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SPEECH BY DR G FITZGERALD IN ROSCOMMON, 5 JUNE, 1981

Street violence in Dublin, widespread attacks on the Garda Síochána and on the property of minorities: these events disturb and concern our people. The shadow of the Northern tragedy hangs over our growing instability and it has become impossible to consider the state of our society today in the South without reference to Northern Ireland, to the failures and distortions of this Government in handling the problem and to the prospects for improved stability in the South and real political progress in the North through an alternative approach in Dublin which could be summed up in three words: 'TELLING THE TRUTH'.

The condition of Northern Ireland today is worse than it has been for many years. Every television broadcast shows violence and communal hatred raging now more virulently than before. Social misery and break-down are the lot of the people.

The recent local elections showed that a more stark polarisation now exists in the political life of the North than at any time in this miserable cycle of conflict. The moderate Unionist voices are all in retreat, the Alliance Party has suffered a serious setback, and Unionist despair and resentment have built up Mr Paisley to a point where he is seen by some as poised to take over the leadership of the Unionist people - although he still commands the votes of only 25% of the Northern Ireland people.

I fail to see that there is anything in these developments which should encourage our people to give credit to the present Government.

On the anti-Unionist side, a minority of extremist voices have begun to match Mr Paisley's strident intransigence.

They have, thank God, availed little against the extraordinary resilience of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, whose towering leader has once again, in next to impossible circumstances, shored up a space in the spreading political chaos for sense and hope of humanity.

All in all, however, a very depressing picture: not one that reflects any particular credit on any leader in Dublin or London; certainly not one which either Mr Haughey or Mrs Thatcher is entitled to invoke to claim credit for himself or herself.

Meanwhile, new tensions and uncertainties disturb the condition of the South. To a certain extent we are experiencing a communal anxiety created by a lack of responsibility, purpose and energy in our own Government's handling of the social and economic crisis. The instability which has now surfaced has another dimension, however, as everyone knows. It now has a Northern dimension.

When we see on our television screens the frightening violence of Belfast and Derry being re-enacted in the centre of Dublin - the petrol bombs and the burning cars; when we hear of the mounting concern of the Garda Síochána about our security; when we hear of the growing fears of shopkeepers, old people and people whose job it is to handle money; when we realise that our tourists are being frightened away - we know that our part of Ireland is lurching into serious trouble.

When we learn of attacks on the property and places of worship of Protestants, we realise with a particular horror that the troubles of the North have spread beyond

the Border. It is even more disturbing when we do not learn of these attacks - such as a physical attack carried out some weeks ago by H-Block supporters in a Protestant school in Dublin, but which were unreported, so far as I know.

Have such outrages become too routine, too banal for the public to be informed of them? Or are the victims too afraid to speak?

Our present malaise recalls many of the difficulties our people experienced in the years of the foundation of the State. The nation then was led safely through. The last World War created a critical sense of threat among the people but it also united the people under the then Government's leadership. The nation was again led safely through.

Today the nation is not being led safely through. What we know from our distressing experience is that Ireland's future, North and South, is more uncertain today than it was two years ago.

The dangerous instability that we now experience, instability connected with the tragedy of Northern Ireland, demands qualities in our leaders which will enable our Government and our people to deal with these difficulties and to play a full and responsible part in solving the Northern crisis.

It is irresponsible for any Government in Dublin to seek to make political capital out of the tragedy of Northern Ireland. It is correct that the Irish Government should state clearly that they favour Irish unity only by consent.

When we are told, however, that by the next Fianna Fail Ard Fheis we will be able to see the way forward to Irish unity

more clearly without any indication of how this is to be achieved, two entirely predictable but disastrous results follow:

The men of violence and the intimidators North and South are encouraged by the evident irresponsibility of Government to pursue their evil campaigns.

Secondly, the Unionists of Northern Ireland, those who should be reconciled by Dublin to considering a common future with us, are provoked to further intransigence. Irish unity is once again postponed.

It is, of course, right that the British and Irish Governments should have close contact on all matters concerning Northern Ireland. Fine Gael, when in government, established this practice on a systematic footing: we shall continue it when elected.

It is a profound mistake, however, to conceal from our own people and from the people of Northern Ireland the broad lines of the contents of these discussions, about which many are clearly apprehensive and about which they have a perfect right to be informed.

It is, moreover, the grossest irresponsibility to promote, purely for short-term political gain, suggestions and rumours that these discussions are leading inexorably to dramatic changes in the constitutional status on Northern Ireland.

