

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2011/127/1100
Creation Date(s):	5 March 1981
Extent and medium:	6 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.



Northern Ireland Information Service

File
522045-

Stormont Castle,
Belfast BT4 3ST
Telephone Belfast 63011
Telex 74163: 74250: 74272

Great George Street,
London SW1P 3AJ
Telephone 01-233-4626
Telex 1918889

Ulster Office,
11 Berkeley Street, London W1
Telephone 01-493-0601
Telex 21839

5 March 1981

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, RT HON MARGARET THATCHER, IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS TONIGHT

As Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, I speak to you this evening as fellow citizens of that Kingdom and in a part of the same Kingdom - a most important part.

Of course Prime Ministers make regional visits to various parts of England, Scotland and Wales. But in the past, visits to Northern Ireland have somehow been perceived to be rather different. But there is no justification for that perception.

It ought to be as natural for the Prime Minister to visit this part of the United Kingdom as for her (or even, though I hope it will not be for a very long time, for him) to visit Lancashire or Kent, Northumberland or Cornwall, Anglesey or Caithness.

This is my third visit to Northern Ireland since I became Prime Minister.

The people of Northern Ireland have endured and still endure great hardships. They have known terror and sorrow in a measure which their fellow citizens elsewhere in the United Kingdom have been spared in recent memory. They have responded with a courage and determination in all walks of life which the whole country has been quick to recognise and proud to honour.

The burdens borne by Northern Ireland have been made the heavier by the difficulties which our country and indeed the whole of the Western community faces as a result of the world economic recession.

The impact of the recession is reflected in falling output and rising unemployment, even more acutely in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

I know - as you do - the cost in human terms - the waste of resources and the sense of frustration of those who cannot find a job. The decline must be arrested.

Government's Economic Policy

But there are no easy solutions. Prosperity will return to our nation only when inflation has been brought down permanently. The reduction in inflation involves inevitably short-term costs, which are all the harsher to bear at a time when our industries are faced with increased competition overseas. But to abandon the fight against inflation just when it is beginning to be won would mean throwing away all prospect of long-term recovery.

Too often in the past we tried to cure our ills by a dose of inflation. At first this produced some additional growth and some extra jobs. But these were then destroyed as prices inevitably rose and our competitors overtook us yet again. The response was to give ourselves another dose of inflation - but this time a little bigger than last. And so the cycle repeated itself, with the dependence on the drug of inflation growing ever greater. Until, that is, this Government broke the vicious circle with its determination to recreate sound money and honest finance.

We are also determined to create all the other conditions that are necessary if we are to replace the old and dying industries with the industries and jobs of the future. That means encouraging individual enterprise, rewarding effort, assisting new investment, and removing obstacles to growth.

Northern Ireland Economy

The people of Northern Ireland have long been famous for their courage in adversity. You are second to none in the belief that we should stand on our own feet. Indeed, there is no other way forward for any of us. But you have special regional difficulties. We have taken them into account in our public expenditure programmes; and we will continue to do so.

We will also persevere in the search for a way of giving to the people of Northern Ireland more responsibility for the conduct of their own affairs so that their elected representatives can play their part in deciding where the economic priorities of the Province lie. But there is no future for a regional economy - or a national economy - if its main foundation is rising public expenditure financed by an overburdened and shrinking private sector. The only secure prospect for jobs and prosperity in Northern Ireland is within the framework of a strategy for the United Kingdom as a whole which is aimed at creating national prosperity. A steadily growing national economy is the best guarantee of growth in the regions. But growth is not something the Government can bring about on its own. Only individuals themselves can create and seize the opportunities. That is what I mean by enterprise. I think that is what you mean by enterprise. The spirit of enterprise in this Province is not dead. There are firms represented here tonight - firms like Desmonds of Londonderry and Mackies of Belfast - who prove that it is not - that, on the contrary, it is still very much alive. Northern Ireland is as capable as any other part of the United Kingdom of responding to the challenge of enterprise, with self-reliance and the will to succeed.

Energy

But we have in the Province one overriding economic problem - the cost of energy, particularly electricity. The increase in energy prices over the past decade has been the biggest single cause of the world recession.

