

PLENARY SESSION OF THE BRITISH IRISH INTERPARLIAMENTARY BODY -
SPEECH BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND - SIR PATRICK
MAYHEW

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Mr Temple Morris, Mr Bradford, assembled members of the British Irish Interparliamentary Body, at last we meet! I am genuinely delighted finally to have the opportunity to address and meet you all. I would like to repeat the assurance I asked Michael Ancram to give to you all last year - I have not been trying to avoid you!

Our first attempt to get together in London in December 1993 was thwarted for the very best of reasons, the Government and Irish Government were just completing the Joint Declaration. In 1994, both Michael Ancram and I were ready to meet you all when the session was cancelled. Last year I was paying an official visit to Australia.

I see from your programme of business than you have discussed several important issues. European Union Aid, the International Fund for Ireland, Co-operation in the Arts and Culture and Policing. [I know that you had a lively debate on political developments yesterday afternoon.] I look forward to answering your questions shortly. Before I do, I would like to set the scene by describing recent developments in Northern Ireland.

Detail

I am addressing the Body at a very delicate time for Northern Ireland. Some may say that such a statement applies at anytime in Northern Ireland. The multi-party talks are happening; sadly there are empty chairs at the debating table. In a fortnights time in Pittsburgh there will be a follow up to last year's successful Investment Conference in Washington. All of this is taking place with the threat of IRA violence in the background, despite the speculation in some quarters that the IRA may declare a ceasefire.

Another IRA ceasefire?

Like everyone here, I hope that the IRA will restore their ceasefire. There has never been any justification for the IRA's so-called armed struggle - and still less justification for the violent ending of the ceasefire in February. The Government call on the IRA for a genuine and unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994. This call is shared by the Irish and American Governments. Sinn Fein have excluded themselves from the talks unless and until the ceasefire is restored. However, progress in the talks will not await Sinn Fein's participation.

If there is a ceasefire, the Government and all of the parties involved in the negotiations will want to be satisfied that it is genuine. We for our part would want to look at the events and

action on the ground. Words are not enough. We are fully aware that targeting and preparations are continuing. Any attacks prior to an announcement would clearly call into question whether any ceasefire was indeed genuine.

British and Irish Prime Ministers at 13

December sets out the constitutional principles and realities which

Current security situation

The ending of the marching season has seen a welcome return to relative normality. This summer there were no winners and the wounds will take time to heal. The violence which we witnessed and the cross-community tensions we felt underline the need for all constitutional parties to show positive leadership.

In Frameworks for the Future, published 18 months ago now the

Despite the breakdown in the Provisional IRA's ceasefire there has, so far, been no resumption of terrorist attacks in Northern Ireland and the Loyalist ceasefire continues to hold, despite tensions. Punishment attacks however continue and are now almost a nightly occurrence. We continue to see intimidation in the form of the INLA internal feud, death threats, threats of expulsion and the murders perpetrated by the IRA under the cover name Direct Action Against Drugs. More recent sinister developments have been the boycotting of businesses on account of the particular trader's religion and the blockading of roads to prevent worshippers attending their churches. This type of behaviour is counter-productive and it must stop. The security forces will continue to meet violence and disorder with resolution. And the Government's response to the security situation will continue to be measured and proportionate according to the threat.

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The talks - central principles

The Joint Declaration of the British and Irish Prime Ministers of 15 December sets out the constitutional principles and realities which safeguard the vital interests of both communities in Northern Ireland. It makes it clear that any overall settlement must be founded on the fundamental principles of democracy and consent. It also states that democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods will be allowed to participate fully in democratic politics and to join dialogue.

In Frameworks for the Future, published 18 months ago now the Governments set out our views on what a political settlement might look like. As is so often the case on Northern Ireland issues, Frameworks was misunderstood and criticised by many. Some tried to suggest that somehow we were going to force some sort of political solution on Northern Ireland. This was not the case then, and is certainly not the case now. If any proposed solution is going to work, it must recognise the hopes and fears of both communities. The frameworks documents do this. The two frameworks documents contain proposals which set out our views on what an overall political settlement might look like.

The marching season

I would like now to discuss marches. In particular the most recent marching season in Northern Ireland a subject on which I notice several of you have tabled questions.

The parade in Drumcree and the way it was handled raised several questions about the operational independence of the RUC, the role of the Secretary of State in the approval - or otherwise - of notified parades and the attitude of the RUC towards parades organised by unionists and nationalists. I would like to deal with these issues head on.

