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PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH TO CONGRESS: NORTHERN IRELAND

1. I HAVE BEEN TURNING OVER IN MY MIND HOW BEST TO MEET SPEAKER O'NEILL'S REQUEST THAT THE PRIME MINISTER ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF NORTHERN IRELAND AND COMBINE IT WITH A CLEAR STATEMENT OF HMG'S POLICY WHICH WOULD ATTRACT THE OVERWHELMING SUPPORT OF THE CONGRESS AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. PRESENTATION WILL BE IMPORTANT, SINCE AN OUNCE OF HELP IS WORTH A TON OF ADVICE, I HAVE TRIED MY HAND AT A DRAFT PASSAGE WHICH I THINK WOULD BE WELL RECEIVED HERE IN YOUR AMERICAN CONSTITUENCY - AND HOPE WOULD NOT CAUSE DAMAGE IN YOUR OTHER CONSTITUENCIES. IT WOULD ALSO, WHEN YOU HAVE GONE HOME, PROVIDE THOSE OF US WHO STAY BEHIND TO PROMOTE THE BRITISH INTEREST HERE WITH AN AUTHENTIC AND DEFINITIVE TEXT WITH WHICH TO OPERATE.

BEGINS

I SHOULD LIKE, IF I MAY, TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT NORTHERN IRELAND.

I DO SO BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT AT YOUR LAST CENSUS WELL OVER 60 MILLION AMERICANS CLAIMED BRITISH ANCESTRY AND MORE THAN 40 MILLION AMERICANS CLAIMED IRISH ANCESTRY: AND BECAUSE YOU, MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE AND SENATE, REPRESENT THESE AMERICANS, NEARLY HALF THE POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES. I ACKNOWLEDGE THE LEGITIMATE INTEREST OF YOU AND YOUR FELLOW CITIZENS IN THE INTRACTABLE PROBLEM OF THE LANDS FROM WHICH THEY COME.

THE POSITION OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT IS CLEAR. IT IS BASED UPON THE PRINCIPLE OF CONSENT, ENSHRINED IN YOUR CONSTITUTION AND AN ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR COMMON HERITAGE, BRITISH OR IRISH.

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAS REPEATEDLY STATED THAT SO LONG AS A MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND WISH TO MAINTAIN THE UNION WITH GREAT BRITAIN, THEIR WISHES WILL BE RESPECTED. THE COROLLARY OF THAT POLICY IS THAT IF EVER THE WISHES OF THE MAJORITY SHOULD CHANGE, THEN THOSE WISHES WOULD ALSO BE RESPECTED BY THE GOVERNMENT AT WESTMINSTER.

THERE IS NO DISAGREEMENT ON THIS PRINCIPLE BETWEEN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND. INDEED THE FOUR CONSTITUTIONAL NATIONALIST PARTIES OF IRELAND, NORTH AND SOUTH, WHO CAME TOGETHER TO ISSUE THE FOPUN REPORT, MADE CLEAR THAT ANY SUCH ARRANGEMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND MUST BE QUOTE FREELY NEGOTIATED AND AGREED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTH. UNQUOTE

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WHILE I WAS UNABLE TO ACCEPT CERTAIN PROPOSITIONS IN THAT REPORT BECAUSE THEY WERE BOUND, IN MY JUDGEMENT, TO FAIL THE TEST OF CONSENT, THERE WAS MUCH IN THE REPORT WHICH THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WELCOMED. WE WELCOMED, FOR EXAMPLE, THE RECOGNITION THAT THERE WERE TWO TRADITIONS IN THE NORTH, THE UNIONIST TRADITION AND THE NATIONALIST TRADITION, OF EQUAL VALIDITY. WE WELCOMED THE RECOGNITION THAT ANY CHANGE IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL POSITION COULD COME ABOUT ONLY BY CONSENT. AND WE WELCOMED THE FORUM'S UNEQUIVOCAL REPUDIATION OF THE USE OF VIOLENCE AS A MEANS TO POLITICAL ENDS.

THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE OF NORTHERN IRELAND RESTS UNEQUIVOCALLY UPON THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT. WE CANNOT EVADE IT. NOR CAN WE SHARE IT. BUT THE REALITIES OF LIFE TELL US THAT OTHERS CAN, BY WORD AND DEED, HELP OR HINDER US IN THE DISCHARGE OF THAT RESPONSIBILITY. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT IS IN CONSTANT TOUCH WITH THE IRISH GOVERNMENT. I HAVE HAD MANY PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS WITH THE IRISH PRIME MINISTER AND LOOK FORWARD TO HAVING MANY MORE. WE ARE AGREED ON THE NEED TO CREATE IN NORTHERN IRELAND A POLITICAL FRAMEWORK ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH THE MAJORITY AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES. I BELIEVE THAT BOTH THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND, I MAY SAY, THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC MAY COUNT UPON THE SUPPORT OF THIS GREAT LEGISLATURE WHEN WE APPLY THESE ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY: CONSENT AND THE REPUDIATION OF VIOLENCE FOR POLITICAL ENDS.

THE WAY TO PEACE, DEMOCRACY AND PROSPERITY FOR ALL IN NORTHERN IRELAND IS LONG AND HARD. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WILL NOT FALTER NOR FAIL IN ITS TASK. BUT WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH REALITIES, FOR THERE IS NO WAY ROUND THEM. AND THE REALITIES ARE AS I HAVE DESCRIBED THEM.

WRIGHT.

ENDS

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