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First Draft of Speech by Taoiseach to Joint Session of
US Congress - 17 March, 1976^m

* Mr. Speaker, Mr. President (of the Senate), Members of the Congress of the United States,

On this day two hundred years ago your countrymen and mine were subject to the same king.

George Washington was already marching into Boston on that St. Patrick's Day in 1776.¹ But the Declaration of Independence by which the American colonies cast off their allegiance was still four months in the future; and our two countries were both governed under King George III.

Ireland had then a slightly greater population than America² - strange as that may now seem; and many leaders of opinion on this side of the Atlantic saw it as the country whose situation and historic experience in relation to the British Crown were most clearly relevant to the great political debate in which they were then engaged.³

Because of this, what happened in Ireland was watched with great interest in America. In the summer of 1775 Benjamin Franklin went so far as to propose to the Continental Congress an elaborate scheme for a kind of legislative union between Ireland and the American colonies.⁴ The Congress, wisely perhaps, did not act on the proposal. But on July²⁸ 1775 it adopted "An Address to the People of Ireland" in which

* (exact form of address to be checked)

it expressed its "most grateful acknowledgement for the friendly disposition you have always shown us".⁵

The news of the events in America coming by every vessel which crossed the Atlantic, aroused in turn the liveliest interest in Ireland.

* [The Irish Parliament in Dublin was as yet scarcely a very representative body; and its powers were limited. But it had received Benjamin Franklin with honour some years before.⁶ It is true that as late as 1775 the Irish House of Commons still addressed George III in a formal address⁷ of loyalty as "the best of kings ... a wise, just and amiable Sovereign"; - a view which was hardly shared in the colonies; and it did not object when the King and his Ministers in London withdrew 4,000 of the troops then based in Ireland who were needed for active service in the American wars.⁸ If it had it would have mattered little-for its consent was not required.⁹

Popular sympathies in Ireland however were clearly with the colonists as the address of the Congress to the People of Ireland had recognised;¹⁰ and even in the Irish Parliament, unrepresentative as it was, there was a substantial minority in 1775 who tried to amend the royal address by asking for conciliation and healing measures towards America¹¹ - an approach which a more famous Irishman, Edmund Burke, was urging at the same time in London.⁷

* [Note: I have retained the section in square brackets in case it is desired to fill out the references to 1775/76. I would however prefer to delete it.]

It was natural therefore that Ireland should hear of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia 200 years ago with the greatest interest. The news reached Dublin in late August 1776. A Dublin newspaper, had earlier that summer printed, over several issues, the full text of Tom Paine's pamphlet "Common Sense".¹² On August 2~~2~~¹², 1776 when news of the Declaration arrived, it printed the text of Declaration in full.¹³ Prudently, perhaps, it refrained from immediate comment. But ~~three~~^{five} days later, on August 27, 1776, it became the first newspaper in Ireland to express a view on this, the most important single event in modern history. "We weep", the paper said,

"for the brave Americans as lost departed friends, never again perhaps to be called fellow subjects or linked to us in the bonds of ... amity and affection"¹⁴

True - Irish and Americans have never since been fellow subjects under the Crown. But was a historical prediction ever so utterly and completely mistaken in the event as that newspaper's suggestion 200 years ago this year that the Declaration of Independence might end the "bonds of amity and affection" between Ireland and America?

Should an Irish Prime Minister who has the honor to address a joint session of Congress in the Capitol of the United States on St. Patrick's Day 1976 even think of raising such a question? Perhaps he should. There are some things so obvious that they escape attention unless they are said.

best qualities and your most admirable traditions. Indeed your influence on us is never so great as when, taught by you, and believing in the principles you have brought home to us, we join you in your criticism of yourselves if you seem to us to foresake these principles at home or abroad. You must forgive us if we join you too easily in such criticism. As friends perhaps we forget that we do not have quite the same rights to criticise you as you do to criticise yourselves. It may seem to you that we apply a double standard and expect more of you than we expect of others. The simple answer is that we do. The world has always expected more of America; and if at times you are impatient about it remember that this is your greatest strength.