We will not excite appetites we cannot satisfy. Nor will Fine Gael, in government seek to feed upon understandably emotional reactions to the tragic sufferings in Northern Ireland.

Consistency, clarity and credibility: without these qualities it will not be possible for political leadership in Dublin to restore stability in our own part of Ireland or to re-establish any links of mutual confidence with the majority of our fellow Irishmen and women in Northern Ireland.

No inconsistency or ambiguity on the issue of violence can attach to our leaders if our people and their police force are to feel, at this moment of tension and uncertainty, that sense of confidence which is necessary for stability in society. Mr Haughey, unlike his predecessor Mr Lynch, cannot even bring himself to repudiate irresponsible and dangerous statements on Northern Ireland by some of his noisier supporters.

How can he, when he did not discipline these supporters at a time when he had a large and unthreatened majority in Dail Eireann, ever hope to play a credible role in settling the problems of Northern Ireland? Again the weakness and the lack of energy and decision, so characteristic of his unhappy tinkering with our economy, are displayed, but now on the even more frightening problem of the safety of our people and our policy on Northern Ireland.

Leadership requires imagination tempered by experiences and steadiness of purpose. The Irish Government in its dealings with London should be guided by a prudent scepticism about British purposes and a very clear understanding that, just as we are motivated by Irish interests, so the British Government is impelled, as it has always been impelled throughout our history, by British concerns, which may, and frequently do differ from, and indeed run counter to, ours.

Even the Unionists of Northern Ireland have begun to learn that it is foolish to place too much reliance on Britain. So far as it goes that is a useful development - it is no more than a realisation that what John Hume has been telling them for years is true.

In the circumstances, it is odd and most unfortunate that Mr Haughey's Northern policy is based exclusively on his relations with the British Prime Minister.

Recent events have demonstrated that such special relationships can, when British concerns so dictate, prove unproductive. When in government Fine Gael worked with the British Government, and we shall do so again when elected. There are two important differences, however. First, we have never been gullible about the British. We have always known that Britain will put her interests before Irish interests. We do not and we shall not place an exclusive or inordinate reliance on Britain in our approach to Northern Ireland.

It seems to me that the present Taoiseach's excessive reliance on a British Prime Minister reflects an unwillingness to heed his wiser predecessors, his more experienced colleagues and his diplomatic advisers, many of whom, as I remember from my time as Minister for Foreign Affairs, echoed our Government's reluctance to place too naive or too complacent a trust in our British opposite numbers. How right we were!

The second difference is that we have always understood that the future of Northern Ireland will not be shaped by politicians or civil servants in London and Dublin aiming mirrors at Belfast and Derry. Ultimately it will be decided by Irishmen and women acting together in Ireland.

It is lamentable that Fianna Fail failed to sustain the relationships we had established with Unionists in Northern Ireland. Everyone knows that without such relationships no amount of talks or joint studies with London, no raising of the problem to 'higher planes' of whatever altitude, will bring progress where it finally matters, that is down on the ground in Northern Ireland.

No one in Ireland has any doubt about where we in Fine Gael stand on the safety of our people or on Northern Ireland. A Fine Gael victory will be a very clear signal to those who seek to dictate to our people by intimidation or terror that they will not be allowed to prevail.

Let us be clear about this. Fine Gael, under my leadership, will never turn its back on Northern Ireland. The ending of the Northern tragedy and the resolution of this centuries-old conflict will therefore be the principal objective of any Government that I lead.

I am, through my mother, directly connected with the Protestant tradition in Northern Ireland and I believe that I have inherited and developed a sympathy for the susceptibilities and problems of that community.

I came into politics for two reasons: to help promote the economic development of this State and to work for the resolution of the conflict between my father's and my mother's people.

No government in Dublin can hope to play a useful role in Northern Ireland if it is seen, through political weakness or indecision, to be allowing intimidation, instability or uncertainty to unsettle its own people. Therefore, as central and positive elements of our approach to Northern Ireland, we shall root out the growing sense of fear and

insecurity just as we shall restore clarity of purpose and consistency to our Government's Northern Ireland policy.

We shall, as I have said, continue the current talks with London but we shall not conceal what we are about from our people or from the people of Northern Ireland. In our dealings with London we shall, guided by experience, be prudent but resolute.

As soon as I am elected, I shall, as head of our sovereign government convey to Mrs Thatcher that her present attitude risks alienating an entire community in Northern Ireland. I shall tell her to heed the voice of John Hume and to give hope to the majority of the Catholics of Northern Ireland who reject violence and who long for peaceful political progress.