

Dermot Nally Papers

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Address by the Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds, T.D.,
to the Irish Association, Dublin Castle,
Monday, 10 January 1994 at 5.30 pm.

I am very grateful for the opportunity of addressing this Association at this time. The Irish Association was founded in 1938 by Hugh Montgomery and other public-spirited Unionists, who were deeply concerned at the dangerous gulf growing between the two traditions in Ireland, and the alienating effect on the Northern minority of overtly discriminatory policies and public statements. They also wished to reassert their own Irish identity, as Unionists. He was of the opinion that 'there is but one people in this island - the Irish people'. Montgomery took a long-term view in an address in 1939 to Irish university students. He said that some effort should be made to remove the obsession of the past in Ireland, and he believed that social unity would leave constitutional and political questions to solve themselves. There was a duty to combat misrepresentation and intolerance, and encourage greater social interaction between North and South. These are very similar to views I have expressed myself. Unfortunately, Hugh Montgomery's foresight was greater than his influence.

At more recent times, the Irish Association has concentrated its efforts more on trying to bring about a greater understanding of the Unionist position among those from a Nationalist or Republican background. I believe the Association has provided a useful forum for meeting, debate and discussion between people of different traditions.

Nearly a month has passed since the Joint Declaration between the British Prime Minister and myself was issued. As is generally known, this initiative in its origins was an Irish one, and in its final form it reflects in a balanced way the principal concerns and interests of all sections of the community. It provides a framework for the peaceful and democratic resolution of differences. It does not purport to provide a political settlement for the Northern conflict, or to provide answers to some complex questions. These are clearly a matter for round table negotiation between the two Governments and the democratic parties.

The Declaration is not a solution in itself. It is only the first step on the road to peace and justice. We want everyone to choose the path to peace and to turn away from the cul-de-sac of violence. It is only a first step in a process that, after a cessation of violence, can evolve into a full democratic dialogue for agreement, when all parties, including Sinn Féin, will be involved in full-scale negotiation, and where everyone will have an opportunity to contribute to finding agreement. I want to see normal life to return to both communities in Northern Ireland.

The purpose of the Joint Declaration is to provide a basis for a just and lasting peace and a permanent end to violence. It has attracted an exceptionally wide consensus of support, including most of the constitutional parties. It enjoys a 97% support rating in the Republic, according to a recent opinion poll. It is reasonable to infer from the reaction of the Loyalist paramilitaries that they would accept it as a basis for peace, provided the Republican paramilitaries accepted it. This confirms my long-held contention that, if the Republican paramilitaries ceased violence, the Loyalist paramilitaries would also cease.

The historic nature and importance of the Declaration has, however, I regret to say, not yet been fully appreciated.

The Joint Declaration, if accepted as a basis for peace and implemented by all, spells an end to the coercion or attempted coercion of either community, whether Nationalist or Unionist.

The spirit of coercion has been a potent cause of most of the violence found in Irish history over the past 450 years. The coercion made necessary by the denial of Irish democracy and the national right of self-determination was substantially responsible for rebellions between 1798 and the War of Independence, and for the ultimate failure of many brave and honourable constitutional Nationalist movements in between.

Throughout this century, the Unionists of Northern Ireland have feared that they would be politically or physically coerced by the weight of the Nationalist majority throughout the entire island into some form of united Ireland against their will. The Unionists have felt under siege, and uncertain about their future, as if the history of the 17th century were repeating itself. This fear in turn has led the Unionist community or sections within it to rely on the threat of violence, and sometimes the frightening reality of violence, to ward off the destiny they fear. As a consequence, the Nationalist community within Northern Ireland has been subjected to many forms of coercion down to the present time.

All of this coercion has ensured that we have remained a divided people. The challenge to all of us is to heal that division. Violence and coercion will only drive us further apart. Peace will bring us closer together.

The Joint Declaration makes it clear on behalf of the Irish Government, with the endorsement of all the constitutional nationalist parties, that it would be wrong to impose a united Ireland, in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. Likewise, the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority in Northern Ireland. Both Governments accept that Irish unity would be achieved only by those who favour this outcome persuading those who do not, peacefully and without coercion or violence. I have also expressed a willingness, in the context of an overall settlement and as part of a balanced constitutional accommodation, to support proposals for change in the Irish Constitution, which would fully reflect the principle of consent. I have expressed that readiness, even though I believe the acceptance of the principle of consent on the part of the Irish Government is already clear and unequivocal. As expressed in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, it has been found to be fully compatible with Articles 2 and 3 by our Supreme Court.

