



11-9  
Page 5

**Address by the Taoiseach, Mr. John Bruton, T.D.,  
to a Joint Meeting of the United States Congress  
on Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1996 at 10.00 a.m. (local time)**

Mr. Speaker, Senator Thurmond, Members of Congress.

It is a great honour to Ireland that I have been asked to address this joint session of Congress today - as only the 30th head of State or Government from a European country to do so since 1945. But it is a particular honour to be asked to speak here on this day, the 11th September.

For it was on this day, the 11th September, two hundred and ten years ago, almost to the hour, that delegates from New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania and Virginia met just 32 miles from here at Annapolis in Maryland.

It was there, in Annapolis, that they decided to convene the convention in Philadelphia, that gave the people the Constitution of the United States of America - the world's first federal Constitution - the constitution that made Americans "the first people whom Heaven has favoured with an opportunity of deliberating upon, and choosing the form of Government under which they shall live", making America the pioneer of that most powerful of all political ideas - democracy under the rule of law.

Two hundred and ten years later, Americans can look back with pride at what they have given to the world. Never before, in all that long period, have more of humanity lived under a system based on democracy and the rule of law, than do so today.

Even in the case of countries as afflicted as Burma, people are standing up for the principle of democracy and the rule of law. For the first time in their history, the Russian people have freely elected their own President.



The American model - constitutional democracy - has succeeded and spread, because it is built on a realistic view of human nature. Checks and balances are needed. As James Madison said "you must first enable the Government to control the governed, and in the next place, oblige it to control itself".

American democracy has worked, because it has controlled itself - through the separation of powers in a written Constitution, and through a strong and independent Supreme Court that interprets that Constitution. As President Andrew Jackson - a man of Irish ancestry - said in 1821 "the great can protect themselves, but the poor and humble require the arm and shield of the law".

I speak today, as President in office of the European Council, a body that is aiming to do for the fifteen Member States of the European Union, what the men who met at Annapolis and Philadelphia did, so long ago, for the thirteen former colonies of America.

The European Union, through an Inter-Governmental Conference launched last April in Turin, is seeking to write a new Constitution for Europe, that will enable the European Union to add new member states to its East, just as your Constitution of 1789, enabled this American Union to add so many new states to its West.

The establishment of the United States of America was the great constructive constitutional achievement of the late eighteenth century. The establishment of the European Union, out of the devastation of World War II, could be described as the great constructive constitutional achievement of the late twentieth century.

We in Europe have much to learn from the American experience.

Americans came together because of necessity. Very few of the eventual framers of the American Constitution who met at Annapolis were inspired by the theories of Montesquieu or Locke, wanting to build the perfect state - a model democracy - a castle in the sky.

They came together because they had to reach urgent agreement on a framework to sort out problems about shipping on the Potomac, about how they would pay for the army, about who was going to pay taxes and who was going to collect them, about how they could get goods to market, and about how their frontiers would be protected - very practical problems.

Americans knew in 1786 at Annapolis that they could not agree commercial reforms to protect trade, without making political reforms as well. That is why the men at Annapolis decided to call a constitutional conference at Philadelphia.



By working together, to find a means of solving the practical problems of life for their citizens, the framers of the United States Constitution forged the most durable, and perhaps the fairest, system of Government the world has ever seen. They came together as people who each were loyal first and foremost to their own states, but who knew that that loyalty and allegiance could find its best expression as part of a wider American continental identity and loyalty.

It was necessity that brought Europe together too. The necessity of reconstruction after World War II, the necessity of resisting Communism, and the necessity to resolve national conflicts that had led to three wars in just eighty years.

That dynamic continues to apply in Europe today.

It is often said that politics and politicians are made to serve commercial needs. The European Union has done the reverse. It has made commerce the servant of a great political objective. By creating a single coal and steel industry, a single agricultural market, and a single commercial market, the European Union has created economic bonds that bind its members together, politically.

The European Union has undermined the economic base of that force that causes wars - national chauvinism. But the psychological base of national chauvinism still remains a threat.

