



PRESS RELEASE

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT HON A B D FAULKNER DL MP, DURING THE COURSE OF THE QUEEN'S SPEECH DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, STORMONT, ON TUESDAY, 22 JUNE 1971

MESSAGE FROM HM THE QUEEN

We have been privileged to-day to receive a personal message from Her Majesty The Queen - a message expressing Her Majesty's goodwill towards all the people of Northern Ireland. That theme - goodwill towards all the people - will I hope establish a key-note for this debate.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME

The legislative programme outlined to-day is a formidable one. It represents the most comprehensive programme of structural and other change ever undertaken in Northern Ireland, but taken by itself it is still not enough.

RESTORATION OF CONFIDENCE: NEED FOR A LEAD

When I first spoke on appointment to this office I stressed above all else the need to re-create confidence. We have made a beginning in doing so, but we have not yet made the progress which I would like to see and which the situation demands of us. And so I consider it to be the task of my Government to reach out beyond the bounds of any ordinary legislative programme. I see it as our duty to give a real lead; to be ready to propose quite exceptional measures to break out of the mould of fear and mutual suspicion.

PARLIAMENT AS A MEANS TO PROGRESS

To-day is the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of our first Parliament, and we rightly remember and honour all who have contributed to the achievements of this Parliament over the past half-century. But all these achievements will be set at naught if we cannot to-day on all sides summon up new reserves of generosity and imagination.

This must not be allowed to happen - for in our Parliament, if we use it aright, we have an institution which can be the means to progress for all our people; and as the re-organisation of local services takes shape, we will have the opportunity to create here a unique structure of truly regional government.

This is our potential, but we are falling far short of it. We, in this House, who have it in our power to give a lead to the whole community in our capacity for working together, have on the contrary rather been reflecting more and more the tensions and distrust which exist outside this House. Our exchanges have become increasingly bitter and sterile. If that trend, with all its disastrous implications for the future of this community, is to be reversed, all Hon Members have a contribution to make. But I acknowledge the special responsibility of my colleagues and myself as the majority here to give a lead in that direction.

POST-MACRORY CHANGES: WIDER IMPLICATIONS

It has been apparent since we took our decisions on the re-organisation of local government that these major changes were bound to have implications for the future role of this Parliament. The transfer of responsibility for very important matters from local to central government has many implications in terms of the burden of work on Parliament, the position of the individual Member and the ability of

the legislature to perform its proper functions in relation to the Executive.

We have been giving deep thought to all these vitally important matters.

There are, of course, two important factors which cannot be overlooked here. Firstly, the basic arrangements for the operation of the Northern Ireland Parliament rest upon the Government of Ireland Act 1920 whose provisions can only be amended at Westminster.

Secondly, the Commission under the Chairmanship of Lord Crowther, which is considering broad constitutional questions in all parts of the United Kingdom is still sitting, and the United Kingdom Government would clearly want to await its Report before deciding upon issues of this kind.

These, at first sight, may seem to be arguments either for not considering the future of our Parliament at all, or at any rate for not considering it now.

But there are strong arguments in the other direction. Even if there are changes involving amendment of the 1920 Act which could only be brought about by Westminster, there are others which lie within our powers here. Moreover, when the Crowther Commission ultimately reports, we will be asked for our views before decisions are taken, and this could involve undesirable delay in dealing with the matter. As the numerous legislative proposals embodied in the Queen's Speech show to dramatic effect, the re-organisation of services now going forward is of a very fundamental character. It will transfer to Ministers responsible to Parliament, and to Area Boards as the agents of such Ministers, many weighty new responsibilities. I believe it to be of great importance - not least from the principle of basic

democracy - that this Parliament should be properly prepared to play its legitimate part in this new system with real effectiveness.

Moreover, reflecting upon the developments of recent years, I think successive Governments have tended to devalue the advice of Parliament as against the advice of the outside expert. Both have a part to play, but I believe there is a need to restore the balance so that wherever possible Parliament - and here I mean all Members of Parliament - can play a fuller part in the scrutiny and examination of policy.

PROPOSALS FOR NEW SYSTEM OF FUNCTIONAL COMMITTEES

For these reasons - because of the increased work-load which will be placed upon us from 1973 onwards and the need for greater participation in our work by all Hon Members - the Government has decided to recommend to the House, for early implementation, a new Committee system.

What we propose is that, alongside the Public Accounts Committee which will continue to operate as at present, there should be three new Functional Committees of this House - covering respectively the fields of Social Services, Environmental Services and Industrial Services.

It would not be the intention to involve Parliament, through these new Committees, in the carrying out of executive functions or the actual management of services. These must remain functions of government. They would be rather a means of expressing legitimate Parliamentary interest in the overall quality of Government proposals and performance.

