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SPEECH BY THE LEADER OF THE PARTY, MR JAMES H MOLYNEAUX JP MP
TO THE AGM OF THE ULSTER UNIONIST COUNCIL AT THE
FORUM HOTEL, BELFAST

Our diligent and determined band of Ulster Unionist Councillors and those of them who serve on various Boards have acquired more powers and exerted much influence in the course of the past year.

Their powers are for the moment limited but they are real. They take decisions and execute those decisions. Those Councillors who also sit in the Assembly must find it a relief to return to their Council Chambers to real political life.

It is the policy of our Party alone that Council powers should be greatly extended. That course was resisted by the DUP, SDLP and Alliance in the prototype talking-shop - the Atkins Conference.

But ours is an unanswerable case, an irresistible demand, because Parliament is sensitive about the absence of devolved local government powers. Though in fairness it was not Westminster but Stormont which removed them. And as Humphrey's knights of the round table now agree the Assembly will have no power for at least four years there is no excuse for withholding powers from District Councils capable of delivering a real service to ratepayers and taxpayers alike.

We Ulster Unionists say it is monstrous that six counties out of the entire British Isles should be deprived of normal Local Government powers because other parties impose a veto until their own peculiar recipes for pie in the sky have been baked in the Stormont cookhouse.

Many of you can remember the Annual Meetings of the Ulster Unionist Council before Stormont was demolished. You can remember the traditional situation reports from Leaders of our Party who were also Prime Ministers of Northern Ireland.

The removal of the latter role does not absolve me from the duty to account, the duty to point the way, and above all the duty to tell the truth - yes, the brutal unpalatable truth.

The printed Annual Report for 1982 is of very special value because it sets out chronologically and in detail our response to the Northern Ireland Office proposals which became the Northern Ireland Act 1982.

Of particular importance is the resolution proposed by Councillor Wm. Thompson, seconded by Councillor Mrs Ardill and passed by the Party Executive on 29 January: "That this Executive having heard a report from their representatives who have been discussing constitutional issues with the Secretary of State hereby authorise their representatives at their next meeting to make it clear to the Secretary of State that this Party is not prepared to go further in the matter of minority participation than that envisaged in the Convention Report and that any attempt to roll a further undemocratic administration onto this Province will be firmly resisted by this Party."

Following the President's Report on the final discussion with the Secretary of State the Party Executive's verdict on the Prior proposals was expressed in a unanimous resolution on 12 March:

"The Ulster Unionist Party reaffirms its belief that Northern Ireland should be administered by an elected body empowered to legislate and govern, to be known as the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland. This body must be elected and operate in accordance with the well established principles of normal British democracy and in particular the arrangements must in no way endanger the Union of the Kingdom nor confer any contrived privileges on any section of the population.

"The Ulster Unionist Party remains totally opposed to the Northern Ireland Constitution Act of 1973 and to the allocation of seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly Act of 1973, to the arrangements originating in the Sunningdale Agreement, in particular to any institutionalised arrangement with the Irish Republic and to enforced power sharing.

"Should the Secretary of State proceed with his plans already revealed to the other political parties, the Ulster Unionist Party will submit their views to the electorate and work for genuine democracy rather than phoney government designed to destroy the United Kingdom."

Our Parliamentary Party translated that determination into action in the House of Commons and exposed the sinister motives behind what the majority of British Members of Parliament regarded as a hilarious charade.

It fell to me and my fellow candidates to submit the Party's views and policies to the electorate and in a final election broadcast I said :
"If the millions of pounds spent on the Assembly are not to be wasted we have to transform the Assembly into the workable structure you would like to see. We need your support to translate that aim into action."

The electors responded and gave us their support but stopped short, by only three seats, of giving us an overall majority of seats taken in the Assembly they thereby deprived themselves of the means of restoring real devolved government.

Of the three Parties in the Assembly ours alone warned of the unworkability of the Act and alone we sought and received a mandate to transform the legislation and so give the Assembly a chance to work. Standing as we did on a manifesto based on the Party Executive's resolutions we were not elected to amuse ourselves with Stage I and not one of us was elected to settle for a mere talking-shop in perpetuity.

Even at this late stage it is to be hoped that Members of the Assembly will make the most of this fleeting opportunity to acquire real powers.

It would be easy to stand here and tell you that the Assembly is doing better than we expected - but that would be a blatant lie.

It would be easy to imply that the Assembly can gradually evolve into a devolved government. But it can't do any such thing - for the Act which established it, and the Secretary of State's interpretation, require that the price of progress - any progress - is power sharing. And it is wrong-headed to suggest as one newspaper leader suggested that it may be "a poor thing but our own."

It is not and never will be our own. It is and will remain the creature of the Secretary of State - for not only does he decide when cross-community consent (or power-sharing with republicans) has been obtained - he will also decide when that consent has been withdrawn, at which point he will, as he explained, dismiss the "native" Ministers and claw back power to himself.

When well-meaning folk use that blessed phrase "make it work" they should address their request to the Secretary of State, the man who guaranteed unworkability.

The lily-livered and the peddlers of compromise have sought to persuade me to settle for less than that which the Party Executive on 12 March insisted upon - a Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland. I make no apology for standing rock firm on that demand for the restoration of that which was abolished to placate our enemies. My reason is clear and simple. That power structure for fifty years resisted and defeated terrorist violence and political pressures. Since its abolition in 1972 it has become clear that

the only permitted form of self government will be a type designed to lead to the break up of the Union.

