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Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. Liam Cosgrave, T.D.,
on the occasion of his visit to Finner Camp, Co. Donegal,
on Wednesday, 6th April, 1977.

I am delighted to have this opportunity of talking to you on this my first visit, as Taoiseach, to Finner Camp.

Too often we in an office can become too involved in theory. Papers and files absorb the attention. We do not know the practice which involves a completely different range of knowledge and skills. My visit here will help me to overcome this disability.

It may be worthwhile, on my part, speaking for a short time to you, who deal in the practicalities, on how we, who are further away from the scene of operations, see things.

You are here largely because of the campaign of violence in Northern Ireland. I have often wondered if those responsible for that campaign have ever thought of what precisely they are achieving. Even if they have not, we, as a community who, in part, bear the burden of their actions, must do so.

Violence in Northern Ireland is destroying the possibility for the present generation of a life where there are normal prospects of employment and peace. Already, almost 2,000 are dead and 20,000 injured. These men,

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women and children can never live the life that would have been theirs if the bomb and the bullet had not been made the instruments of politics, and brute force, the chosen mechanism of persuasion. And these totals of the murdered and the maimed mount tragically every day as the futility continues.

For our country, the campaign will have caused an increase in public expenditure totalling over £170 million in the years between 1969 and the end of 1977. This is the level of expenditure on extra Gardaí, and on prison and army personnel and equipment as well as on compensation for persons and property. It is worth recalling to those who so often profess a concern to defend the interests of the people, that this money could have built another 20,000 houses; or could have given a boost to the economy and to employment in the form of reduced taxes or other incentives almost as liberal again as those included in the last Budget; or could have increased all welfare payments to the sick, the unemployed, the old and others in need of care, by something just short of a further 10 per cent a year.

The damage to our community resulting from violence does not stop with the higher level of public expenditure and the lost opportunities this means. It goes deeper into the fabric of the economy. As a result of violence, particularly as it relates to tourism, the country is at least £200 million poorer. We all know that unemployment is one of the most serious problems facing our community - if not the most serious. If perhaps half of this £200 million had been available and invested, it would have yielded up to 20,000 additional jobs. At least one in five of those now unemployed in our country have the men of violence to thank for their misfortune.

To what purpose is their campaign continuing? They are alienating support for the cause they profess to advance. And, in the end, they are making its achievement impossible in any worthwhile sense. In the Northern situation, when a person uses violence he confers on his opponent the right to use it in turn. I am not defending the ethic of these beliefs. I am simply saying that

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those against whom violence is used can attack any system evolving from it - in their time and in their own way. They will not have given consent. Thus, the consequence of trying to establish institutions by violence is to leave them perpetually weak. They will always be vulnerable to destruction by the means used to set them up. The continuing possibility of conflict in any system established without consent leaves it open to continuing instability - and, therefore, continuing economic and social decline.

It is for this reason that we in Government insist that any settlement of the Northern problem must be based on consent. It must have the acquiescence of both sections of the community there. We, for our part, maintain our aspiration to unity, but, again, it must be unity by consent. We want a society based on respect for the ideals and beliefs of all its members. It is only in such a society that people can live in decency, with respect for the rights of others, and enjoy the prosperity and peace which most modern communities regard as their heritage.

You are here to defend these principles. The Government are utterly determined to build^{up} the Defence Forces, the Garda Síochána and the prison service to whatever level is necessary to ensure the defeat of political violence. In this, they have the support of the vast majority of the people. As you know, those who support violence have never in any election in recent years attracted the support of more than 1 or 2 per cent of the electorate.

In pursuing our policy, we have built up the security services to their highest level, numerically, since the war. The permanent Defence Force stands at over 14,500 all ranks.

Prior to 1969 Finner Camp was the only occupied post in the Border area. Since then the situation has been such that we have had to provide troops in locations stretching from Rockhill south to Finner and east through Manorhamilton to Dundalk. We now have ten permanently occupied posts as well as a permanent military presence in six other locations in the area.

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All of these posts have been improved and renovated and a new barracks built in Monaghan. In Finner itself, the provision of an air-strip, aircraft hangar and workshop are an indication of the Government's policy to strengthen^{the} capability of the Defence Forces to defeat the men of violence.

The army have been active in discharging this role. In the year to 31st December last they have participated with the Gardaí in setting up more than 13,000 check-points. They have sent out more than 10,500 patrols along the border road networks and they have provided escorts for explosives and blasting operations on more than 1,000 occasions. These duties, which are susceptible to enumeration, are, I need not add, carried out alongside the ordinary everyday business of the Defence Forces in maintaining a presence to uphold security and help maintain the law of the land.

I should like on this occasion to pay tribute to the Garda Síochána who stand in the front line in combatting crime and subversion. In face of great difficulties and often at high risk to their own safety, they discharge their duties with zeal and courage. As recently as Sunday last at Portlaoise when they were confronted by a hostile mob, they held firm in the face of the intimidation and the violence directed against them. They deserve the co-operation of us all.

It would be remiss of me if I overlooked to mention our Prison Service. Regrettably it is necessary for the protection of ordinary law-abiding peaceable people to keep a number of our law-breakers in custody. The task of administering and servicing prisons for adults and places of detention for juveniles was never easy. Recent events have added factors like the disruption of prisons and the intimidation and vilification of Governors and Prison Officers to a task that was already sufficiently onerous. I am happy to avail of this occasion to express my

appreciation of the manner in which the men and the women of the Prison Service are serving the people of Ireland. Each and every one of us owes a lot to them and no one of us, irrespective of who we are, should needlessly make their task more difficult or add to its dangers.

The Defence Forces, the Garda Síochána and the Prison Service are performing difficult and often dangerous tasks in the struggle against political violence. Those active in that campaign are not scrupulous in their methods which involve propaganda as well as physical violence.

Your task and that of the other services I have mentioned is the maintenance of security and order, on which society ultimately depends. The citizens of this country, who enjoy their democratic right to live without fear, under an impartial law, owe these services a deep debt of gratitude which I gladly acknowledge here.

Rath Dé oraibh agus mo bhuíochas féin agus buíochas ~~probaí~~ na hÉireann doibh go léir.