But it is right that you should know too that you have friends abroad who still believe in you. We have believed in America for too long to lose faith now; we have shared the hopes of America for too long not to take pride now in the achievement; and we have had an affection for America for too long to turn now in an opposite direction.

You will understand therefore how deeply I am moved at your invitation to appear before this joint session of the Congress of these United States on St. Patrick's Day in this bicentennial year. The Continental Congress speaking to the people of Ireland in that Address in July 1775 foresaw that

"the fertile regions of America would afford you a safe asylum from poverty and in time from oppression also; an asylum in which many thousands of your countrymen have (already) found hospitality peace, affluence and become united to us by all the ties of consanguinity, mutual interest and affection." it

The Congress, of the United States and the people whom it

represents must know in March 1976 that that hope has been well fulfilled. Let them be assured also - if they need to be assured - that "the ties of consanguinity, mutual interest and affection" of 1775 are still deep and strong in 1976 on the other side of the Atlantic - in Ireland and in the Europe of which it forms part.

But I must not dwell too long on this aspect of the long and remarkable relationship between our small island and your great Continent. I am, after all, speaking to a Congress where Irish names are not wholly unknown even today; and where you may still, if you try, find more than one Senator or Congressman to tell you what St. Patrick's Day is all about.

I want to talk ^{so much about} instead not/ the history of people and ethnic groups ^{about} as/the spread of ideas; not/ ^{so much about} how Ireland has helped to shape America ^{about} as/how deeply America has influenced Ireland.

^{unfortunately} Ireland is/~~xxxx~~ ^{much} in the news today largely because of the troubled situation in^a/part of the island which deeply affects all of us, even though Northern Ireland, the area concerned, is not within the jurisdiction of my Government.

It is natural that it should do so. Northern Ireland came into existence because of events in our common past;

its divisions reflect these events; its present troubles affect all of the island; and any definition of its future - defines our future too. I believe it necessary therefore to speak to you of this problem and our attitude to it so that you may understand what is happening in Ireland today - since I believe that the Congress in 1976 maintains the interest in Ireland which was shown by the Congress in 1775.

It is important to me that you do understand. Because America, American ideas and American attitudes have had, and can have, very direct consequences for Ireland North and South. I said at the outset that the experience of Ireland was seen by some on this side of the Atlantic in 1776 as particularly relevant to the political debate then under way in America. Now the situation is exactly the reverse. The actions of some Americans today can very directly help or harm what we are about in Ireland; and the ideas of the Declaration of Independence as reflected through the American experience seem to me to be ideas of direct and immediate relevance to our present situation.

Let me explain what I mean.

Some nations come to independence by agreement; others, politically separate through a long history, develop democratic institutions by a slow evolution over many centuries. You and we have had a different experience.

Ireland, like America, was politically dependent - subject indeed at one time to the same king. In the course of human events, as your Declaration says, a time came when each asserted its independence. Each did this in a single dramatic gesture; each explained and justified what it had done out of a decent respect to the opinions of mankind; the independence of each was contested; and each had to fight to have it recognised. So far were our experiences similar - ours directly influenced by yours - and so far common to many other subject nations and colonies.

But you and we shared something more. Neither of us in asserting independence was content to change the old order without establishing to replace it a new and democratic order deriving its just power from the consent of the governed. And that is a much less easy task.

We know that as Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington's forces at Yorktown in 1781 in the last battle of the Revolutionary War, the band played "The World Turned Upside Down".¹⁸ But though it was radically changed, the world was not turned upside down - because Americans in asserting their independence had at the same time set a foundation for democratic political structures and institutions. These proved to be both lasting and flexible; they evolved with time to meet the needs of time; and they ensured that a declaration of independence became a basis for democratic liberties for every future generation.

That I repeat is much the most difficult task in any Revolution. Independence may be proclaimed by a single dramatic gesture which reflects the will of a small group who claim to speak for a majority and believe the time has come for such a declaration. But freedom - the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness - is a different matter. It does not come from a simple declaration - it must be earned by obtaining the consent of all; and it can be guaranteed only if democratic institutions are established which they are willing to accept.

You did these things in America in the late 18th century. For us they came much later. The generation before mine had to grapple with these issues - so they are still vivid for us; and they have raised problems which we are working today to resolve and for which we require your understanding.