Unlike the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the terms of the Joint Declaration have been accepted by responsible Unionist opinion, despite some understandable

reservations. Significantly, the Ulster Unionist leader, Mr. Jim Molyneaux has declared a willingness to work with all those who fully subscribe to the Declaration.

If on foot of the Joint Declaration all violence were to cease, it would mean for Unionists that the siege was over. The benefit and significance of that for everyone is that, because their fundamental democratic rights are protected, there could be no basis for any resort in future to violence or threats of violence to block political progress or agreement arrived at, through the democratic process. The Joint Declaration is a Charter for Democracy in Ireland.

If one looks back over the century, one sees that Home Rule was blocked, any form of all-Ireland institution was blocked, the equality and advancement of Nationalists within Northern Ireland was blocked, Sunningdale was blocked, and the Anglo-Irish Agreement was to a considerable extent frustrated, by the threat or reality of a resort to extra-constitutional means. If removal of any threat of coercion or basis for it directed against Unionists means that any attempt by people acting in their name to impose a veto by physical force on agreement between Unionist and Nationalist or on any form of political progress is lifted, then this represents a huge advance. It would remove one of the principal stumbling blocks to a political settlement and to a full recognition of the rights and identity of Nationalists within Northern Ireland. It is important to note that the requirement for the consent of a majority is related by the Declaration to the constitutional issue. It does not mean that all forms of political progress or other decisions by the two Governments are subject to a similar block.

All this would be the subject of discussion and negotiation, when the Joint Declaration has been accepted and peace has been established in our island.

X It has been said that national self-determination is linked to peace. This principle, which is the foundation stone of Irish independence, is clearly stated in Article 1 of the Irish Constitution, which begins: 'The Irish nation hereby reaffirms its inalienable, indefeasible and sovereign right to choose its own form of Government, to determine its relations with other nations'. The Joint Declaration for the very first time contains explicit British acceptance of the right of self-determination of the people of Ireland as a whole North and South. The Irish people have themselves freely determined, both in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and now in the Joint Declaration endorsed unanimously by the Dáil, that unity would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. The Irish people themselves have freely accepted the attachment of this condition to the exercise of

Self-determination. It is not imposed from outside. No Irish Government could bypass the principles either of our own Constitution on self-determination, or of the Anglo-Irish Agreement on consent, in breach of our international obligations. Both documents have been found to be fully compatible by the Supreme Court, as I believe are both principles.

The Hume-Adams public joint statement of 24 April clearly stated that the exercise of self-determination is a matter for agreement between the people of Ireland. That principle is spelled out in the Joint Declaration by the British Government, when they 'agree 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'.

Acceptance of the principle of consent is central to democracy. It is not possible to insist that self-determination must have a guaranteed and predetermined outcome. The Irish people today do not want the British Government to coerce a deeply unwilling Northern majority into a united Ireland against their will. The attempted application of self-determination without the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland would clearly amount to coercion, and would be a certain recipe for huge future political and economic instability. In the final appendix to Brendan O'Brien's book on the Long War, a paper from a Republican source admits that a declaration by the British that they proposed to withdraw by a given date would create 'a situation of great tension and danger - and, unquestionably, violence'. That is precisely what we wish to avoid. The principle of self-determination cannot and should not be turned into a framework for the coercion of either the Unionist or the Nationalist population. No example can be found anywhere in a long divided country of the application of the right of self-determination, except in the way set out in the Joint Declaration. It is the Irish people, not just the British Government, who have clearly accepted and endorsed the principle of consent.

In terms of Republican doctrine, this is nothing new. There has long been a view, dating back to the independence struggle in the early 1920s that a policy of trying to force or coerce the North into the Free State would not work. The thinking and the intention behind the 1920 Government of Ireland Act was that unity would evolve over time. Some were prepared to say that if the North was to join the 26 counties, it must be voluntarily, and that the South must become economically attractive.

We too have long believed in the silent forces of mutual interests, of economic persuasion, and increased social interaction to bring about the union of Ireland. The gulf of separation, created in part by a militant approach, has hitherto largely prevented those forces from operating. They cannot operate in an atmosphere of attempted coercion.

The Joint Declaration for the first time makes the British and Irish Governments persuaders for an agreement between the people of Ireland North and South. This is not something just stated by me. It has been stated by the Co-Chairman of the British-Irish Parliamentary Body, Peter Temple-Morris. Both Governments are solemnly committed to promote cooperation at all levels, and will work together to achieve an agreement, which will embrace the totality of relationships. The role of the British Government is to encourage, facilitate and enable the achievement of such agreement over a period, and to legislate for it.

