

5.23 p.m.

Mr. Hume: When listening to some of the speeches from hon. Members opposite I sometimes wonder whether I am listening to speeches from Members of Parliament or from members of the flat earth society. The right hon. Member for Larne (Mr. Craig) has come to the Dispatch Box today; he has in the past insulted the trade union movement and apologised; he has insulted the educational background of Catholic lawyers and apologised; he has produced a White Paper on local government reorganisation and today he has criticised what arises out of it; and, without being challenged by anyone in this House, today he has seriously attacked the representative of the Queen in Northern Ireland when he stated categorically and clearly that the Governor of Northern Ireland had been party to a political manoeuvre in appointing a Commission of Inquiry.

That right hon. Gentleman is a member of the Privy Council. I call again for his resignation from that position and I think any hon. Member should support me in that because he clearly stated today that the appointment of the Cameron Commission was a political manoeuvre and an abdication of authority. Those were the words he used and that Commission was appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Craig: On a point of information. The hon. Member apparently was not listening too carefully. I said I agreed with the comment of my right hon. Friend the present Minister of Development.

Mr. Hume: So he is now blaming the Minister of Development.

Mr. Craig: I am not blaming anyone; I am stating facts.

Mr. Hume: He is making it clear that he agrees with the statement that the appointment of this Commission by the Governor of Northern Ireland was a political manoeuvre. We have heard a lot of criticism from hon. Members since they were sworn in, to protest against this sort of conduct from the

right hon. Member for Larne and to join with me in calling for his immediate removal from the Privy Council.

The right hon. Member has criticised this Commission on the grounds that the evidence given to it was unsworn. If I might recall the attitudes of hon. Members of both sides to the appointment of this Commission the consistent criticism from this side of the House was that the evidence was unsworn. We called for a public and sworn inquiry and we received no support from either the right hon. Member or from anyone else. We are quite prepared that there should be a public, sworn inquiry into the events of the last year because we have nothing to hide. The right hon. Member came today to criticise the findings of this Commission but he himself refused to give evidence to it. I do not think that anyone can give any great credence to the views he expresses.

He talked about threats to the Constitution. There is no greater threat than the right hon. Member. That is the view not only of myself but of a very large section of the community. In any case the present is hardly the time for hon. Members of this House to be involved in argument or discussion that might be inclined to raise tension. When speaking in this House on 22nd April following the weekend disturbances in Derry I said that it was time for political leadership to show a bit of moral courage and that politics were about the lives of the people; I finished by saying:

"... the lives of people in this community are in danger today."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 22nd April, 1969; Vol. 72, c. 1274.]

Unfortunately people have lost their lives since then. I join with all hon. Members who have offered their sympathy to the families who have been bereaved in recent incidents. The House should not only have been offering sympathy but should have been apologising to the community for the loss of life that has taken place.

What has happened is due to nothing more nor less than the total failure of this House to give the community the leadership it requires. It was due to the failure of this House to establish the community on a basis of complete justice, which is the only basis for peace,

[Mr. Hume]

and its failure to end for ever religious incitement and hatred. Rather than urging people to end religious division many hon. Members continue to attempt to divide people on the basis of the churches they attend.

To come to the Report, the Motion and the Amendment, the Government talk about allaying fears. We have heard from many hon. Members opposite what their fears of the civil rights movement are. We have heard what they have had to say about the civil rights movement. Their attitude was best summed up yesterday when the right hon. Member for Enniskillen (Mr. West) said that when he saw the hon. Member for Dock (Mr. Fitt) and Mr. McAteer, whom he described as well-known Republican leaders, leading the march in Derry on 5th October what could he expect the community to think the civil rights movement was? In that comment he summed up the narrow-mindedness that besets the community. He cannot see that a person can support a movement or an idea without involving his political views in it. If hon. Members on this side of the House were to set up or give support to an organisation for, say, the eradication of disease would hon. Members opposite tell us that it was being done to subvert the Constitution?

The civil rights movement has stated its aims clearly again and again. It has said that it stands for nothing more or less than full justice and equality for all within the Constitution of Northern Ireland. That is a position which can be supported by anyone of any political viewpoint. People can support justice in our society; they can support any movement which asks for society to be placed on a firmly just basis without bringing their own political views into it. We have always made it clear that the civil rights movement has support from people whose political views go far beyond civil rights, but that those people—and all parties represented on this side of the House support the civil rights movement—have never introduced their political viewpoints into the movement. At least, I have never heard them do so. But a lot of suspicions have been expressed.