FUNCTIONS OF NEW COMMITTEES

Accordingly one of their principal functions would be the consideration of major proposals of policy. These could be either "outside" proposals (such as, in the past, the Lockwood, Matthew or Wilson Reports) or "inside" proposals (such as a Development Programme or a Hospitals Plan). The object would be to give Parliament a genuine opportunity to contribute to the making of policy at the formative stage. Certain types of policy decision would still have to be taken or announced without prior discussion or consultation; but wherever possible the Government would seek the course of indicating the broad lines of its thinking in a Consultative Document, and thus allow Parliament and the general

public to take part in informed debate before reaching any firm final decision.

X (The second major function of the new Committees would be that of reviewing performance - in other words, to probe and assess after the event the performance of executive functions by the Government and its agencies. In this sphere the Committees would have as raw material all major reports on the work and performance of all Departments and their agencies, including those made in the course of an investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

A further possible function for the new Committees would be the consideration of certain legislation. Many Bills would, no doubt, continue to have a Committee Stage before the whole House as at present; but where, for example, a Bill represented the implementation of policy proposals already considered by the appropriate Functional Committee, the House might consider it sensible to refer the Bill on Committee Stage to that Committee, possibly with the addition of further members.

COMPOSITION, PROCEDURE, ETC, OF NEW COMMITTEES

As to composition, we are thinking in terms of Committees of not more than nine Members each, broadly representative of Party strengths in the House. We would propose that at any time, of the three Functional Committees plus the PAC, the Opposition should provide at least two Chairmen. These posts would have real status and importance in the new scheme of parliamentary operation. We would propose that they should be salaried posts, and that in addition those serving on the major Committees of the House should receive a fee for attendance.

It would be our hope that the procedure of the new Committees would be as informal as possible, with the tone being one of constructive exchange of ideas rather than of formal debate. They would have the usual power to send for persons and papers, and in particular to require the attendance of Ministers and Civil Servants. It would also be our view that holders of Ministerial office should have the right to attend.

Obviously such Committees would have to be open to the Press when considering Bills. In their other work, it could be argued that there might be merit in having meetings in private, to encourage truly constructive, businesslike yet uninhibited discussion in as

X - taken from Para 44 of Working Party's Report

non-partisan an atmosphere as possible; but of course it goes without saying that any decisions or conclusions of a Committee would in any event be made public.

Because of the demands which the establishment of such a system would make, the Leader of the House will be discussing with all parties a simplification of the existing system of Service and other Committees of the House. We also think that, in the light of the increase in the overall burden of work, ways could and should be found to simplify our whole parliamentary procedure in many respects, and on this too the Leader will have discussions with the parties on various concrete suggestions we have in mind.

The proposals I have outlined represent a very radical departure. For us on the Government benches, and for the officials who serve us, the new system will represent a further burden of work at a time when that burden is already heavy. But we are prepared to accept it because, particularly with the forthcoming transfer of functions from local to central government, we think it is important to involve all Members of the House more constructively in its work. Our proposed scheme of Functional Committees is designed, first, to allow the House as a whole to perform more effectively its functions of scrutiny and control; second, to permit genuine and constructive participation in the work of Parliament by all its Members; and third, to encourage the development of much greater specialisation and expertise.

DEBATE ON NEW COMMITTEE SYSTEM AND RELATED ISSUES

We will provide time to debate these proposals immediately after the Summer Recess and then, if they commend themselves to the House, we would hope to institute the new system without delay. Certain aspects would involve amendment of our Standing Orders, others, action by way of Resolution, and some possibly the introduction of legislation. In the brief now being prepared for Lord Boyle's Review Body which will deal with the salaries of Members here as at Westminster, we will refer to these proposals and to our wish that Chairmen of these Committees should receive a salary and members a fee.

Hon Members will recall that, because of the anticipated increase in the work-load of Parliament, the Macrory Report pointed to the possibility of increases in the membership of the Northern Ireland

Senate and House of Commons. While we believe that the new system of functional Committees can be carried within the present membership, the introduction of such a system, coupled with the transfer of functions will undoubtedly make it necessary to consider whether either or both of our Houses of Parliament needs to be strengthened numerically, and this too is a matter we can debate after the Recess. Indeed, I would propose that such a debate should take place on a Motion in sufficiently wide terms to allow Parliament to discuss all the "secondary" implications of Macrory to which my predecessor referred in his statement last October.

DEMOCRATIC DECISIONS AND CONSENT

Our community to-day is in many respects at a crucial moment of choice, and if we are to choose aright there are certain facts we must all acknowledge. Because we are a democratic society, we place ultimate executive responsibility in the hands of those whom the majority choose to represent them. That may not be a perfect system, but I have yet to learn of a more successful one. And if one does accept the democratic system there is no getting round the proposition that on fundamental issues the views of a majority must ultimately prevail.

But we are a free society as well as a democratic one; and this means we must aim to govern with the consent and the acceptance of a far wider majority than is constituted by those who elect the governing party. That cannot mean everyone. One cannot frame one's penal policy to meet the requirements of murderers, nor can one allow the organs of a state to be used to subvert that state. Neither Government nor Parliament nor people can compromise with violence or sedition.