Modern Irish nationalism began in the late 18th century with Wolfe Tone - an Irishman of Protestant origin. Under the influence of ideas from America and from revolutionary France, he set himself the aim of working to abolish past dissensions between different elements in the Irish population - who traced their origins to settlements at different times in the island of Ireland and who differed in political outlook and religious belief. His hope was to see the names of "Protestant", "Catholic" and "Dissenter", as he put it, yield place to "the common name of Irishman"; and he tried to establish an Irish Republic on this basis. For nearly

two hundred years now, this has, broadly speaking, been the fundamental aim of Irish nationalism; and numbers of Irishmen and women of differing religious backgrounds, have worked in one way or another in every generation to realise it. In their effort to do so they could always count on support, understanding and help from across the Atlantic where these principles were so well established and where Protestant Catholic and Dissenter - from Ireland and elsewhere - had joined to build this great nation.

My own father, as an Irish nationalist, worked in his time in Ireland for this aim. In his generation an independent democratic Irish state - the first in history - came into being and took its place in the modern world. He and his generation had to cope from the outset with what I have just described as the most difficult task for those who proclaim independence in the name of a people - the establishment of durable democratic institutions on a solid basis of consent, so that the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is not ^{simply} proclaimed dramatically but actually achieved.

They did this well. The democratic structures they established in Ireland are solidly based in the will of the people.

[Today an independent Ireland has, I believe, a respected

place in the world. It has developed its economy; it has assured a better life to its people and a virtual end to a tradition^{of} emigration through necessity - even if it is now, like most of the developed world recovering from the current recession. It plays its full role as a member of the EEC of which it held the Presidency in rotation for six months last year; and it has committed itself with its partners in that community to European integration and the building of a European Union].

But in one respect the aim of my father's generation was not realised and this they had to accept. Their hope, like that of Tone, had been to see all of the ^{four and a half million} people of the island of Ireland irrespective of background or origin, join ^{one million,} to create an independent Irish state. But/a substantial element in the Irish population, who today form the majority in Northern Ireland made it clear that they did not wish to be a part of such an independent Ireland.

More than fifty years have passed. Many things have happened; much has changed. But this is still the central political fact in the island of Ireland; The one million Irish men and women, who make up the largely Protestant majority in Northern Ireland - an element in the Irish population whose emigrants, I would remind you, contributed greatly to the building of America and who trace their

[origin in Ireland to a settlement twelve years before the
Mayflower] - did not, and do not ^{at present} want to be part of an
independent Irish Republic.

It may be that that is our fault. It may be that they do not see the aspirations of Irish nationalism, as we had hoped they would, as sufficiently generous to accommodate them and their tradition and their loyalties. Or it may be that is their's. Or it may be ^{a wise man would say that} that there are faults on both sides. But for whatever reason it is a fact.

To this has been added a second and equally stubborn fact. Within Northern Ireland since it came into being there has been a large minority, for the most part Roman Catholic, who have always shared the traditional nationalist outlook predominant in the rest of the island. This minority, close to half a million people, have felt themselves disadvantaged and saw little reason to identify with the political institutions which were established at the outset in Northern Ireland. This is also a fact.

These two facts pose major problems for all of the people of Ireland - and for Great Britain too:

- for the people of Northern Ireland, in the first instance, the problem is how both parts of a community divided by past bitterness, present fears, and insecurities about the future can live together in peace - for live together they must whatever political

- solution they may or may not reach.

- for all of the rest of us in the island of Ireland, and in particular for my government, the problem is how best to ease fears in Northern Ireland and promote peace and the rule of law throughout the island in the interest of all its people.

The British Government so long as it retains responsibility in the area has the task of maintaining order and protecting the lives of all of the people - especially the lives of the minority. ^(No) These are difficult - indeed painful - problems for all of us. They have a long history; and though we hope to make progress - and greater realism in itself is progress - I cannot tell you that they will easily be solved. As leader of an Irish Government, elected democratically, I can, however, tell you the principles which we seek to apply to them, with the consent of our people as expressed time and again at elections, and the policies to which we as a Government have committed ourselves; and I can ask for your sympathy and understanding for this approach.