First, the operational independence of the RUC. The wider power to impose a ban on public processions and open air meetings rests in law with the Secretary of State; but in practice such decisions are made on the basis of advice given by the Chief Constable. This is precisely what happened in the case of the Apprentice Boys' parade in Londonderry in August. The responsibility for evaluating a proposed parade against the statutory criteria rests with the Royal Ulster Constabulary. In making decisions as to whether a parade may follow a particular route, the RUC must decide whether the proposed route is likely to prompt serious disorder, serious disruption to life of the community or serious damage to property or whether the purpose of the organisers is to intimidate others. If so, they and they alone have the right to impose conditions on the parade.

Do the RUC have a different decision making process for parades organised by the Unionist or Nationalist community? I can say categorically they do not. Each parade is dealt with individually, and the RUC apply the law to each situation as it arises. No two situations are identical and all decisions are taken in the light of circumstances on the ground.

I would like to turn specifically to the parade in Drumcree on 11 July. Many of those who sit on the outside looking in, have wrongly assumed that Drumcree took the RUC by surprise. This is wrong. As I said in my statement to the House of Commons on 15 July, unprecedented efforts had been made by the Government, the church leaders, by the RUC and many others to secure an alternative accommodation in Portadown as far back as January this year. There was also an alternative and uncontroversial route available to the Orange lodge from Portadown. But they decided not to take it. The RUC had also served a lawful notice on the Orange Order, which ordered the return stage of the Orange Order Parade at Portadown to be re-routed away from the Garvaghy Road. This is the objective of the current talks. That objective is shared by the British Government - which had the full support of the British Government - there was serious public disorder at both Drumcree and in many other parts of Northern Ireland for four days. There was a clear and reprehensible intention to over-stretch the capacity of the RUC to maintain public order. I have to say sadly and honestly that those attempts nearly succeeded. The proposals are already agreed by the overwhelming majority of the parties as well as the two.

Throughout there were efforts to reach an agreement within Drumcree which failed. In the light of all these circumstances including his view that some 60,000-70,000 Orange Marchers would be invited to converge on Drumcree, the Chief Constable decided that a limited parade down the Garvaghy Road was the option most likely to prevent loss of life.

The two Governments subsequently decided that these two parties could remain in the negotiations. Sinn Fein know what is required before they can come to the negotiating table.

From here on in I hope that we can build on the achievements of the 1991/92 talks, and the agreements we reached then. Notably that any settlement needs to address the three key relationships: those within Northern Ireland; those between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and those between the two Governments including their relationship with any new institutions in Northern Ireland. It is also agreed that if any settlement is going to work, it must be supported by majorities in each part of the community. This is the objective of the current talks. That objective is shared by the two Governments. Both the Governments are agreed that there is no prospect of this happening through a one sided outcome which leaves one side of the community with a sense of grievance.

This is why there is no predetermined outcome to the talks; but the principles on which a settlement will be based are already agreed by the overwhelming majority of the parties as well as the two Governments.

There will of course be difficult issues to tackle now that the negotiations have resumed. Decommissioning of weapons naturally arouses strong emotions. I am confident that with positive dialogue we can find answers to these tough questions.

Anglo Irish Relations

I should like now to say a few words about the wider relationship between the two Governments. When he spoke to you in Cardiff last year, Michael Ancram said that he thought the time was right for an enhancement of the overall relationship within these Islands. It is worth noting the real progress that we have made since then.

In 1994, our Ambassador in Dublin was obliged to report that, apart from a short visit by the then Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, no British Cabinet Ministers had visited Dublin, except on Northern Ireland business, ^{that year} ~~for some years~~. The present picture, even ignoring all those visits which are a result of the Irish Presidency of the European Union, is very different.

The lead was taken by our two Heads of Government. In December 1995, the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach agreed a programme of co-operation intended to strengthen and broaden the bilateral relationship. I do not wish to give you a catalogue, but it is worth noting just some of the developments which have flowed from that initiative.

The Prime Minister himself, of course, was deeply touched by the warmth and friendliness with which he was received during his short visit to Dublin last December. But other visitors too have found that in many areas of Governmental activity, we have a lot in

common, have a lot to learn from each other, and can do business with each other with an ease and naturalness which I suspect neither of us encounters in dealing with other countries within Europe or beyond.

