

Extract from speech by the Rt. Hon. J. Enoch Powell, MP  
to the Annual General Meeting of the South Down Unionist  
Association at Glenloughan, Kilkeel, Co. Down.  
at 8 pm, Friday, 25th January 1980

As *Am*

I expect I am not the only person to be staggered by the volume of sheer bad advice which appears to be tendered to the Secretary of State. In small things and in great, in matters of timing and manner as in matters of policy, he has from his earliest days in office made a series of gaffes and blunders from which any ordinarily competent department would have saved him. From the gaucheries of getting himself tied up with the Mayor of New York or being on holiday at the most delicate time of the Ulster year to his evident incomprehension of the respective political forces in this province and their intentions, one is bound, with the best will in the world and with all due allowance for inexperience and ineptitude, to ask oneself what it is about the Northern Ireland Office that makes it so different from all the other departments of state.

Once one puts the question, the answer is not far to seek. It is an important one, and it points to a reform which ought to be undertaken in the interest of all concerned.

When a minister goes to any normal office, he finds there, to advise and help him, a wealth of experience, built up over many years. Most of the officials will have spent much, if not the whole, of their career in that department. Few, even those at the top who may have had recent experience in other ministries, will have come to the Department as complete strangers; and even they will have at their elbows colleagues and juniors who 'know the form' from A to Z. One might suggest that sometimes departments can become unduly 'in-grown' as a result; but of one thing any minister can be sure - while he himself may be a tyro, those advising him and executing his policies will not be.

Now, to all this the Northern Ireland Office - the office of the Secretary of State as the cabinet Minister responsible for the

● affairs of Northern Ireland - presents a unique and total contrast. I am obliged regretfully to add that the contrast is not an accidental or unintended one. It is not because there exists no Northern Ireland Civil Service. Indeed, there does, and an excellent one too, composed very largely of Ulster men and women thoroughly experienced in their work and, in my judgment, fully on a level with their opposite numbers in Great Britain. This civil service staffs the Northern Ireland departments over which the junior ministers preside. They, in contrast to their chief, are surrounded with the benefits of wide local knowledge and deep experience of the Ulster scene. Not so the Northern Ireland Office itself.

When that Office was set up in 1972, you might have expected that the Government would have been keen to avail itself of the wealth of talent and knowledge that was ready to hand on the spot. Such, however, was the suspicion and even hostility towards Northern Ireland of the then Government, that the Northern Ireland Office was constructed de novo out of personnel seconded from other Whitehall departments, not forgetting, of course, besides the Home Office, the Foreign Office plus its former Commonwealth and Colonial Service elements. Nor, once the Office had been formed, have officials been left there to continue their career and build up the requisite experience. On the contrary, and as a matter of policy, their tours of duty are limited to two or three years, as a precaution against their becoming too much assimilated to those who, in the jargon of the Northern Ireland Office, are contemptuously referred to as "the natives" - that is to say, you and me.

Just try to imagine the Scottish Office or the Welsh Office being deliberately manned with birds of passage whose supreme qualification for advising and assisting their respective Secretaries of State was to be as far devoid as possible of any experience of Scotland or Wales and of any sympathy with it. Or think what would be said if the Chancellor of the Exchequer was given a new

department thrown together from the denizens of other ministries, from transport to social security, who had been picked for their lack of experience in finance and who would move on again shortly before they could possibly get the hang of the Treasury. Small wonder if the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland so frequently talks and acts as if he were the man in the moon paying us a visit, and commits the most egregious blunders apparently unawares and un-  
advised.

This is a position which is fair neither to Northern Ireland nor the Northern Ireland Civil Service. If the United Kingdom is the rightful heritage of all the people of Northern Ireland, the civil servant in Northern Ireland has a right to the full scope and opportunities available to the civil servant in any other part of the kingdom. The time has come - indeed, it has been with us for long already - when the civil service in Northern Ireland should be an integral part of the Civil Service of the Crown throughout the United Kingdom. No doubt, as with other departments of state, those serving the administration in Northern Ireland would still choose to spend most or all of their careers here. No doubt, all the existing vest rights and expectations of Northern Ireland civil servants would be preserved and guaranteed. But the civil servant in Ulster should be able to look forward as he approaches the apex of his profession, to filling any top position in the U.K. no less than his peers in other departments; and the devastating dichotomy between the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Northern Ireland Office would be removed.

All this is in no way bound up with the question of future local government here or even future devolution. When the last parliament framed a Bill for Scottish home rule, complete with a Scottish Assembly, one thing it resolutely refused to do was to divide the Civil Service and give part of it off to Scotland. The unity of the Civil Service was perceived to be an attribute of the

unity of the realm. The Ulster civil servant has a right to the same United Kingdom status as the Scottish civil servant. To continue to deny this - indeed, to treat the question itself as if it did not exist - is not only to perpetuate the disastrous isolation and separation of the Northern Ireland Office from those for whom Parliament and Government are responsible through the Secretary of State. It is a standing practical denial of that integral position of Ulster in the United Kingdom, to which both Parliament and Government purport to be committed.