I would like to see an early restart to the wider talks process, in order to pursue agreement, that would represent the most fruitful way forward. Much play is made of the British guarantee to Unionists. But equally in this Declaration, again for the first time, there is an explicit, rock-solid British guarantee to Nationalists, that the British Government will uphold the wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland, in the event that they choose to support a sovereign united Ireland. They explicitly acknowledge and agree to support the right of the Irish people to come together in whatever form they choose. They promise to legislate for that. They also disclaim, as they have not always done, any selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland. In other words, British imperialist interest in Ireland is dead, even if we still have to resolve some of its legacy. The President of your Association and historian Dr. John Bowman has described the document in the Irish Times as 'the most separatist' British Government declaration in two centuries.

It is interesting to note that recently revealed Government records show that Seán Lemass as Taoiseach sought from the British 'a clear statement by British political leaders that there would be no British interest in maintaining partition when Irishmen want to get rid of it'. He also told President Kennedy privately that he would like the British Government to welcome agreement between the Irish people. The Joint Declaration not only meets those requirements, but in many respects goes well beyond them.

that regard I welcome the endorsement sent to me from the National Treasurer and 1994 National Convention Chairman of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in America, Thomas E. Gilligan. When he congratulated both Prime Minister Major and myself on the bold step our Governments have taken in searching for peace in Northern Ireland, he described the Joint Declaration as 'a giant step towards this end', and 'certainly the most dramatic advancement in the last 72 years'. He goes on to state: 'the recognition of the British Government, that it is for the people of Ireland alone to settle their differences, should enable all parties to use this thoughtfully composed document as a starting point towards peace'.

It can always be legitimately debated with any agreement, as to whether it is a sufficient basis to be going on, or whether there was or is a possibility of negotiating more. That happened with Home Rule, and with the first Anglo-Irish Treaty. But no one should fall into the trap of repeating the tragic history that led to the civil war that marred the birth of this State.

The situation that I see now is as follows. For over 20 years there has been a prolonged military stalemate that has stifled most of the possibilities for political and economic progress.

There are no military victories on either side, nor on the basis of past experience does any side have any reason to expect one. It is generally agreed that there is no prospect of any material change in that situation. It should be clear that there will be no surrender on any side, Loyalist, Republican or by the British or Irish Governments, and surrender terms are not acceptable to any side. It is totally unrealistic for anyone to expect peace on that basis. There can only be a mutual process of demilitarisation through confidence-building on all sides. Continued violence and conflict is not merely evil. It is futile. What is needed therefore is a basic framework of democratic principles for peace and political progress, that apply equally and impartially to both communities, which will allow a permanent cessation of violence on all sides.

The paramilitaries on both sides see themselves as soldiers, in an honourable war, fighting for what they hold dear in their own way, and not as criminals. Society and the State on both sides of the border deem otherwise. But I agree with John Hume that peace will require moral courage and statesmanship of a high order from all those who lead both the Republican Movement and the Loyalist paramilitaries. The greatest service they can perform for all the people of Northern Ireland is to support the democratic process, and to recognize that, within an agreed and assured

democratic framework for constitutional decision-making, further resort to the gun either now or in the future is wholly out of place. This is the way in which the killing can be halted.

The Joint Declaration incorporates a statement of six rights that are important to Loyalist organizations. These rights belong to everyone, and are accepted and supported by the Irish Government. Equally, the British Government in the Declaration now clearly recognize the legitimate rights of the Nationalist community, the lack of recognition of which has been the *raison d'être* of much Republican violence.

Demilitarisation of the situation on all sides will bring about an end to coercion. I have already spoken about the Unionist fear of coercion. For Nationalists, it has been a continuing reality. For 50 years they were coerced into a State, to which they felt they owed no allegiance. They were coerced, when they protested about the denial of civil rights. Over the past 25 years, the people of deeply Nationalist areas have felt coerced by the security forces, leading to a lack of confidence in, and support for, the administration of justice.

The Nationalist nightmare, as it has been called, or Nationalist alienation can be ended much more easily and effectively in conditions of peace. The Irish Government will insist in the Anglo-Irish Conference and in all future negotiations on the right of the Nationalist Community to equality, and to recognition of their identity. We will not allow any one-sided oppressive system to be reestablished. The Irish Government are absolutely committed to ensuring that there is no return to the bad old days.

At the same time, Nationalists throughout Ireland and Unionists must now seek to establish a better relationship of trust, understanding and co-operation. We must get away from the zero-sum mentality, which is evident even in recent comment. Unionist support for the Declaration has been cited as a reason, why it should be regarded as suspect by Nationalists. Similarly, some Unionists regard any expression of Nationalist identity and aspirations as illegitimate and as a threat to them.

We have all to recognize 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.