For 50 years politics in the North of Ireland have been very easy. In order to be elected all one has had to do is to raise a flag or work up prejudice or suspicion. There has been no necessity to seek election on policies related to the social and economic nature of our community. When a movement tries to wipe out the underlying cancers which divide the people it is met with the same accusations and intransigence. I would point out, as I have done repeatedly in this House during the past six months, that intransigence breeds intransigence and extremism feeds upon extremism. That is exactly what has been happening in the North of Ireland during the past six months.

Mr. Cooper: Hear, hear.

Mr. Hume: I sometimes think that people like the right hon. Member for Larne are delighted to see extremist activity because it lends some credence to their point of view. When extremism breeds upon extremism the centre falls apart, and moderation, which the vast majority of people in this community want, has very little chance. Therefore, we should discuss our fears and the fears of hon. Members opposite—or what they think are their fears—bluntly and clearly.

We have talked about the Constitution of Northern Ireland. Is it not time somebody told us exactly what that Constitution is? How do we recognise a constitution? Do we have to sign something? Most of us have made it very clear that we have no wish to change the Constitution of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority of the people. What exception could anyone take to that position? As citizens we have played our full part in this community. We are seeking to have public boards and other bodies made more representative so that we may play a fuller part. Yet we meet this accusation continually.

There are in our community many people who seek to have Ireland reunited. Listening to hon. Members opposite one would think that was a crime. It is a perfectly acceptable political viewpoint, providing it is put forward in a democratic manner and

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support for it is sought democratically. Parties on this side of the House have always done that. It has always been made absolutely clear that they have no wish to impose a minority viewpoint on the whole community and no wish to be involved in physical force in any manner. Hon. Members opposite either believe that or they do not. If they do not, then we do not have a future in this Parliament. It must be realised that public figures cannot survive if they tell lies in public. One's own supporters know if one tells lies. Unless that is accepted we will get nowhere fast.

I have said that it is perfectly legitimate politically to put forward an alternative type of Constitution. But some people argue that anyone who does so must be deprived of rights. If someone in Britain campaigned for the establishment of a republic, for a change in the British Constitution, should he be deprived of his rights or freedom of speech?

Mr. Cooper: Colin Jordan.

Mr. Hume: Unless we have a society which is founded on freedom of speech and the other fundamental principles of democracy we will get nowhere. Any attempt to suppress a political viewpoint, however one may dislike it, only strengthens it. Laws, like sections of the Public Order Act and the Special Powers Act, which attempt to suppress political expression only damage society. So far as I can see, the real subversion in the North of Ireland comes not from those who seek justice but from those who hysterically oppose it.

Mr. Currie: U.D.I.

Mr. Hume: The people who belong to what is described as the right wing of the party opposite are the ones who have opposed justice right down the line. Injustice in society can be used as a breeding ground for anything. The way to stop people who attempt to be subversive is to remove the feeding grounds of injustice.

Mr. Currie: Hear, hear.

Mr. Hume: As I have said, the right

wing opposes justice. I welcome the Prime Minister's statement that he will resign if his reform programme is stopped. I would remind him that his predecessor said precisely the same thing; and we know what happened to him. I am sorry the Prime Minister chose to say outside this House a few days ago that party unity was essential to the progress of Northern Ireland. In putting party unity before the good of this community he is making the same fundamental mistake as his predecessor. I accept that, as some hon. Members on this side have said, some hon. Members opposite genuinely want justice. But there are also men who will oppose it tooth and nail. Those two forces are incompatible. I forecast that if unity of the Unionist Party is the price we have to pay for reform we will not get it.

Some of the reforms have been spelled out; some of them we await. There is much talk of law and order. No one is opposed to law and order providing they are administered impartially by an impartial force. I hope we will get such a force. I hope such a body will not be forced to carry out political decisions. If anything has been proved by the events of the last few months it is the arguments we have put forward against the political nature of the powers in the Public Order Bill and the Special Powers Act.

The hon. Member for East Tyrone (Mr. Currie) has warned again that the crucial issue is the reform of local government. I endorse that warning because of the injustices which have flowed largely from manipulation of local government powers through minority rule. We are totally dissatisfied with what we are being offered. We feel that the document concerning the reorganisation of local government is another attempt to appease what is described as the right wing of the Unionist Party.

Mr. Currie: A compromise.

Mr. Hume: It is a compromise. Surely any sensible and reasonable man can see that the people who were brought up, whipped up, here yesterday cannot be appeased. Anyone who attempts