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Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. Liam Cosgrave, T.D., at a meeting of the Blackrock Branch of Fine Gael in the Town Hall, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, on Thursday, 21st June, 1973, at 8 p. m.

At the present time, the people of Northern Ireland are preparing for elections. On 28th June they will choose members of a new Assembly. Who exactly will be chosen to sit in this Assembly and what the strength of various political groupings will be, is not yet clear. But already merely by their willingness to take part in these elections the people of the North give expression to an even more basic decision which they have already made - that of electoral action rather than violence, of politics rather than destruction and death.

We all speak constantly of "the majority" and "the minority" in Northern Ireland. But in this regard at least there is no doubt as to who is the majority. This is a majority in a different sense, a majority who have a vital common interest transcending otherwise deep political divisions - a majority for peace. They want no more of the deadly mixture of ruthlessness and incompetence expressed again in the bombings in Coleraine last week; they want an end to sectarian murders and intimidations; an end to innocent deaths - whether of bus drivers in East Belfast or children in Andersonstown.

We must do all we can to encourage and help this great majority of the population who have chosen political action in preference to violence, to persevere in that decision and work through the electoral process. We must do everything we can to ensure that those who seek to disrupt this basic choice - by violence and threat of war against the Irish people, North and South, or by killing and

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maiming Irish men and women of today in the name of Irish men and women of the past - will not prevail.

The Government here will do everything open to us on these matters.

What else can we do at this crucial period to help to promote peace in the North?

In a debate in the Dáil last month I set out my view of the problem as a whole and the approach which I believe is required.

Northern Ireland is a divided community because two apparently incompatible aspirations exist within its population. To satisfy either aspiration definitively now would be finally to frustrate the other. Both communities know this. Each sees that a definitive settlement would finally confirm one or other community as a permanent minority - in the one case in a united Ireland; in the other, in a Northern Ireland permanently accepted as part of the United Kingdom. The experience of fifty years in one case, and the insecurity of the past four or five years in the other, have sharpened the issues for both sides and aggravated the fear of each that it will be thrust permanently into a minority position.

The result is a chronically unstable society where some persons on either side in varying numbers are committed to opposing or threatening to wreck any settlement.

Is there any way out?

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If a broad and genuine consensus transcending community differences could now emerge as a basis for a definitive settlement, I for one would welcome it. But such a broad consensus seems unlikely at present. So it is necessary to work towards it by seeking to promote reconciliation as the essential preliminary basis for a settlement. This is more likely to be a gradual process rather than a single event. The great need therefore is for political institutions that will favour and encourage this process.

Reconciliation calls for a growing recognition of common interest transcending past bitterness and division. This is not a process that can be confined to the North nor can be undertaken successfully within that area alone. Quite apart from the fact that reconciliation between North and South is for one of the two Northern Communities one of its deepest aspirations, there is also the fact that tension between the two parts of Ireland, and fears of the Northern community deriving from this tension, have been an important factor underlying much of the Northern tragedy.

Only if we are prepared to approach the whole people of Northern Ireland in genuine friendship and with a sincere concern for their tragic problems, can we hope to lay a foundation for reconciliation within Northern Ireland itself. Only if the suspicions and fears, which owe part at least of their existence to past attitudes and actions, can be allayed, and trust and confidence restored between North and South, can we realistically expect true peace to return to the North. We have the duty, and the opportunity, to make such a contribution to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, and no considerations of pride, or instinct of self-righteousness must be allowed to stand

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in the way of doing so.

In thus stressing the part we can and must now play in reconciliation in and with the North, I am not suggesting that we should forget or deny our aspiration to see reflected in the political sphere one day, with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, the unity we hope will come; a unity that, despite half-a-century of blunders and mistakes, still exists in such spheres as the Churches, the organisation of trade unions, sporting organisations and financial institutions.

What is most needed today, I believe, is a conscious effort by all of us to cease trying to impose on each other our particular concepts of the kind of Ireland that will eventually emerge from this turmoil. We are all struggling to break free from the shackles of the past; let us not impose new rigidities on our present hopes.

If, as we believe, there must be a reconciliation ^{not} /alone between North and South, but also between the shattered communities within Northern Ireland, we must be prepared to play our part in encouraging the development of a system of institutions within the North that will be acceptable to its people, of both communities. This means that we must be prepared on our part to work with any system of joint government in which valid representatives of both communities are prepared to work together in the interests of Northern Ireland. We must be prepared to recognise the right of the two communities in Northern Ireland to set aside their different views of the eventual shape of Irish political institutions, and to establish institutions that will provide the North with a system of government designed to reconcile the two communities in peace and harmony.

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We shall not be found wanting in this regard. My Government is prepared to meet and discuss matters of common interest either with the political groups in Northern Ireland prior to the establishment of a new Executive there, or with that Executive after it has been established by agreement amongst parties representing both communities, and, of course, with the British Government also.

We shall enter such talks without pre-conditions, in order to see how best to resolve the problems of the island of Ireland. We shall have proposals to make as to how we believe the people of this island can best organise those activities which are carried on in the common interest of both parts of the country - for example, external and internal transport, energy, tourism, industrial and export development, regional development.

I have already invited the Inter-Departmental Unit on Northern Ireland Affairs to examine the scope that exists for joint action by North and South in the economic sphere, and to suggest what mechanisms would be best adapted towards this end.

What is needed above all in dealing with this tangled problem within Ireland and indeed in relations between these two islands as a whole, is a willingness to accept, and work forward from, existing realities, rather than a concern with abstract legalistic or constitutional definitions.

It is said that they who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it. We should all by now have learned - particularly from the recent past - how easily a conflict of abstractions in regard to past or future can kill the real possibilities which exist in the present.

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I do really believe that we have begun to learn and that the stark experience of recent years has begun to induce a new realism in all who are involved in this difficult issue.

The British Government has come to see, and apparently to accept, the Irish Dimension intrinsic to Northern Ireland, and they seem willing to consider steps to give it expression.

And without abandoning our aim, we have also come slowly to realise that we really do want reconciliation and peace between all of the people of Ireland.

The people of Northern Ireland, for their part, have, I believe, also learned from the futility and tragedy and suffering of these recent years. I believe that they will hold to the decision which they have made already by participating in the local elections last month and which they are now preparing to reaffirm - the decision to decide issues electorally rather than by violence and destruction - and to reject absolutely and without any qualification the authors of violence.

What I have said here has had one aim - to help and support them in that basic choice - and by doing so to answer and respond in some way to the mute and patient accusation addressed to all of us last week by the mangled face of an Irish child in our newspapers.

An adequate response to that accusation from each of us must be honest, determined and equally patient. To this we must all respond in the interests of the people of Ireland.