If Europeans do not constantly work at bringing their Union closer together, the strains arising from remaining differences, will gradually pull their Union apart.

Can the European Union create economic bonds that are strong enough to persuade European states to make sacrifices, and take risks, for a common objective?

That is the question that Europe now has to answer for itself. And, depending on the answer, we will know whether the Yugoslav violence of 1992 - 1993, was just the last convulsion of an old and primitive Europe, or a sign of wider threats to come.

And Europe has to answer that question, while simultaneously bringing in new members, with different political traditions, from Central and Eastern Europe. This problem - of bringing existing members closer together, while also expanding membership - is one that is familiar to anyone who has studied the nineteenth century history of the United States.



Europe's task of constitution-building today is particularly difficult. Europeans were on different sides in past wars, whereas America's founding fathers, (whatever their differences), had all been on the same side. But we are determined to make the European Union work - to make it work for peace, to make the European Union a firm friend and partner of this great American Union.

The United States has built a Union that is robust enough to accommodate radical disagreements, but still take tough decisions when tough decisions have to be taken. Europe must do the same.

This Union - the United States - has worked because it is based on freedom. As Thomas Jefferson said "error of opinion may be tolerated, where reason is left free to combat it".

Conformism of thinking, political correctness if you will, is the great enemy of democratic discourse. We must not be afraid to disagree. We must not dismiss other people's opinions just because they have used the wrong words to express them. Equally, we must accept that some people's views are so profoundly different from ours (on some things), that we will never agree with them, or them with us.

Living with difference. That's the challenge for the United States today. It's the challenge for Europe. And it is also the challenge for Ireland as a whole, and for Northern Ireland in particular - living with difference.

In Northern Ireland, we see two communities, each offended by the views of the other, and by how those views are expressed. Two communities, each feeling itself to be a minority - a minority that has been oppressed, or a minority that fears it may be oppressed in the future. The fears of each community mirrors those of the other.

Two minorities - each justly proud of their heritage, each believing their heritage is one founded on tolerance and civil liberties. Two minorities - who yet will always be different from one another, but who have not yet been able to see that, on many vital issues, they already agree with one another, much more than most. They have exaggerated their differences, and minimised their similarities.

Thus, if there is to be a peaceful and fair accommodation in Northern Ireland, each tradition must be willing to sit down for long enough, and to listen for long enough, to the views, worries and concerns of the other tradition - to uncover the common ground.



Thanks to the effort of many people here in the United States, of President Clinton, Vice President Gore, Speaker Gingrich, and other leaders of both Houses of Congress, most of the parties in Northern Ireland have been sitting down and listening to one another since the 10th of June, under the able chairmanship of former Senator George Mitchell, whose skill and commitment I salute today. They have had about six weeks of talks together and have made some progress. They have agreed some procedural issues, which have laid the foundation for forward movement.

Against the background of twenty five years of brutality of all kinds, and of almost four centuries of distrust, one might not expect rapid agreement, between nine different parties, in the space of only six weeks of talking.

My own view is that the harmony we seek will not come overnight. It will come in stages, from the experience of working together to solve practical, immediate problems.

But, if that is to happen, it is the strong view of my Government, that the talks must now move beyond procedure, and soon discuss really substantive issues of disagreement. This must happen quickly, if we are not to miss the window of opportunity, so often highlighted by President Clinton during his recent visit to Ireland.

On that occasion the President spoke for all Americans.

Almost as much as the Irish themselves, Americans welcomed the political efforts that gave us a ceasefire of seventeen months. But now all of us want the IRA to stop for good. True negotiations can only take place in an atmosphere of genuine peace.

The all-party talks, for which we have worked so hard, have been delivered. We must have everybody there at those talks now, genuinely willing, and able, to negotiate. That can only happen, when everyone has been convinced that violence will never be used again to intimidate opponents, or to control supporters. Never again.

That means a cessation of violence by the IRA that will hold in all circumstances. I know I have the full support of the United States Congress for that vital objective.

