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The Northern Ireland Executive Office of Information Services News Release

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Broadcast by Mr Brian Faulkner, Chief Minister, Saturday 25 May 1974 EMBARGO:
NOT FOR BROADCAST, TRANSMISSION OR PUBLICATION BEFORE 10.30 PM

You have just heard the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland talking to you about the present grave situation. I now want to add a few words of my own - to speak to you as one Ulsterman to his fellow Ulstermen.

Last night, as a direct result of this situation, some of our fellow citizens were killed. Their "crimes" were to keep open a business or to seek to drive along the Queen's highway. I care not what were their politics or religion; their deaths, like all the many deaths we have suffered over these last few years, make me profoundly sad.

No-one can dispute that this prolonged stoppage of work - whether it results from genuine conviction or from intimidation and fear - is doing terrible damage to our country. The current cost in millions of pounds lost is very great; the future cost, in damage to our reputation and prospects, is beyond calculation. For every day the confidence of the outside world in our ability to meet our commitments ebbs away. Tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of jobs are at risk. If the present deadlock continues much longer we will all be the losers in time to come.

It is a time when the responsibility placed upon those in Government is a very heavy one. I believe that we now have a four-fold duty to this community.

1. Where there are unfounded fears and suspicions, we must seek to dispel them.

2. Where there are legitimate and deeply felt grievances, we must try to meet them.

3. Where unreasonable or unacceptable demands are made, we must explain patiently and without rancour why they cannot be met.

4. While never seeking a confrontation, we must sustain the authority of lawful Government.

I believe that the overwhelming fear in the minds of many is that Northern Ireland is being forced, against the will of a majority of its people, into a form of close association with the Irish Republic which can only end in Irish unity. This, I believe, is the proposition against which many people are seeking to demonstrate their unalterable resistance.

I myself have been, am, and will always remain a Unionist. If I thought for one moment that we were being forced into, or even forced towards a United Ireland, I would be adding my own voice to the protest.

But there is no such plan or intention or possibility. The future of Ulster is firmly and irrevocably in the hands of Ulster people. Let me read you some words from the 1973 Constitution - that Constitution which has been so distorted and misrepresented. You have a right to hear the words of the Act itself, which provides that:

"in no event will Northern Ireland or any part of it cease to be part of Her Majesty's dominions and of the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland voting in a poll

and the first such poll cannot in any case be held before 1983 at the earliest.

There are, I know, those who believe that, as a result of Sunningdale, this strong assurance and guarantee has been undermined. That fear is misplaced. I ask you all to read carefully the statement about Sunningdale released by the Executive earlier this week and published in all the newspapers. Don't rely on others to tell you what it means. Read it for yourself and form your own judgement. I am confident that if you do that, you will find it to be based upon the same principle as the 1973 Act itself - the principle of consent. What we are prepared to embark upon right away is constructive co-operation

for the mutual good of North and South alike, without the slightest infringement of sovereignty on either side. The Council of Ministers is to be set up for this purpose. Further development of the Council of Ireland will only come about after the people of Northern Ireland have had the opportunity to express their attitude to it at the next general election in something over three years' time. Thus it is the people not the politicians who will decide.

And so, the fears that we are being forced into a united Ireland are without foundation, and our link with Britain will only be broken if the people of Northern Ireland themselves are not willing to accept the fundamental basis of being British - which is that one accepts the laws made by the Queen in Parliament.

I know, too, that many people may be moved by a feeling that a large and influential body of political opinion is not represented in the present governing Executive. But why is this? It is because the representatives of that opinion refused to play any part in the discussions between Parties which led to the Executive being set up. Had they come into these discussions in a constructive spirit, it might very well be that we would have had a more broadly based Executive, and I for one would have welcomed this. One cannot, however, refuse to come in and complain about being shut out at one and the same time.

But there are demands now being made which cannot be met if the traditions of democratic government, as we know it, are to be preserved. If one group of people, by pressure exerted outside the proper constitutional framework, can bring down governments and dictate when elections are to be held, we shall be on a slippery slope. Who will be next to take the power of decision into their own hands?

This is why the authority of lawful government must be, and will be asserted. Surely we cannot tolerate a situation in our country where self-appointed groups of people may decide who shall be allowed out of a housing estate, who shall receive petrol or oil, who shall be allowed to open his business? Everyone has a right to make his protest within the law; no-one has a right to coerce others.

In no circumstances do we seek a confrontation between the forces of authority and any of our fellow citizens. There is no need for any such confrontation, if people act in a lawful and responsible way.

I now ask everyone listening to me, and in particular the supporters of the present stoppage of work, to consider fairly and unemotionally what I have said. Today, I fear, we are the despair of our friends and the mockery of our enemies. Let us not plunge this country, which all of us love in our different ways, into a deepening and potentially disastrous conflict. Let us, instead, get back to work in the factories and on the farms.