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Address by Mr. Peter Robinson (D.U.P.)
to the Irish Forum, San Francisco.

Mr. Peter Robinson, deputy leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, addressed an audience of approximately 200 at the Jack Tar Hotel, San Francisco on 19 January 1982. The meeting was organised by the Irish Forum. The meeting was held under tight security although the conference hall was briefly cleared at the half-way stage following a bomb threat. Supporters of NORAID picketed the Hotel and one of the protesters was reportedly arrested for disturbing the peace and trespassing.

Mr. Robinson's speech was, in the main, received with cold politeness; the question and answer session which followed was, by contrast, at times highly emotive.

In his short and rather disjointed speech, Mr. Robinson continually emphasised the fact that Ulster is a part of Great Britain and that it is the democratically expressed desire of its inhabitants to so remain. The 1973 Border Referendum had demonstrated this conclusively: 98.92% of the electorate had then voted to retain the link with Great Britain. Despite the fact that this referendum had afforded an opportunity to all citizens to express their wish, the Provisional IRA and their supporters had chosen to boycott it. In any event a vote in favour of a United Ireland would have amounted to, at most, 20%. He stated that those who would seek to force Ulster into a 32 county Republic, and thereby deny Ulster its right to self-determination should remember the results of the 1973 referendum. The wish of the majority to remain in the United Kingdom must be guaranteed.

He then went on to examine, and to counter, charges of religious discrimination which had been levelled at the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland. The Roman Catholics of N.I. had been adequately, not to say generously treated in the fields of housing, education and social benefits. Claims of adverse discrimination were somewhat undermined by the fact that the R.C. population of Ulster had increased significantly since 1922 while, by contrast, the Protestant community in the Republic had, during the same period, dwindled almost to extinction. This suggested that R.C.'s in Ulster were more generously treated than Protestants in the South.

Turning to the question of an assembly for Northern Ireland, Mr. Robinson stated that direct rule must be ended. Ulster should have a parliament and a government elected by Ulster people for Ulster people. To take account of the minority population, the Unionist parties had suggested a committee system, with eight committees comprised of half government supporters, half opposition parties, the chairmanship to be distributed on a 50/50 basis. These committees should have the right to scrutinize

government policies, to question Government decisions, and to initiate legislation. This proposal had, however, been rejected by both the Irish Government and by the Republican element in Northern Ireland.

He then went on to state that the aim of this speaking tour was to underline the common objective of Unionists - Official and Democratic - to press for the elimination of terrorism. He detailed various IRA atrocities, including the murder of the Rev. Bradford, and the attacks on John Taylor. He referred to the cancellation of Rev. Paisley's U.S. visa as the work of republican sympathisers in Irish-American political circles. He (Robinson) had been denied the right to free speech by the Roman Catholic University of San Francisco - a right guaranteed under the American Constitution. These and similar reactions give encouragement to the murderous aims of the IRA. Irish-Americans should, therefore, ensure that their words of support do not give the IRA the momentum they seek to continue violence. They should further ensure that no finance be given to IRA front-organisations such as NORAID. In conclusion, in a rather self-conscious manner, Mr. Robinson remarked that it was ironic that American dollars would be used by the IRA to buy Communist guns to kill British citizens.

In the question and answer session which followed, audience reaction was, in general, hostile but contained. While many of the "questions" might more accurately be described as emotive statements, by and large questions were pertinent and informed.

The following issues were raised by questioners:

1. Bishop Hurley stated that Irish Americans resent the manner in which Unionists reduce the complex question of Northern Ireland to one single issue - the IRA - when in fact it is a matter of basic civil rights for the minority Catholic population. In reply, Mr. Robinson in an apparently blatant misinterpretation of Bishop Hurley's statement, said that the most basic human right of all was the right to life - a right which the IRA callously disregarded. To suggest that the IRA is an organisation dedicated to attaining human rights was unbelievable and unacceptable. This reply provoked an uproar and despite repeated demands from the floor to reply to the question raised by Bishop Hurley, Mr Robinson declined to comment further.
2. Protestant Paramilitary Groups: Mr. Robinson was asked for his views on Protestant Paramilitary Groups such as the Red Hand and the UVF, who, for the past ten years have systematically murdered thousands of innocent Catholics. He replied that 90% of those murdered had perished at the hands of the IRA and INLA.

While he condemned the actions of the UVF and Red Hand, their activities had to be seen in the context of counter-revolution.

Sean McGuffin (journalist) asked why the DUP continues to support and publicly champion members of the UVF and Red Hand (as, for example, during the recent rioting and roof protest by Loyalist Prisoners in the Crumlin Road Jail) in view of their "mindless acts of murder" which during the past decade have accounted for some 35% of all murders in N.I.

In reply Mr. Robinson again quoted statistics in support of his contention that the vast majority of deaths in N.I. were attributable to the IRA. Less than 10% were the work of Protestant paramilitary organisations. The DUP has condemned all cases of murder. Pressed further on whether the UVF should be banned, Robinson replied that it was for the British government to decide which terrorist organisations should be proscribed.

3. The Third Force: Asked about his attitude to the Third Force, Mr. Robinson replied that the Force had emerged in response to organised genocide on the borders of Northern Ireland - hundreds of innocent farmers had been murdered in an effort to push back the border by systematic depopulation of border areas. When it became clear that the British Army was unable to prevent these atrocities, the Protestant people of Northern Ireland had assumed their inalienable right to defend themselves. The Third Force is not a terrorist organisation. Its role is to complement the role of Security forces and to protect Protestant lives.

Questioned about systematic discrimination against Catholics in relation to franchise, housing and employment, Mr. Robinson replied as follows:

4. Franchise: He denied that Catholics were deprived of the right to vote on religious grounds - ownership of property, rather than religious affiliation, was the sole criterion in establishing franchise. Interesting enough, he defended the one man one vote system as being particularly suited to Ulster. He opposed PR, chiefly because it was un-British: Ulster people resent being the odd ones out in the UK. Furthermore, the PR system is difficult to administer and tends to produce spoiled votes. On the question of gerrymandering, he rejected the suggestion that Ulster was an artificially created Protestant majority and, as such, had no legal status in international law. The border of N.I. was ratified by Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and the Irish Free State, and was registered as an international boundary in the League of Nations.

In reply to a question on the gerrymandering of Derry, he stated that Londonderry should not be viewed in isolation but rather in

the context of Northern Ireland as a whole.

5. Housing: Mr. Robinson stated that Catholics, if anything, receive more generous benefits than Protestants. Catholics in Newry have 52% of public housing although they represent only 32-35% of the population. In the past year in Belfast, £13 million was spent on public housing for Catholics compared to £7 million for Protestants.

6. Employment: Mr. Robinson denied allegations of discrimination against Catholics in relation to employment. He pointed to the establishment of the Fair Employment Agency, which after several years of "touting around" for cases of discrimination had come up with only five, of which three were overruled by the High Court.

7. Education: Asked for his views on the Chilver's report, Robinson replied that he agreed with its recommendations. Training the teachers together was an important first step in educating children together.

8. Democratic Unionist Party: Asked if the D.U.P. would consider discussions with all democratically elected representatives, including the IRA, Robinson replied that his party would never talk to murderers. The D.U.P. are prepared to work closely with other Catholic representatives, such as SDLP, on economic and social issues. They were not prepared to discuss fundamental issues such as the constitution of Northern Ireland.

The meeting then concluded. Attached are two leaflets which were distributed in the course of the evening.

Anne M. Webster

29 January 1982.