But first I think I am entitled to tell you how our problems will not be solved. I do so with the support of the Irish people who elected me. They know the reality of which I speak.

Our problems in Ireland will not be solved by simplistic comparisons with colonial situations in other countries - since all who live in the island of Ireland today belong there as of right; or by calls for liberty and civil rights in the abstract for this group or that if such calls fail to take account of living people or to respect the simple right to life of all sections of the community.

Our problems will not be solved - now or ever - by bomb, by gun, by bank robbery, by sectarian killing or by retaliation; by an easy unthinking and sentimental view of history of a kind which sounds best in a ballad; or by a rigid and authoritarian one which betrays the very past to which it has so tightly locked itself because it denies to a living majority the right to use the freedom gained in previous generations, to rethink the problems which those generations were unable to deal with.

Most of us in Ireland, North and South, see these things very clearly and have done so for a long time. There are some who do not. Misguided,^{or} uncaring^{or} evil, or sick in mind - they are, thank God, a small minority and we hope, a diminishing one. Those who stand for such things are consistently rejected by the people of both parts of Ireland whenever they have stood for election. But they pay little heed to this. In virtue of their own particular interpretation of the past - they claim the right in the name of dead generations to reject those democratic

institutions which secure the freedoms of the living generation in Ireland. The opinion of the living expressed democratically is nothing to them - they presume to call a majority from the past to confute it; and they insist that it is they who will interpret to the living views of the dead. Their ability to cause destruction and to inspire fear is however, as the pages of your newspaper too often show, out of all proportion to their number or their support in any part of Ireland.

The fact is that more than -X- people have been killed in violence in Northern Ireland since 1969. -X- of these were Irish - policemen, civilians, Protestant, Catholic and agnostic, men women and children; the remainder, X, were British soldiers sent to maintain peace in the province. But that is not all. In the same period -X- people have been killed in the rest of Ireland and -X- in Great Britain in bomb explosions directly related to the violence in Northern Ireland.

I feel it necessary to put these figures on record and to draw your attention to the fact that ~~this total~~ ^{the number of} for the most part Irishmen and women killed by other Irish men and women ^{in the seven year period} already ~~greatly~~ exceeds the number killed in the Irish struggle for independence in the early part of the century ^a ~~or in the Civil War which followed~~. I say no more about these statistics - a total/individual tragedies - I made up of simply let the figures stand and leave each to mourn his or her own dead.

a { $\frac{1969-1976}{1463}$ v. 334 (1916 - civilians + RIC + DMP) + 752 (1944 - Truce IRA + civilians) + (approx. 250 (?) Blue)

But there is one thing I must say. There are in Ireland and elsewhere, people who support violence at a distance and who can sleep easy themselves on the wounds of others. Here you will forgive me if I speak plainly - even bluntly - on a matter which has direct relevance for Americans.

I am sorry to say
There are /in this country some people who contribute in the most direct way possible to violence in Ireland - by sending guns and explosives - for use in Northern Ireland. A larger number have contributed - thoughtlessly or otherwise - to organisations nominally engaged in "relief" work which have used that money to buy guns and explosives for use in Northern Ireland.

Now I can understand that history and its emotions become simplified because of distance from events in time or space; and some at least of those who contribute in this way may possibly mean well. Some may think they are supporting genuine relief organisations

Others may feel that they are following a centuries' old tradition of help by Irish-Americans for the achievement of full independence in Ireland - the aim expressed in the past as "getting the British out of Ireland".

Let me, as Prime Minister of an Irish Government, tell such people in the most categorical manner possible what they are doing and what not.

What they are doing, whatever their motives, with every penny, dime or dollar they give thoughtlessly for such purposes, is helping to kill or maim Irish men and women of every religious persuasion in Ireland. They are thereby also, clearly and directly frustrating and postponing into a receding perhaps a very distant future any possible hope of realising the traditional aim of Irish nationalism to which they would claim to be committed - the establishment of harmony and a sense of common identity between "Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter" in our island.

