

AS DELIVERED

3 May 1995

Attached is a copy of a speech delivered today by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon John Major MP, to guests attending a luncheon hosted by the Confederation of British Industry at a Dunadry hotel.

Thank you very much for that introduction. I look forward in a few minutes to hearing what you have to say about tax, and no doubt roads, and no doubt a whole range of other matters. And may I say what a delight it will be to discuss the same sort of economic matters in Northern Ireland that I would discuss in every other part of the United Kingdom as well, and the sooner I can come here and discuss just that, the better it will be for Northern Ireland and the better it will be for everyone else.

But we have not quite reached that happy state yet and what I want to do this morning is to talk for a while about where we are on the road towards a durable peace. A great deal of attention, especially outside Northern Ireland, has been focused on a rather narrow definition of the peace process on the exploratory talks with Sinn Fein and with the Loyalist Paramilitaries. Of course they are important, but progress in Northern Ireland runs much wider and much more deeply than that, its seeds were sown long ago and people in all walks of life are contributing. You and your fellow businessmen are contributing. Those who have long worked

for fair employment and against sectarianism and discrimination are contributing. The churches, the community workers, groups fighting courageously against intimidation and violence. And the police, not just in protecting the population with the army's help, but extending crime prevention and community policing. And of course those democratic politicians who, throughout the troubles, have stood against violence and exclusively for constitutional methods.

That common determination to move forward is, I believe, the surest guarantee that Northern Ireland will have a better future. Our task, everyone's task, is now to create a rolling tide for peace that no-one can withstand. I want to see the people of Northern Ireland confident in themselves, confident in their economy and confident that the political system can produce a lasting agreement. And I think the signs of progress are beginning to show. Unemployment here is now at its lowest point for 13 years. Employment, the number of people in jobs, is at an all time high. Tourism is growing dramatically, there will be 20 percent more visitors this year spending an extra 200 million pounds, and there are going to be new hotels to house them.

And since the Belfast Investment Conference there have already been 20 possible new investment projects. In the last week Seagate have announced a large expansion creating 300 jobs in Londonderry; Dairy Young (phon) is bringing 500 jobs to a new investment in Craigavon; and Mivan (phon) of Antrim have



announced double profits. I hope we are going to hear further success stories at the Washington Investment Conference later on this month.

So I believe that your growth challenge, an important initiative, is an initiative that is catching that rolling tide for peace that I referred to. It comes at a time when Northern Ireland exports are growing even faster than those of the United Kingdom as a whole, and the United Kingdom as a whole is leading the field in exports across the whole of the European Union.

Peace is boosting business confidence, just as growing prosperity itself reinforces peace. So I think the moment is right for business, in partnership with government, to accelerate growth. And we need to make sure that this peace I speak of extends right across the community, that it meets the challenges of a new situation. This morning I had the opportunity of discussing some of those challenges with church leaders, with trade union leaders, and with representatives of Families Against Intimidation and Terrorism. And later on this afternoon I will be seeing how the RUC are responding to the challenges that they face.

And one challenge of course is to deal with paramilitary criminality, with extortion rackets, with intimidation and with a vicious phenomenon of what are called punishment beatings. Since the ceasefire there has been an unwelcome increase in vicious paramilitary assaults, the mis-named punishment beatings.

I met, as I said a moment ago, Families Against Intimidation and Terror this morning and they told me that they had counted 97 assaults since 1 September, at least one of which led to a young man's death, a young man not yet 17 who killed himself as a result of what are euphemistically called punishment beatings.

They told me of other things as well. Another 16 year old boy whose legs were smashed on both sides with iron bars for 10 minutes while he lay on the ground with a paramilitary foot on his body, holding him in place while he was beaten. The family is forced out of Northern Ireland for speaking out against terrorism. And I met a mother who, like other grieving relatives here, cannot be at peace in her mind because the paramilitaries murdered her son 17 years ago and they have still not told her where that body lies so that she can give her son a decent Christian burial.

That is not politics. That is barbaric criminality. And everyone in the community should help the police and the courts to combat it, and no-one who aspires to democratic politics in any way should defend or in any way tolerate such unspeakable activities. I hope that the people of Northern Ireland, whenever they have any knowledge of any incident like that, any group that seeks to exclude someone from part of Northern Ireland, that takes upon itself punishment of some sort that they have no proper legal authority to take upon themselves, I hope anyone with any information of that sort will have the courage to take that information to the police so it can be properly dealt with,



properly investigated, the perpetrators arrested, tried and if found guilty suitably punished properly in accordance with law.

It is a difficult job, policing in Northern Ireland. I have a great admiration for what the RUC have achieved. They are already responding to the challenge of civilian policing throughout all of the community. But it does need the help of the community, not wilful obstruction of the crime prevention campaigns or intimidation of new recruits, the whole community needs to be involved to help develop policing for a Northern Ireland at peace and to break down decades of suspicion and distrust.

Over the years the RUC has withstood the most intense assault and it has made many sacrifices in the cause of impartiality, courage and professionalism. As it is increasingly freed from the threat of terrorism, I believe it can serve the whole community as never before. The men and women of the RUC have seen Northern Ireland through the past 25 years, they have defended democracy, they have defended the rule of law, they deserve our support and they will get it and we will stand by them.