At our Party Conference in October 1981 I laid my political future on the line when I told the truth in the following words:- "While we are entitled to hope, and retain our aspiration, I cannot and will not mislead you into believing that this government - or the next - will restore Stormont in a form acceptable to true Ulster Unionists. And I have to warn you that anyone who asks Ulster people to believe otherwise is practising a cruel deceit."

I stand by that assessment, based as it is on my knowledge and understanding of the two main parties in the State.

The Labour Party is said to have changed its position by declaring that it would like to see a united Ireland but it then goes on to cancel that by saying that unity must come by consent. It is quite an achievement to embody two contradictions in one short sentence. But however genuine Labour hopes for unity they will never be fulfilled particularly as Labour has also said it will play no part in persuading us to consent.

Not for them a foray into Ulster's political arena. No Labour Party here. No Labour candidates here.

So clearly when Labour talks about consent they mean a point when the greater number of Ulster people decide of their own freewill and accord to give up their British citizenship and then at a much later stage freely decide to become citizens of the Irish Republic. Why they should want to cheerfully assent to either of the two stages is not clear to the Labour Party and even more obscure to us. So unity by consent is a non starter!

We know where Labour stands and they know where we stand.

The position of the present Government is in some ways more worrying (and by Government I mean the Northern Ireland Office with a Conservative input).

They proclaim that Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom as long as the majority so desire and I am sure that some of them mean what they say. But here again we see a contradiction in that the Government proceeds to erode and undermine the will of the Ulster people. They have pursued that contradiction for nearly four years although the Conservative Party's Daily Notes for Candidates in the 1979 election warned that.

"The next Government will come under considerable pressure to launch a new, high-powered political initiative on Northern Ireland, with the object of establishing another 'power-sharing' government in the province, which could pave the way for a federal constitution linking Ulster to the Irish Republic."

The Conservative Government did come under such pressure. It surrendered to that pressure with the result that we have the Northern Ireland Office paying lip service to the maintenance of the Union and employing every trick in the book to destroy the Union.

The advocates of an Assembly without a Government were conned right up to last weekend when Lord Gowrie let yet another cat out of the bag and confirmed that the Prior initiative was a more subtle version of Sunningdale with the Foreign Office preventing Dublin from showing its hand too early and trying to grab too much too soon.

It is right that we should recognise the nature of the forces arrayed against us, not with the object of demoralising Ulster Unionists, but rather of illuminating dark corners where intrigue flourishes.

It is fashionable to label such warnings as Unionist paranoia. The same label would have been applied to Lord Brookeborough had he been aware of Churchill's private talk in our Washington Embassy in 1952 declaring that he desired a united Ireland and had advised de Valera to woo Ulster and not rape her.

Fortunately we do not have to wait to discover what is now passing between the Foreign Office, the Northern Ireland Office, and Dublin.

In military matters it is essential to know your enemy and to understand his strategy because you will then be able to counter his moves and avoid his traps.

This is no less true in politics.

Far from being depressed by knowledge of enemy intentions, we should accept the challenge and defeat every thrust.

Unionists have in their armoury one weapon against which there is no defence but reluctance to use it places us in constant peril. It is the simple demand to have restored to us basic British rights within the Union. The Yorkshireman is not expected to pay a political price for local government. The Scotsman is not required to hob-nob with Norwegians

in return for Parliamentary Government.

Both assume that they are entitled to such rights as a matter of course. And when pessimists allege that we cannot have similar status, the answer is that we have never made the request in clear terms. We cannot, with safety, delay much longer.

Whatever the fate of the Assembly, however permanent the SDLP veto on progress within Northern Ireland, there is nothing but benefit in our being brought up to the level of basic rights as they are understood by our fellow citizens in England, Scotland and Wales.

Achieve that and you strike from the hands of our enemies proof that Northern Ireland is different. Left in their possession it will be used as a lever to make us not only different, but separate.

The Ulster Unionist Party has removed one such difference by securing equal and fair representation in Parliament. A victory which must be consolidated by our winning most of those seventeen seats by candidates of our Party.

Whatever the future of the Assembly, we must get rid of Direct Rule.

Not for us vain attempts to bridle it - only its removal will satisfy us. For it is monstrous that such a system devised in 1972 for one year should have been preserved for the succeeding ten years. That has surely made a mockery of the word temporary by which the process is described.

That annual renewal of Direct Rule has the effect of implanting in the minds of our enemies the belief that Ulster is held on a twelve month lease. How can there be political stability on the basis of one year at a time?

How great is the encouragement for terrorists to overthrow a system which is claimed to be only temporary?

We shall not rest content until this province has elected local government like all parts of Great Britain; administration by non-elected boards and Whitehall Ministers and officials has to go.

We demand the repeal of the anti-democratic constitutions imposed on us in 1973 and 1974 and an end to law making for Ulster by Order-in-Council.

We will submit no longer to political isolation from the rest of the Kingdom.

Progress in the Northern Ireland Assembly may be obstructed for years by the Secretary of State, by Republicans, and by the faint hearted within.

But Ulster's place in the Kingdom must be made secure. Even four more years of limbo are unthinkable. We must not fail those who look to us for leadership.

In the past twelve months we have sensed a restoration of self-confidence and self-respect in the hearts and minds of Ulster people.

No longer are we obsessed with the Ken Livingstones, the EEC meddlers, the Irish American arm-twisters and the Dublin blackmailers.

We shrug them off like so many flies, because after fourteen years of hell, we have emerged with an unshakeable conviction that nothing can remove us from our place within the British nation.

We are not a beleaguered people; we are an unmoveable block. We do not know - nor do we want to know - the meaning of the word defeat.