In trying to work out a system of Government for Northern Ireland that all can share, in equality and parity of esteem, we are not asking Unionists to cease to be loyally British, or Nationalists to cease to be loyally Irish - any more than the

may be a doorway  
to fortune.

we can argue "or equivalent"



original framers of the United States Constitution ceased to be loyal Virginians, or loyal members of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We are asking nationalists and unionists to agree a political framework which will allow them, together, to take on responsibility for solving the day-to-day problems that affect the lives of the million and a half people who live in Northern Ireland, and to do so in harmony and co-operation with Britain and with the rest of Ireland.

Let the parties build on what they already agree about. All parties in Northern Ireland already agree that the form of Government should be democratic, all agree that there should be a Bill of Rights, all agree that there should be links with the rest of the island, each tradition agrees that the other should be respected, and each agrees that the other tradition cannot be coerced.

The Irish Government has no interest in propelling anybody into an arrangement that they do not wish to be part of. We are not motivated by any interest of our own other than that of obtaining an agreement which is reasonable and fair to the aspirations of both communities in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Speaker, as a historian, I know that you are very conscious of the fact that Europe has many psychological boundaries that go back to the Thirty Years War and earlier, boundaries of religion, boundaries between one world view and another. One of those psychological boundaries does indeed run through the ancient province of Ulster. Yet similar boundaries in Europe have not prevented the development of agreed political structures across boundaries, which allow regions and countries, majorities and minorities within states, to work together in partnership, to the mutual benefit of all their people.

We in Ireland can admire our history, we can regret aspects of it too, but we certainly cannot erase it. We do not owe our history any debts. We cannot relive our great grand parents lives for them. We are not obliged to take offence on their behalf, any more than we are obliged to atone for their sins.

It is our task to live in this generation, as people who live in Ireland and whose children will live there too.

Northern Ireland needs a political system that allows the people there to take responsibility together for their own future. Thanks to the generous support of Congress, they already take responsibility together in economic projects aided by the International Fund for Ireland. They have also taken responsibility together at local level this summer, by agreeing, in very difficult circumstances, the routes of contentious marches.

But a wider political agreement is what we need now. The destructive force of



sectarianism is all too easily fanned. It can quickly get beyond the control of those who fan it, making compromise impossible, and eventually coming back to consume its authors.

That is why we need an agreement, and within a workable time frame. Such an agreement is within reach. The Irish and British Governments were able to agree last year, on a detailed model or framework of a possible agreement. The parties can add to that, or subtract from it, they can come up with an entirely new or better draft - but the core problems that the British and Irish Governments have plainly identified, must be tackled and overcome by this present generation of political leaders. I am absolutely determined that that will happen.

A number of the men who met in Philadelphia to frame the United States Constitution were of Ulster Scots ancestry - some of their distant cousins sit on the Unionist benches at the Belfast talks, just as some of their ancestors defended Derry's walls in 1689.

If men of that ancestry could devise the greatest and fairest democratic Constitution in the world, surely they can work with their neighbours today, to devise a fair and just system for their home country.

Agreed institutions for Northern Ireland must be ones that enforce fairness, and check the arbitrary excesses of whoever happens to be in the majority in any area at any particular time.

Your second President, John Adams, made a bleak, but not altogether unrealistic, comment on universal human nature when he said

"The people, when unchecked, have been as unjust, tyrannical, brutal, barbarous and cruel as any king or senate possessed of uncontrollable power. The majority has eternally, and without exception, usurped over the rights of the minority".

That is why the enforcement of fairness through law, has been one of the key stones of the American Constitution.

That is also why we need rules, and a balanced system of institutions, in Northern Ireland. Rules which limit "uncontrollable power". Rules that require people to share power. Rules that allow people to build trust through small successes. Rules which recognise that people are different from one another, and that people's allegiances may be many and varied.

This is a lesson that the world as a whole needs to learn - if it is to live at peace.