Let me mention also the trade union leaders whom I met this morning and who play an important part in your lives as businessmen. They too have played a remarkable role often where passions burn most strongly in bringing all sides together. They have helped rid shop floors of destructive sectarianism, they have shown that people in Northern Ireland can and do work together in

the workplace to the benefit of everyone and Northern Ireland as a whole. And for doing so they deserve their share of the credit for Northern Ireland's success.

Let me now for a few moments just turn to the political process. Paddy Mayhew and his colleagues will shortly begin a further round of talks with the parties. Those talks have one overriding objective - to move towards agreement on the widest possible basis on a stable and harmonious future for Northern Ireland. Such an agreement has always eluded us, it will not come quickly or easily now. But without question, we have a better chance of achieving it than we have ever had before.

In the two framework documents we identified the issues that need to be addressed. There has been a wide debate about those issues, different views have been expressed, sometimes with more passion than accuracy. Hard questions have been asked. We now want to have a constructive discussion with the political parties on the way forward, about the issues in the two documents and about their own ideas as well on a political settlement. And encouragingly some meetings have already taken place between the political parties themselves.



Mr Vice-Chairman, I am in doubt that with your support and with the support of the overwhelming majority in Northern Ireland which seeks a stable and just future, there is a basis for a lasting settlement, a settlement which the parties can honourably agree and the people will be prepared to support in a referendum. This is a process with a single track. Sinn Fein, through their own actions, have left themselves further back than others, but they can advance down that track and we wish to see them do so. We want all parties in Northern Ireland to be full participants in a democratic, political and exclusively peaceful process.

And that is one of the main purposes of the exploratory dialogue with the Loyalists and Sinn Fein. When Michael Ancram joins the dialogue with Sinn Fein next week it will be an historic moment. It will also be an historic opportunity because we want to explore how Sinn Fein and the Provisionals can best demonstrate their exclusive commitment to peaceful methods by putting away violence and by putting away the instruments of violence. They know what is required of them. We and the Irish government spelt this out in the Downing Street declaration and have done so on many subsequent occasions. There will be no tricks and no traps, just the opportunity offered by the Downing Street declaration to Sinn Fein to join in the political process on the same basis as other parties with a democratic mandate, the basis of exclusively peaceful methods and a commitment to abide by the democratic process, the basis of a level playing field on which no-one threatens violence or intimidation.



When we began many people did not see the Downing Street declaration as a realistic basis for a ceasefire. They were wrong. Some now argue that it is not realistic to expect the paramilitaries to dispense with their arsenals. They too are wrong. It is neither realistic, nor acceptable, as we come to the end of the 20th century, for parties in our democracy to front private armies. And this is why I have said, and the Taoiseach has said, and President Clinton has said the decommissioning of arms is so important. And that is why we and the Irish government have worked on a joint plan for decommissioning.

I can put it no better than the recent Irish Times editorial which said, and I quote: "Sinn Fein can be under no illusion that the question of IRA arms must be resolved before it can be an equal partner in political talks". That is the end of the quote. To sit at the same table, Sinn Fein must gain the confidence of the other parties, by making a commitment to progressive disarmament and by beginning a verifiable process of decommissioning.

Over the months the government and the security forces have responded in innumerable and imaginative ways to the new opportunities of the ceasefire. The people of Northern Ireland have responded themselves to those opportunities. It is now time for the paramilitary organisations and their political representatives to pay heed to what the people of Northern Ireland are seeking and are saying and to respond to that.

I have no doubt that it is realistic to expect them to take these essential steps and we shall help them to do so in every way that we can. I spoke earlier of confidence. In the Downing Street declaration we offered a fair deal for everyone who embraced peace, and you can be confident, and they can be confident, that we shall stand by that pledge.

You yourselves are helping to generate confidence through your growth initiative. Every week, every month, has helped to build more confidence in that rolling peace process. The tide is carrying Northern Ireland away from violence and towards an enduring peace. With growing and visible economic success, an unshakeable political resolution, a much better future for Northern Ireland is at hand.

There is a new atmosphere out there in Northern Ireland, a willingness to think afresh. People here, people I have spoken to today, people who have suffered terribly from violence over the years, they want to take down barriers and make peace irreversible, to make the price for going back to violence unbearable for those people who might seek to go back to violence.

After 8 months of ceasefire people can see no cause, no reason and no sense in the illegal arsenals which still impede progress. Neither can I. An opportunity to remove them, an opportunity to come fully into the democratic process is there, it is there for everyone with courage and vision to take that opportunity.



I believe that the time has come to put those weapons aside forever and to invest only in peace. That is the chance that is at hand, that is the chance that I hope everyone will take.

We for our part will do our best to bring those talks satisfactorily and honourably to a conclusion that will lead to a permanent peace in Northern Ireland. The opportunity is there. If we have to be patient, we will be patient. If we have to be bold, we will be bold. But we see that chance of peace and we don't wish to see it lost. My hope is that everybody will see that peace and that chance in precisely the same way and we may be able to carry it through to fruition.

I come back frequently to Northern Ireland. Every time I return I am refreshed in my view of the opportunities that exist here. I know in listening to what you have to say in a few minutes I shall find that view reaffirmed yet again and I am delighted to have had the opportunity to express it this morning.