But short of this it is very important to strive for the maximum of consent. Within the context of our democratic system we must try to provide the means for all responsible elements in our community to play a constructive part in its institutions.

A BASIS FOR PARTICIPATION

That is the spirit in which I think the majority and its representatives should approach these matters. But there is a clear need for a matching attitude and a positive response from the minority. If, for decades past, representatives of the minority have not played a proportionate part in various aspects of our life,

that has surely stemmed quite as much from the lack of inclination as from the lack of opportunity. It would be encouraging to have occasionally a more frank acknowledgment that there have in the past been failures of vision and imagination on both sides.

For the future, people have got to make up their minds, and then to make it clear to their fellow-citizens, what they really do want. Responsible minority representatives, whatever the pressures upon them, ought to be urging those they influence to come forward and join such forces as the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment; for the only realistic way to make one section of the community trust another is for them to work together in the same causes.

By this I mean causes which are not political, sectional or sectarian. I talk of things which every decent citizen, whatever his ultimate political aspirations should be happy to support:- building houses, creating new employment, defending one's own neighbours against intimidation and lawless thuggery. No improvement of political or constitutional structures can conceivably draw this community together unless we are prepared to work unitedly for such things; and because history and geography have decreed that we must live with each other, no one in the end can find the necessary basis of confidence and trust but Ulstermen themselves. There has been much speculation of late about so-called "political solutions". If by this is meant the possibility of changes in Northern Ireland's basic constitutional position, then I am bound to say that such speculation is misguided and mischievous because it ignores the democratically-expressed will of the majority. But if the term "political solutions" means that all of us here should seek to improve the situation by political means, then I say that this underlies the Most Gracious Speech itself and all that I am saying to-day. I repeat that real solutions must come not from Dublin or even from London but from ourselves. And if they are to be found it must be recognised that any concept of participation will be hollow which does not recognise the duty to participate in bearing the burdens of the State as well as enjoying its advantages; and that no duty is more important than to mount a united opposition to terror.

THE SECURITY SITUATION

For that reason I want to share with this House my thoughts, not

INDUSTRIAL LEGISLATION

In the meantime, to strengthen its hand in helping industry, the Government has taken steps to extend its industries development legislation. This will increase the ability of the Ministry of Commerce to facilitate the establishment of new industry and to assist the re-organisation of existing industry. We are also in process of revising the arrangements for standard capital grants to all manufacturing industry - a scheme which no other region of the United Kingdom or indeed the Irish Republic now enjoys.

ECONOMIC COUNCIL

The Economic Council has an important part to play in present conditions, both in assessing the local situation and in advising the Government. I therefore intend to strengthen further the membership of the Council.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS: THE EEC AND IRISH REPUBLIC

There are two further comments I wish to make in relation to the economy:- first, that if the United Kingdom should decide to enter the EEC, we will attach the greatest importance to seeing to it that our industries and indeed all sectors of the economy are advised and as far as possible prepared for the new challenges and opportunities they will have to meet; and second that, as I have already stressed, we will be glad to discuss further with the Irish Republic on a basis of mutual respect any realistic measures of co-operation which would be of benefit to both economies.

NEED FOR INITIATIVES

In all that I have said about the economy and about the serious effects of continuing tension, I hope the House will perceive the need for new initiatives.

At a very early stage in my premiership, I told Hon Members opposite that my door would be open at any time if they wanted to see me, and I have since repeated that invitation. They have not taken advantage of it, and indeed they have been expressing increasingly serious doubts as to the motives and intentions of this Government.

More and more we seem to have been dealing in this House with isolated issues, and dealing with them in a strong atmosphere of partisan conflict.

I do not know to what extent widely agreed solutions to our present difficulties are possible; and it is not easy to find them in such an atmosphere. But they must be sought, and I suspect that in reality our aspirations for this community are not as far apart as highly-publicised speech-making may suggest.

THE AIM OF THE GOVERNMENT

Mr Speaker, fifty years ago, after King George V had opened our first Parliament, Sir James Craig rose to make for the first time a speech on the Address. May I recall some of his words?

"..... I myself and my colleagues," he said, "are at the disposal of the people of Northern Ireland. We have nothing in our view except the welfare of the people. Our duty and our privilege are from now onward to have our Parliament well established, to look to the people as a whole, to set ourselves to probe to the bottom those problems that have retarded progress in the past, to do everything that lies in our power to help forward developments in the town and country, so that the Parliament established yesterday by His Majesty may at all events be a Parliament which has set out upon its task fully realising the responsibility that rests upon it"

If we have not yet achieved all these things, they remain a remarkable summary of what should be our aim. We have announced today a programme designed, in words I cannot possibly better, to "look to the people as a whole"; we now seek the help of the whole House and the whole community in carrying it through to completion.