What they are not doing should be made equally clear. They are not helping - whatever they may think - to bring an end to what they call "the British presence in Ireland". The world has changed - this is not now the basic issue. The British Government declared formally two years ago that it would support Irish unity if and when a majority of the people of Northern Ireland accepted it. The problem today therefore for anyone who claims to favour unity in Ireland is reduced to its essentials - it is to promote good relations and trust between all elements of the population in the island.

This is the problem to which I believe the principles of the Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776 and the American experience built on that Declaration, are so directly relevant. That is why I have felt entitled to speak to you at such length about the affairs of Ireland in the year in which you celebrate your bicentennial rather than talking as I might have, about the role of Ireland in Europe or of the relations between Europe and the United States.

The central concept of the Declaration as America for two centuries has understood it, is that governments, instituted among men to secure the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, "derive their just powers from the consent of the governed". As it is formulated in the Declaration this concept could hardly fail to find an echo in Ireland, where Dean Swift, writing a letter to his countrymen in 1724 had said ... "all Government without the consent of the governed is the very definition of slavery"¹⁹.7

It is precisely this principle of consent that is so immediately relevant to our situation. It is relevant both within Northern Ireland and in the island as a whole. It is central to the policy to which my government is committed; and it is a principle which all parties elected to parliament support. I hope that any others elsewhere who address themselves to the problems of Ireland will also learn to understand and accept it. America and Irish-America in particular, which has helped us so often in the past must do so now more than ever. In contrast to the past the help needed now is not material help - it is a clear, intelligent sympathetic understanding of our problem and a rejection of those who distort it through well meaning ignorance or through ill-will. What then is our approach to the problem and how is the principle of consent to be applied?

First - within Northern Ireland; If new structures of regional Government are established within the province with

power devolved by the British Government, such institutions must have, and retain, general consent throughout the community there. In the situation prevailing in Northern Ireland today, where the community is so deeply divided on religious and historic lines, this means that any government structures in the area must provide for participation by both sections of the community - not simply because we or others say so but because they will not otherwise have sufficient support to endure in face of deep community division. Recent efforts by a Convention elected for the purpose in Northern Ireland to work out structures of Government for Northern Ireland have not been successful and the Convention has now been dissolved. It is therefore a time for a pause and for reconsideration of entrenched positions. But the effort to work out agreed institutions of regional government in Northern Ireland must eventually resume.

Secondly - for Ireland as a whole: - acceptance of the principle of consent means not seeking now or ever - to coerce the people of Northern Ireland or to impose unity in the island if a majority in Northern Ireland do not want it. Such government in our island without the full and free consent of the governed would be disastrous for Ireland North and South; we will not have it and we do not want it; and if there is anybody who does he is no friend to freedom, to the principles proclaimed in your Declaration or to Ireland. If ever there are to be institutions of Government for the island as a whole they can be established only in peace and

with the consent of all those who are to live under them.

Does this mean that we have abandoned for ever the hope that all who live in the island of Ireland will wish to live together in peace and unity one day? To do so would be to accept a narrower concept of nationality based largely on religious criteria which would be false to the more generous aspirations of Irish nationalism as based on the principles of Tone. But to seek to impose national unity would be to betray Tone's ideas in an even more fundamental way. If there is to be unity in Ireland at some time - and I hope there may be - it must come about peacefully and by consent. This consent, if it is ever given, must be freely given; and it can be won, for those who wish to win it, only by respect and tolerance. Freedom to give consent means freedom also to withhold it. A majority in Northern Ireland have withheld this consent at present and we respect their wish to do so.

I have already made clear in Ireland our commitment to these basic principles. I have declared quite categorically on behalf of my government that we would consider it a duty and a privilege to find common cause with any administration in Northern Ireland in which both parts of the Community share and to which both give their full allegiance.

The principles on which I based this statement are well known - they have been around for 200 years. They are well

known to this Congress - or at least they should be, since they were formulated in Philadelphia and published to the world as self-evident truth on July 4, 1776. They are true today as they were then. They are true in Ireland as they are in America. They are principles which have guided this country for two hundred years as it has become the great nation which celebrates its bi-centennial this year and which we, your friends, believe and hope that you still stand for in the world. Their content is simple - and forgive me if I remind you - that governments, instituted among men to secure their unalienable rights to life to liberty and to the pursuit of happiness, derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.