

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2004/21/627
Title:	Copy of the speech of Prime Minister Edward Heath at the opening of the Sunningdale Conference.
Creation Date(s):	6 December, 1973
Level of description:	Item
Extent and medium:	4 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

FOR ORIGAN (COPY TO LILLIS) FROM BURKE.

MR HEATH'S SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE -
6TH DECEMBER 1973.

GENTLEMEN MAY I OPEN THIS CONFERENCE BY WELCOMING HERE THE TAOISEACH
AND HIS COLLEAGUES AND THE MEMBERS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND
EXECUTIVE DESIGNATE AND THEIR COLLEAGUES.

THIS IS AN HISTORIC OCCASION. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND AND OF THOSE WHO WILL SOON, WE HOPE, TAKE
ON THE GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND OVER A WIDE RANGE OF
FUNCTIONS, ARE SITTING DOWN TOGETHER WITH THE PRIME

MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO CONSIDER QUESTIONS VITAL TO
THE FUTURE OF IRELAND.

WE ALL MEET IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF A SAD HISTORY OF VIOLENCE IN
NORTHERN IRELAND AND IN THE FACT OF THREATS OF FURTHER
VIOLENCE. IN MY JUDGMENT, IT LARGELY DEPENDS UPON OUR
ACHIEVEMENTS WHETHER THAT TREAT BECOMES A REALITY.

I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT IT IS IN THE HANDS OF ALL OF US HERE
TODAY TO BRING ABOUT A GREAT GOOD THE FUTURE PEACE AND STABILITY
OF NORTHERN IRELAND.

BUT WE SHALL NOT ONLY BE TALKING ABOUT NORTHERN IRELAND.
WHAT WE SAY AND WHAT WE DO WILL EFFECT THE INTERESTS OF
THE UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND AS A WHOLE.

THE WHITE PAPER ON NORTHERN IRELAND CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS
WHICH WAS PUBLISHED IN MARCH 1973 FOLLOWING EXTENSIVE
CONSULTATIONS ON THE EARLIER PAPER FOR DISCUSSION, CONTAINED
THE PROPOSAL THAT THERE SHOULD BE A CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS
THREE INTER-RELATED OBJECTIVES.

THESE THREE WERE THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE PRESENT STATUS OF
NORTHERN IRELAND AND OF THE POSSIBILITY - WHICH WOULD HAVE
TO BE COMPATIBLE WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF CONSENT - OF SUBSEQUENT
CHANGES IN THAT STATUS; EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION AND CO-
OPERATION IN IRELAND FOR THE BENEFIT OF NORTH AND SOUTH ALIKE;
AND THE PROVISION OF A FIRM BASIS FOR CONCERTED GOVERNMENTAL AND
COMMUNITY ACTION AGAINST TERRORIST ORGANISATIONS.

SINCE THEN, MUCH HAS HAPPENED AND THE NATURE OF THE ISSUES
HAVE BECOME, IN SOME RESPECTS AT LEAST, CLEARER.

THIS IS NOT, AS WE SEE IT, A CONFERENCE WITH AN AGREED AGENDA
OR AN AGREED PROGRAMME OF WORK. WE THOUGHT IT RIGHT THAT THE
CONFERENCE ITSELF SHOULD DECIDE HOW IT GOES ABOUT ITS BUSINESS
AND THAT THE PARTIES WHO WILL FORM A NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE
SHOULD THEMSELVES HAVE A SAY IN THIS.

2. WE ARE ALL HERE CONCERNED WITH A "PACKAGE". DURING THE TALKS WHICH THE FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HELD OVER THE LAST TWO MONTHS WITH THE NORTHERN IRELAND PARTIES, IT WAS ACCEPTED THAT THERE SHOULD BE AGREEMENT ON ALL THE MAIN ISSUES BEFORE THE PARTIES CAME TOGETHER IN AN EXECUTIVE.

THIS CONFERENCE WILL ITSELF NO DOUBT WISH TO LOOK AT MANY OF THESE ISSUES. I HOPE THAT WE CAN REACH CONCLUSIONS ON THE POINTS OF IMPORTANCE IN A WAY WHICH WE CAN ALL ACCEPT. THESE CONCLUSIONS CAN THEN BE ANNOUNCED AT THE END OF THE CONFERENCE. BUT THE DISCUSSION OF A "PACKAGE" CANNOT EASILY BE FITTED INTO A FORMAL AGENDA.

PERHAPS I MIGHT FIRST OF ALL REHEARS WHERE WE HAVE GOT TO.