Political theorists of the nineteenth century, assumed that a person could only have one sovereign allegiance - to his or her territorial nation state.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, territorially based natural resources - agricultural and mineral - were crucial to the economy, so nation and territory normally did have to be one and the same.

In contrast, knowledge, instant communication, multiculturalism - or at least a multiplicity of cultures - and mobility will be the characteristics of the twenty first century economy, and nationalities will inevitably become more and more intermixed the one with the other. That is why in many parts of the world, a new (political) model is needed to organise this new social reality - a model that recognises that people can have more allegiances than one, and yet live and work happily together.

The European Union today reflects that concept. In the European Union, someone can, at the same time, owe allegiance to Flanders, to Belgium, and to Europe, and still share the same working and living space with someone who has a different set of national allegiances.

If such a model can work for Europe, it can work for Northern Ireland too. And, if we can get it right in Northern Ireland, we will be setting a model for similarly divided communities across the world, just as men of Irish descent set a model for the world, two hundred and ten years ago today, when they helped draw up the constitution of this great Union.

Yes. Both Ireland and the United States have responsibilities to the wider world - to the six billion people who inhabit this globe. There are three times as many people in the world today, as there were when the Irish state was founded in December 1921, and six times as many as there were when the United States was formed. Africa had half Europe's population in 1950. Thirty years from now there will be three times as many Africans, as Europeans.

All of these people will have to be fed and clothed. All will need in or around 2,000 calories per day and 2 litres per day of clean - I emphasize clean - water. There will be two billion more mouths to feed in the world thirty years from now. All will need to feel that they are a respected part of the world community, and that they're not second class.

The world is a better place today, than it was fifty years ago. It can be even better still fifty years from now, if we build freedom, freedom for all, within rules set by democratic consent.

Lawmakers everywhere must remember that rules work best, when there is consent to the way in which they are made, and when everyone has had a recognised input to making the rules. That is why we need to reform the United Nations. We cannot impose rules unilaterally. If the United Nations had not been created in 1946 in San Francisco, we would have had to invent it today - because (given the scale of the world's problems) we must have a means of making rules, which allow us to share the world together, rules in which all nations have a recognised part in making.

Let me take one example of an area where world rules are needed.

We need world rules against terrorism, terrorism which exploits the freedom of our media. As President (George) Bush said "simply by capturing headlines and television time, the terrorist partially succeeds".

Violence and democratic politics can never mix. Civilised states do not negotiate under threat. That is why those who wish to win respect through democratic politics, must give up all connections with terror, give up the threat of terror, and give up even giving coded warnings about terror.

Terror can not be part of the political calculus of a democracy. That is why Ireland strongly supports the United States' efforts to create world rules to combat terrorism - terrorism of which United States citizens have been victims in recent times.

Freedom and democracy work, because in a democracy, change must be based on consent, and because it leaves space for individuals to innovate; creating the best conditions for economic growth.

Ireland is a good example of a democracy that works.

Ireland's economic growth rate last year, was the highest in Europe, for the third year in a row. Inflation in Ireland is amongst the lowest in Europe. Government spending came down from 52% of G.N.P. in 1986, to just 40% today. Four times as many Irish people go to college today, as did so in 1965. The proportion of Irish children who complete high school has more than quadrupled since then.

As a result, one third of all U.S. high tech investment going to Europe as a whole, comes to Ireland.

Education is the key.



We do have problems. Too many Irish people are (still) unemployed.

But the biggest common factor among the unemployed, is that they left school too early. It is not enough that 85% of Irish students complete high school, or to use the Irish term - sit the Leaving Certificate - we need 100% to do so. Not just to acquire technical qualifications, but to understand their place in the world - their history, where they are coming from, who they are, and as much as possible about all the other peoples with whom they must share this increasingly crowded globe.

I thank all Americans, and Americans of Irish heritage in particular, for their contribution to Ireland's success. I salute the contributions men and women of Irish heritage have made to this great nation, in every walk of life. I ask Congress to continue to support the peace process in Ireland. I ask Congress - representing this great American Union - to work together with Europe to build a structure of peace in the world as a whole.