The Princess Royal, of course, visited Dublin in January. She opened the new British Embassy, and attended a rugby match whose result will have pleased her, as a supporter of Scotland, rather more than some of you in this room. At Government level, our Attorney General and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster have visited Dublin for discussions with their counterparts. The Secretary of State for Social Security had very useful discussions there recently and the Economic Secretary from the Treasury likewise. Irish Ministers of the Environment and of Health have been among the visitors in the other direction. The Minister for the Armed Forces visited Dublin earlier this month for discussions on European security issues and peacekeeping. And of course the Royal Navy ship, HMS Manchester, visited Cork as part of the celebration of 50 years of the Irish Naval Service.

Last week the Government's International Drugs Co-ordinator, Derek Plumbly, visited Dublin to discuss ways in which we might enhance co-operation in the battle against a problem which plagues us throughout these Islands. I hope that further practical steps to improve our efforts to combat this problem will emerge. I understand that members of the Body may be giving consideration to a

study of the question of drugs. I am sure that that would be a helpful area to examine.

But the value of visits at any level, of course, lies not so much in the fact of their taking place, though that can have real or symbolic importance. It lies in the quality of the business that is done and in whether our co-operation can be sustained. It is therefore encouraging that in a number of areas, including finance, health and social security there is a constructive exchange about concluding Memoranda of Understanding or other forms of agreement, which would provide a basis for continuing co-operation in specific areas.

And let me dwell on that for a moment. Any diplomats in the room will forgive me if I say that diplomats often speak rather vaguely about the value of "good relations". But good relations are not an end in themselves. And we can be quite hard-nosed about this. If the exchanges I have mentioned bear fruit, then the Irish health service may secure better value for money in the procurement of goods and services; the British social security system may be better able to combat fraud; and we may both be more effective in reducing the number of young people who fall victim to those who peddle drugs.

So these exchanges can bring real, practical benefits to improve the quality of life of Irish and British people alike, and the lofty rhetoric we all fall prey to should not obscure that fact.

And we must not forget that it is not only at the Governmental level that relationships between the people of these Islands can be enhanced. Links between cities, between universities and cultural exchanges of every form all contribute to a better understanding. Many of these developments do not receive much publicity. But it is worth mentioning, for example, the ambitious programme of co-operation between the Universities of Strathclyde, Aberdeen and Trinity College Dublin, known as the Scottish-Irish Academic Initiative. And there is a whole series of exchanges of artists, musicians, teachers and academics organised by the British Council, who not only bring cultural performances from Britain to the Republic but also help certain Irish groups who wish to visit the UK

The British Council, I know, have been very grateful for the support they have received from President Robinson. They were delighted that the President graciously accepted an invitation to visit British Council Headquarters during her official visit to Britain in June. That visit was an enormous step forward. It is sad to reflect that this was the first official visit in either direction by a Head of State from either country. But instead of looking back in regret, that visit encourages us to look forward with hope and with determination. At her meetings with the Queen and other members of the Royal Family, with the Prime Minister, in a major speech at the Guildhall and during her visit to York, at which she attended a special ecumenical service, President Robinson conveyed the sense of an open, confident Ireland. Her visit, and the spirit

it engendered, inspires us to seek out the best in each other and to build on what we have in common, rather than to suspect the worst and perpetuate division.

I know that in the past there were some in the Republic who believed that any proposal by London to develop the relationship outside the question of Northern Ireland represented some attempt to avoid tackling that central issue in our relationship. The way in which both Governments have acted over the past year surely puts that suspicion to rest. Our determination to pursue a lasting settlement is firm. And we believe that it makes sense, while these efforts continue, to seek also to overcome past inhibitions and to develop a broader, more open relationship in an imaginative and flexible manner. Both processes must continue: that certainly is the intention of the British Government, and this Body is well placed to make a positive contribution.

Conclusion

I would like now, to draw my statement to a close. I am grateful for your hospitality and to Peter Temple Morris for continuing to invite me to come and I am grateful that this time, events have not conspired against us.

As I look around me, I must say that as a parliamentarian I am saddened that the Unionist parties have decided not to take up their two seats on the British Irish Interparliamentary Body. I hope that

these parties are keeping a watchful eye on the work you do and see the added bonus your work is giving to the relationships between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. There is also, the hidden benefit to be gained from discussions in the margins of meetings which should not be overlooked. Perhaps they will reconsider their position in the next Parliament.

Finally, it is clear that there is a very strong relationship between the Government and the Irish Government. In the Joint Declaration and 'Frameworks for the Future' we have key principles which underpin a possible future settlement and our views on what a future settlement might look like. These principles threaten the rights and identity of no-one. The talks are turning to these

issues; both Governments will play a positive role. I look forward to the continuing positive contribution from the BIIPB.