THE FACT THAT WE ARE HERE AT ALL IS A TESTIMONY TO THE WORK OF MR WHITELAW WHO HAVE RECENTLY GIVEN UP HIS RESPONSIBILITIES AS SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.

SINCE MARCH 1972 WHEN WE ASSUMED DIRECT RULE, HE BEGAN AND CARRIED ON A SERIES OF DIALOGUES WITH THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND. THIS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO PUBLISH A GREEN PAPER AND THEN A WHITE PAPER WHICH SET OUT OUR PROPOSALS.

NOT EVERYONE AGREED WITH THOSE PROPOSALS BUT IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT THE NORTHERN IRELAND CONSTITUTION ACT 1973 REPRESENTED A GREAT DEAL OF AGREEMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND ON BASIS ISSUES. IT WAS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THIS ACT THAT THE INTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS WERE UNDERTAKEN IN NORTHERN IRELAND BY MR WHITELAW WITH THE ALLIANCE PARTY, THE SDLP AND THE ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY.

THESE DISCUSSIONS WERE BROUGHT TO A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION AND THE AGREEMENTS REACHED WERE ANNOUNCED BY MR WHITELAW DURING THE DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 22 NOVEMBER 1973. I AM SURE THAT EVERYONE HERE WILL BE FAMILIAR WITH WHAT HE THEN SAID.

"THE WAY WAS OPEN FOR THE FORMAL APPOINTMENT OF A NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE AND FOR THE DEVOLUTION OF POWERS THAT EXECUTIVE AND TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY. IT WAS HOWEVER AGREED THAT ONCE SUCH AGREEMENT HAD BEEN REACHED THERE SHOULD BE THIS CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS A COUNCIL OF IRELAND AND OTHER MATTERS. THIS IS WHY WE ARE HERE TODAY.

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF INTER-RELATED SUBJECTS WHICH WE WILL BE TO EXAMINE.

FOR EXAMPLE WE WELCOME AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS THE STRUCTURE OF A COUNCIL OF IRELAND. ON THIS WE HAVE ALREADY MADE KNOWN SEVERAL PROPOSITIONS WHICH WE ARE PREPARED TO DISCUSS TODAY.

3
FOR EXAMPLE WE ARE PREPARED, SUBJECT TO AGREEMENT AT THIS
REFERENCE, TO ACCEPT THAT A COUNCIL OF IRELAND SHOULD BE
BEST TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NORTH AND SOUTH OF
BEST WITH PROPER SAFEGUARDS FOR HER MAJESTY'S
GOVERNMENT'S FINANCIAL AND OTHER INTERESTS; THAT IT SHOULD
BEST NOT ONLY OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
PUBLIC AND OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE BUT ALSO,
SEPARATE ADVISORY AND CONSULTATIVE LEVEL, OF REPRESENTATIVES
THE PARTIES IN THE DAIL AND THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY;
BUT THE COUNCIL SHOULD HAVE ITS OWN SECRETARIAT.

IN ADDITION WE THINK THAT IN ORDER THAT DECISIONS OF THE COUNCIL
CARRY THE GREATEST POSSIBLE DEGREE OF SUPPORT, THEY SHOULD
BE MADE AT GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL ON A BASIS OF UNANIMITY. NO
ALL OF YOU HERE TODAY WILL WISH TO EXPRESS YOUR VIEWS ON
AND OTHER PROPOSITIONS ON THE STRUCTURE OF A COUNCIL.

ON THE RELATED QUESTION OF LAW AND ORDER GENERALLY,
THE ISSUE OF DETENTION IS IMPORTANT IN THIS CONTEXT AND HER
MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT HAS REAFFIRMED ITS FIRM COMMITMENT
BRINGING IT TO AN END FOR ALL SECTIONS OF THE COMMUNITY AS
SOON AS THE SECURITY SITUATION PERMITS. AS AN EARNEST
OF THIS, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HOPES TO
BE ABLE TO BRING INTO USE HIS STATUTORY POWERS OF SELECTIVE
DETENTION IN TIME FOR A NUMBER OF DETINEES TO BE RELEASED
BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

AS TO THE SECURITY SITUATION, HMG HAS STATED THAT ITS AIM
IS TO ACHIEVE THE ENDING OF POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE
WHATEVER SOURCE. WE ARE IN NO DOUBT THAT A COUNCIL
OF IRELAND CAN PLAY A USEFUL ROLE IN RELATION TO THIS AND
WE HAVE STATED THAT WE SHALL BE GLAD TO CONSIDER FURTHER
THE IMAGINATIVE AND IMPORTANT CONCEPT OF A COMMON LAW
ENFORCEMENT AREA, THE QUESTION OF EXTRADITION PROCESSES
AND WHAT ROLE THE COUNCIL MIGHT PLAY IN THE LAW AND ORDER
FIELD. HMG ARE IN NO DOUBT THAT THE THREAT OF TERRORISM
MUST BE DEALT WITH ON AN ALL-IRELAND BASIS IF EFFECTIVE
STEPS ARE TO BE TAKEN.