All the confident economic predictions of the 1960s have been shattered. There is no longer any cheap energy. We have to come to terms with this. Some people talk as though a supply of natural gas

ould solve virtually all our energy problems. The reality is very different. Natural gas is a diminishing resource and its replacement costs are high. Even if a local gas industry received its supplies from Kinsale in the Irish Republic (and we are looking at that possibility with an open mind) gas from that or any other source cannot be cheap in the future - including any that might be found in Northern Ireland itself. Whatever the future prospects for gas, electricity prices will continue to be of vital concern to Northern Ireland consumers. The Northern Ireland electricity operation is small and was made heavily dependent upon oil-firing in the 60s and early 1970s. That was logical at the time. Today, 87 per cent of the Province's plant is oil-fired, compared with 22 per cent in Great Britain. That has led inevitably to the high tariffs of the last few years. The Government accept that these tariffs are an unreasonable burden upon the Northern Ireland community and that they are a real obstacle to economic development. We have been examining the best way of tackling the problem. We have decided to bring Northern Ireland electricity tariffs more closely into line with those in England and Wales, and to keep them there. The tariff increases due on 1 April will be reviewed in the light of this decision. Because of the importance of energy costs to the whole Northern Ireland economy, this is a major decision of principle. I believe that it will be welcomed by commerce, industry, and agriculture, as well as by domestic consumers, as evidence that the Government is responsive to the needs of this part of the United Kingdom and as confirmation of the Government's economic commitment to the Province.

But the commitment of the Government is not simply economic.

Constitutional Position of Northern Ireland

I want to talk to you in the plainest and simplest terms about the constitutional position of the Province within the United Kingdom.

The Government have repeatedly declared that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and will remain so unless its people and the Parliament at Westminster decide otherwise. That is the law of the land, enshrined in the Northern Ireland Constitution Act of 1973. It is fundamental to the Government's thinking. It is something to which I am personally and deeply committed. Let me say with all the

emphasis at my command that there is no plot. There is no sell-out. Those who argue otherwise have simply got it wrong or are choosing not to understand the purpose of my discussions with Mr Haughey. We all have a common interest in peace and reconciliation; we all have a common interest in creating a society where the gunman has no place and where he will no longer be able to kill and maim innocent people; and we all have a common interest in building better working relationships within these islands and within Europe. Our discussions with the Government of the Republic are directed towards those ends. They pose no threat to Northern Ireland. We shall not be deterred by those who seek to invent one. We will not be deflected from serving the best interests of the people of the United Kingdom including the people of Northern Ireland. Attempts at intimidation will fail. No-one in Northern Ireland stands to gain from them. The rule of law must apply to everyone.

Law and Order

The Government's first priority is to protect the people of Northern Ireland from the bullet and the bomb. The terrorists, whether they call themselves loyalists or republicans, have nothing to offer but heartbreak and bloodshed. They are the enemies of us all. We have come a long way in the fight against terrorism. We have made great strides in getting back to normal policing throughout Northern Ireland. The task is not yet done. But we can all have full confidence in the steadfast dedication of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and of the Army, including your own Ulster Defence Regiment, to carry it through. Often the operations of the Security Forces have to be shrouded in secrecy. This has made them targets for unfounded and ill-informed criticism. But they have persevered with the greatest courage and fortitude. Their critics should remember how many lives - since 1969 - the Police and the Army have laid down in order to protect the ordinary citizens of Northern Ireland.

Our aim is to build a healthy and harmonious society in Northern Ireland. The measures the Government takes to deal with the terrorist minority must do nothing to damage the fabric of society. We must always be sure that we punish the law-breakers, and not the vast majority of innocent people, Protestant and Catholic.

The Police and Army fully accept their duty to operate solely within the law and to act in a way which wins the support of the whole community. More and more they are getting that support.

We need too - and increasingly we are getting - determined and effective co-operation from the Authorities in the Republic of Ireland. The terrorists are their enemies too. Those terrorists will carry their determination to disrupt society to any lengths. Once again we have a hunger strike at the Maze Prison in the quest for what they call political status. There is no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence. We will not compromise on this. There will be no political status. Of course those convicted of serious crimes and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment should serve their sentences in humane conditions. We will continue to maintain and, if we can, to improve the high standards which Northern Ireland prisons already provide.

Conclusions

The people of Northern Ireland are entitled to a future as secure and hopeful as that of any other part of the United Kingdom. To that end, we will support the security forces. We will persevere until terrorism has been stamped out. We will work to improve relations within these islands between nation and nation, between community and community. We will together rebuild the trade and commerce of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom and of the United Kingdom within Europe. We will go on and on until our hope is realised.