

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

Reference Code: 2005/7/628

Title: Text of a statement by Northern Ireland Chief Minister Brian Faulkner, in relation to the statement on the status of Northern Ireland made in the Dáil by Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave.

Creation Date(s): 13 March, 1974

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 2 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Access Conditions: Open

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ATTENTION

13.3.74

TO MR JACK HINCHEY

FROM ROBINSON, STORMONT CASTLE

STATEMENT BY CHIEF MINISTER

THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT WAS ISSUED THIS MORNING BY THE CHIEF MINISTER OF THE NI EXECUTIVE, RT HON BRIAN FAULKNER, IN RELATION TO THE STATEMENT ON THE STATUS OF NORTHERN IRELAND MADE TO THE DAIL BY MR COSGRAVE:

WHEN I WENT TO THE SUNNINGDALE CONFERENCE, I SAID IN MY OPENING STATEMENT, BEFORE DETAILED DISCUSSIONS BEGAN, THAT IT WAS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC TO MAKE CLEAR ITS ACCEPTANCE OF THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND TO ORDER THEIR OWN AFFAIRS.

IT WAS IN RESPONSE TO THIS THAT MR COSGRAVE'S GOVERNMENT, IN ARTICLE 5 OF THE COMMUNIQUE, FULLY ACCEPTED AND SOLEMNLY DECLARED THAT THERE COULD BE NO CHANGE IN THE STATUS OF NORTHERN IRELAND UNTIL A MAJORITY OF ITS PEOPLE DESIRED A CHANGE IN THAT STATUS.

NO-ONE AT SUNNINGDALE WAS IN ANY DOUBT ABOUT THE MEANING OF THIS DECLARATION. IT MEANT THAT NORTHERN IRELAND WOULD REMAIN PART OF THE UNITED KINGDOM UNLESS AND UNTIL A MAJORITY WERE TO DECIDE OTHERWISE. SUBSEQUENT EVENTS SEEMED TO CAST DOUBT UPON THIS INTERPRETATION, AND MADE IT ESSENTIAL THAT MR COSGRAVE SHOULD CLARIFY THE POSITION. THAT IS THE PURPOSE OF HIS STATEMENT MADE TODAY.

IT INCLUDES THESE WORDS:-

'THE FACTUAL POSITION OF NORTHERN IRELAND IS, OF COURSE, THAT IT IS WITHIN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND MY GOVERNMENT ACCEPT THIS AS A FACT. I NOW THEREFORE SOLEMNLY REAFFIRM THAT THE FACTUAL POSITION OF NORTHERN IRELAND WITHIN THE UNITED KINGDOM CANNOT BE CHANGED EXCEPT BY A DECISION OF A MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND.'

THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT ABOUT THE MEANING OF THESE WORDS. THE POSITION IS CONFIRMED TO BE AS I STATED IT TO BE AFTER THE SUNNINGDALE CONFERENCE AND MY SUBSEQUENT MEETING WITH MR COSGRAVE AT BALDONNEL. FOR THE FIRST TIME, A GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC HAS MADE A SOLEMN PUBLIC DECLARATION WHICH ACCEPTS OUR RIGHT TO REMAIN PART OF THE UNITED KINGDOM FOR AS LONG AS THAT IS THE WISH OF A MAJORITY OF OUR PEOPLE. THUS, THE PRESENT IRISH GOVERNMENT LIKE THE PARTIES FORMING

THE EXECUTIVE HERE, ENDORSE THE PRINCIPLE OF CONSENT WHICH
IS EMBODIED IN SECTION 1 OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND CONSTITUTION
ACT 19

IT IS HOPED THAT THIS WELCOME STATEMENT OF CLARIFICATION WILL
ENJOY SUCH A WIDE MEASURE OF SUPPORT IN THE IRISH REPUBLIC
AS TO REMOVE THE STATUS OF NORTHERN IRELAND, AS A PRACTICAL
MATTER, FROM THE AREA OF PUBLIC CONTROVERSY. IT IS CONCERNED
WITH PRACTICAL FACTS AND REALITIES, RATHER THAN WITH LEGAL
ABSTRACTIONS.

WE NOW AWAIT THE DEVELOPMENT OF OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF
THE SUNNINGDALE "PACKAGE" NOTABLY SECURITY, INCLUDING THE
PROBLEM OF FUGITIVE OFFENDERS.

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