing legacy of our history. Where peace and harmony should have reigned for the mutual benefit of both communities, disagreement and strife have prevailed. Where reciprocal co-operation and trust should have enhanced the quality of life in both parts of Ireland, suspicion and discord have held sway. This polarity is tragic, dangerous, destructive and unchristian.

I now ask 'where is the courage to take the necessary initiative to help change this trend'?

Our future on this island will only be shaped and formed by us. Either we address ourselves with determination and with resolve towards finding an acceptable and agreed solution by Parliamentary and diplomatic means or we run the risk of presiding over an island where death and destruction will be all around us and will be an everyday occurrence - one brutality being more cruel than the last. Politicians of all traditions and of all Party affiliations must recognise anew their mandate from the people to protect and to defend democracy on this island. The narrow and restricted view of what Ireland is about must be set aside. Decisions and determined action must be found to promote the common good to protect the fabric of Irish society - Protestant and Catholic alike - which deeds of violence including the one we recall here today do so much to frustrate and undermine.

Those who planted and triggered the bomb which killed 8 teenage boys and destroyed the bodies of many more have been branded guilty of this foul deed and so they are. They must bear the responsibility but the political lacuna and the need for a political solution were contributory factors. That bomb is no more but the political unrest remains and it will undoubtedly help to trigger the next bomb and the next bomb and the next bomb until political agreement is found.

As sure as night follow day the killings will continue in Ireland unless political settlement is freely agreed between both communities. After 2,000 deaths and 20,415 people injured in the last twenty years it is only the stubbornly blind who refuse to acknowledge the need for political agreement. The high price of that kind of stubbornness is too high for any civilised society to pay. It matters little to the families who have already paid the high cost whether those killed or cruelly maimed were English, Irish, Scotch or Welsh - they were their loved ones, that's what matters. All of them have died or have been cruelly injured because politicians have failed, neglected or stubbornly refused to find political solutions which could bring all this violence to an end. The threatening fear now is that the violence will get worse as people who have little regard for Parliamentary and diplomatic means fill the vacuum left by the inaction <sup>of</sup> politicians and step up their campaign of violence.

I have tried to cross the political/religious divide in the past. I have tried to understand the fears, the suspicions and the misunderstandings of the Protestant people in Northern Ireland. I have tried to communicate with and befriend good people in that tradition and to-day I am trying again by crossing what people in my tradition would see as the cultural divide.

From this spot, in the name of eight teenage boys who were sent to Northern Ireland as soldiers, I am calling on the elected leaders of the Protestant community to step forward and speak with me. I will go to their homes, to their offices, to the Party Headquarters, to their Protestant Halls to meet and speak with them and their supporters about peace on this island and our future together. It does not have to be a United Ireland but it must be about peaceful agreement. I beg the Protestant people of Northern Ireland for the chance to be heard and I call on them to encourage their elected leaders to make themselves available and to enter into talks with the elected leaders of the Catholic people.

The conflict is not about religion but more and more people now see it as intolerant Catholics and intolerant Protestants in a bigotted sectarian conflict. I therefore call on Church leaders to explore all possible ways by which sectarian politics can be ended and to play a greater part in helping elected leaders find common ground because politicians of all Parties are politically impotent without their help.

Finally, but perhaps much more important, I call on Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Haughey to meet face to face as a matter of urgency to work out a fair and just agenda which could unlock the deadlock of Northern Ireland.

No one should complain about imposed solutions if they themselves make no effort to find answers.

There is one thing which is obvious in all of this campaign of violence - it has gone on too long and it must not be allowed to continue."