Our best future should be decided pragmatically not ideologically in the light of prevailing possibilities, without necessarily abandoning any long-term vision which we hold dear. In the 1790s there was a natural tension between the ideals of the United Irishmen and the Defenders. One tried to bridge different traditions, while the other represented the interests of only one community. Subsequently, Irish Republicanism often tried to live up to the highest ideals, but has sometimes succeeded in only paying lip-service to them.

The spirit of the Joint Declaration has been to try and strike a generous balance between the two communities and traditions, and to provide a new starting point for a more constructive shared future. Republicans everywhere must decide in the period ahead whether they are more United Irishmen or Defenders. The task ahead is surely to practise real Republicanism and reach out to the other tradition, and begin in earnest the task of reconciliation, not allowing ourselves to be discouraged by the inevitable rebuffs along the way.

In today's interdependent world there is no absolute sovereignty, and no absolute unity. We already have a degree of unity on this island, cultural, sporting and even economic. Let us seek to persuade our Unionist compatriots to enlarge that sphere of unity, in a way that does not threaten their future or their identity. Let us also recognize that as a counterpart we, living in this part of Ireland, and in a State that has reached a fair degree of maturity, will need to develop a more balanced and friendly relationship with our neighbouring island than was perhaps possible in the past. We have achieved much. There is no cause to feel any lingering post-colonial inferiority. It should cost us nothing to accept and respect other traditions and other influences. Let us look forward to an Ireland that will blend in a balanced way the best in the political traditions of Republican separatism, of constitutional nationalism, and of Unionism in all their diversities. Let us also capitalize on the great international goodwill that would exist for an Ireland that is working together in new peace and harmony.

Apart from rebuilding relationships, our most immediate priority will be to repair the enormous economic damage that 25 years of the Troubles have caused to both parts of the island. It would make sense to do some of this together. We also need to realize the potential of the Single Market within Ireland, which restores one of the positive economic features of Ireland under the Union. Gone are the customs barriers and the many manbuilt distractions that the economic border sustained. Soon the border will be just a memory. Ireland North and South is an attractive country for investment, for high quality tradeable products, and for tourism. We

have the skilled people. Together, Ireland North and South can make an even bigger impact on a world, that stands waiting to help and support us to set aside our centuries old conflict.

I have no doubt that there will be a large peace dividend for the whole island. Trade, investment and tourism will flow to a much greater extent. Northern Ireland will benefit in particular, and policies can be more effectively applied to tackling high unemployment in deprived areas in cities and in border areas. The highest priority will be given to restoring all cross-border links, and re-opening cross-border roads.

All these subjects will be topics for discussion and negotiation in renewed, wider and deeper political talks. These talks will include in their remit the establishment of North-South institutions, as set out in the Declaration, which would enable the people of Ireland to work together in all areas of common interests. They will also be on the agenda of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, which I propose to establish in consultation with interested parties.

We are in a very difficult and delicate period, when critical decisions, that could affect our future for a very long time to come and perhaps forever, have to be taken. While we have every right to be impatient with continued violence, we must be patient over serious deliberation. I never said or believed the full response would be early or swift. Reasonable patience is not an unseemly price to pay, if the reward we all seek is peace. The unwavering momentum for peace will endure. I believe the Declaration offers in particular a sufficient basis for the Republican Movement to participate fully in the next stages of the peace process. I recognise that for them it is a momentous and historic decision requiring real leadership, courage and conviction to give their movement new direction. The beginning of every new journey holds some fears. These fears can be overcome. The priority must be the protection of human life.

The Irish Government recognise and acknowledge the integrity of all electoral mandates and the rights of all sections of the electorate to freely choose their representatives. But it should also be recognised that we have a duty as an elected Government to protect the integrity of the democratic system as a whole.

The Irish Government want to be as helpful as possible to all sides, to provide continuing clarification to the best of our ability to resolve genuine perplexity, but without putting in question the achievements and balance of the Joint Declaration, which deals very clearly with many of the central issues.

Both Governments and both Prime Ministers have gone further than ever before in our history to solve the age-old problems that afflict us and to provide a framework for an honourable peace all-round in Ireland. We should recognise that it is potentially the most important statement of principle and intention by both Governments in critical policy areas over the past 70 years. What may be hardest to grasp is that it provides important protections to both Unionists and Nationalists at the same time. In place of a history of coercion, democracy will have primacy for the first time in their relations with each other.

X I would appeal to those with whom the ultimate decision for peace now lies. Do not let this opportunity pass. do not because of the weight of the past, or because of very natural instincts, condemn the people of either community to another generation of suffering. Over the next generation we must share a determination to achieve an enduring settlement that will result in a new and agreed Ireland.