THERE WILL, I AM SURE, ALSO BE DISCUSSION ON POLICING. WE
ARE PREPARED TO ENGAGE IN THIS PROVIDED THAT IT IS UNDERSTOOD
THAT THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY MUST CONTINUE TO PROVIDE
THE POLICE SERVICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.

THESE THEN ARE SOME OF THE MATTERS FOR US TO DISCUSS, TOGETHER
WITH THE VITAL ISSUE OF THE TERRITORIAL STATUS OF NORTHERN
IRELAND. WE DO SO IN A DEVELOPING SITUATION.

IN NORTHERN IRELAND WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGE. THE
CONSTITUTION ACT PROVIDES THE MEANS TO MAKE ADVANCES IN THE
FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY IS
BEING SUBSTANTIALLY REORGANISED AND DEVELOPED; THERE IS
AN EXTENSIVE PROGRAMME OF ECONOMIC REFORM BEING BROUGHT
ABOUT. WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND TAKE ACCOUNT OF THIS
IN OUR DISCUSSIONS.

4
BUT THERE IS NO REASON WHY NEW ORGANISATIONS OR STRUCTURES, SUCH AS A COUNCIL OF IRELAND, SHOULD NOT BE CREATED WHICH, FAR FROM IMPEDING THESE FAR-REACHING DEVELOPMENTS, WILL ASSIST THEM.

AT THE END OF OUR CONFERENCE, IT IS HMG'S HOPE THAT WE CAN REACH CONCLUSIONS ON ALL POINTS UNDER DISCUSSION AND INCLUDE THEM IN A COMMUNIQUE FROM THIS CONFERENCE. THIS CAN LEAD TO THE FORMAL APPOINTMENT OF A NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE AND THE DEVOLUTION OF POWERS TO IT. THERE WILL FOLLOW A FORMAL CONFERENCE AT WHICH THE TWO SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENTS AND THE NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE CAN RATIFY THE AGREEMENTS WHICH HAVE BEEN REACHED.

FURTHER, IT IS OUR HOPE THAT THIS CONFERENCE WILL DECIDE UPON A PROGRAMME OF WORK, WHICH, GIVEN DETERMINATION BOTH THERE AND IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND, CAN BRING ABOUT GREAT CHANGES, AN END TO POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE AND THE BEGINNING OF STABLE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

AS POLITICIANS, ALL OF US HERE WILL HAVE THE TASK OF EXPLAINING TO THOSE WE REPRESENT THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THIS "PACKAGE", NOT ALL OF IT WILL BE UNIVERSALLY WELCOMED BUT WE SHALL ALL HAVE TO MAKE COMPROMISES FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

THIS CONFERENCE CAN BE AN END AND A BEGINNING. IT IS THE END OF THE PERIOD OF DISCUSSION BOTH IN GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND ON THE WAY TO MAKE CONSTITUTIONAL ADVANCES IN NORTHERN IRELAND COMPATIBLE WITH THE DEVOLUTION OF GOVERNMENT. IT CAN ALSO BE A BEGINNING TO NEW INSTITUTIONS NOT ONLY IN NORTHERN IRELAND BUT ALSO IN IRELAND AS A WHOLE. SUCH INSTITUTIONS WILL, WE MUST ALL HOPE, PAVE THE WAY FOR PEACE, STABILITY AND HARMONIOUS CO-OPERATION THROUGHOUT IRELAND.

I EXPECT THE TAOISEACH MAY NOW WISH TO MAKE SOME OPENING REMARKS. I HAVE KEPT MY REMARKS AS SHORT AS POSSIBLE SO THAT BY LUNCH TODAY WE CAN ALL HAVE MADE OUR OPENING STATEMENTS. IT MAY THEN BE DESIRABLE FOR THE TWO SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENTS AND THE LEADERS OF THE PARTIES TO MEET TO DECIDE HOW WE CONDUCT OUR FUTURE BUSINESS.