The marches issue, perhaps more than any other goes to the heart of the differences between the two main communities in Northern Ireland. On the Unionist side the inability to parade to and from a church service along routes sanctified by tradition is symbolic of a threat they perceive exists to their culture and sense of identity. By their interpretation of political developments since the signing of the Anglo Irish Agreement now nearly 11 years ago, the curtailment of the freedom to parade is evidence that the Government is following a 'pro-nationalist' agenda. They also feel that these changes are indicative of possible future attitudes to Protestant/Unionist culture should there be any change to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. - if that is an agreed

option. - to be introduced in time for it to impact on next years

On the Nationalist side, while the right of the Orange Order to march is fully recognised and accepted. This is qualified by an insistence that marches should not go through areas where they are not welcome and where offence could be caused by displays of triumphalism. Nationalists maintain that if they are to be citizens of Northern Ireland, they should be citizens of a Northern Ireland where their status is recognised and esteemed as being fully equal to that of Unionists. Such recognition in their eyes does not include being obliged to allow Orangemen to march in nationalists areas because they have always done so. In a nutshell, Nationalists see the prevention of re-routing traditional marches as an indicator of the extent to which things have moved on, while the many unionists see it as an indicator of how much has to be regained.

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True tragedy arises from a conflict of right and right. In the
light of all these difficulties I announced a review of the current
arrangements for handling public processions and associated public
order issues in Northern Ireland.

The review is being chaired by Dr Peter North; Vice Chancellor of
Oxford University, assisted by two clergymen from each side of the
community. The review has wide terms of reference which include
examining current legislation and looking at the possibility of
introducing codes of practice. This review will be independent and
will provide a thorough analysis of the issue by January. That
deadline will allow time for legislation, - if that is an agreed
option, - to be introduced in time for it to impact on next years
marching season. It is our hope that this Review will formulate a
set of principles which will provide guidance in this area.

I hope that this lengthy exposition about Drumcree and the marches
issue has been helpful. I will be glad to deal with your specific
questions later.

The talks process

I believe that Drumcree and the events surrounding it served as a
valuable reminder to us all, of how Northern Ireland could become if
all of the work to secure a peaceful accommodation in Northern
Ireland fails. It has reminded us of just how essential the talks

process is to the people of Northern Ireland and how vital it is for this process to continue. For it is only through the talks process that we will overcome the difficulties and reach an accommodation.

Turning then to the talks. Where do matters rest at present?

After the inevitable hype and the formal opening of the talks, they are beginning to settle into something of a routine.

Again, outsiders not involved in the day to day process are heard to say that nothing has been achieved. It would be a very brave optimist to presume that several weeks of talks can overcome all of the difficulties of centuries. But it would be wrong to belittle the progress we all have made thus far. First, the talks were themselves convened on 10 June. After only two days it appeared as if the whole process would founder on the process of how they were to be chaired. I must say here that the difficulties were averted by the courageous initiative and leadership of David Trimble. I must also say that we have been served brilliantly by Senator Mitchell, General de Chastelain and Mr Holkeri. It is also important to note that rules of procedure were agreed within 6 weeks and this was after the events of Drumcree. The equivalent rules of procedure which applied in 1991 and 1992 were developed over a period of several months. These new rules, after all, provide the comprehensive operative framework for the talks - a significant achievement in itself and one which should not be underrated.

Inevitably recent attention has focussed on the attempt by the DUP and UKUP to remove the Ulster Democratic Party and the Progressive Unionist Party from the negotiations. Some even question why these two parties are remaining in the negotiations while Sinn Fein have not been invited to join.

In our joint communiqué issued on 28 February, we made it clear that the talks participants would be those political parties which achieve representation through an elective process, who establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and have shown that they abide by the democratic process. Sinn Fein were not asked to nominate a team for the negotiations on the grounds that there had not been an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. On the loyalist side, the ceasefire declared by the combined Loyalist Military Command in October 1994 remained in place.

Following certain incidents in the summer, the DUP served an indictment on the two loyalist parties which questioned their commitment to the Mitchell principles of democracy and non violence. These parties have since reaffirmed their commitment to the pursuit of political objectives through solely democratic and peaceful means, and rejected the furtherance of political aims by violence or threat of violence and taken practical steps to resolve tensions with the loyalist paramilitary groups.