

22 November 1979

Speech by Mr. Powell

I enclose a copy of the speech which Mr. Powell intends to give tomorrow evening and about which we have spoken on the telephone.

You will no doubt wish to prepare a line to take in response to Mr. Powell's speech once it has been delivered. I do not think there can be any question of trying to dissuade Mr. Powell from making it. But if you agree with me that the allegations in Mr. Powell's speech are entirely without foundation, it might be worth suggesting to the Prime Minister that Mr. Gow should telephone Mr. Powell and tell him that this is the case.

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Roy Harrington, Esq.,
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Speech by the Rt. Hon. J. Enoch Powell, M.P. to the Garvaghy Branch of the South Down Unionist Association at the Carnew Orange Hall, Banbridge, Co. Down, at 8 p.m. Friday 23 Nov. '79

In politics there are times for private advice and times for public advice. Which is which, like everything else in politics, is a matter of judgment. It is my judgment that at this moment I might, without risk of doing harm and some chance of doing good, send an open letter to the Prime Minister. From what address could it be better sent than from this place in my own Ulster constituency?

What I have to say to her is to some extent prompted by my duty to my constituents (all of them) and to this province (the whole of it). But even more is at issue; for no national interest would be served if the Prime Minister, who is in some sense the nation's representative for the time being, were to be personally committed to a course of action which was based upon misapprehension and which might, in the outcome, cast doubt upon her candour.

When Mrs. Thatcher became Prime Minister, her general policy towards Northern Ireland had been firmly stated. She was committed to the maintenance of the parliamentary Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and had undertaken to try to remedy the principal disability under which this province labours as compared with the rest of the nation, namely, the virtual absence of local government, though the Conservative Party was not committed as to the exact way in which that lack might best be made good. She had authorised her spokesmen to inform the previous leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, Mr. West, that, whatever view might be taken of a devolved parliament and government - a "Stormont", to use the shorthand expression - such a development was not envisaged during the lifetime of the present parliament. It was in accordance with this position of the Prime Minister that the new Secretary of State proceeded in a commendably quiet and unostentatious fashion to acquaint himself with the province and move towards implementation of the Party's manifesto.

All this was changed three weeks ago. To the stupefaction of the House of Commons, the Secretary of State suddenly announced a constitutional conference at which the Government would seek agreement, if attainable, upon one of a range of options including

full legislative and executive devolution, with the sole exception security. The Northern Ireland Office was as much taken aback by the sudden change as was the House of Commons, which could hardly credit that the Secretary of State had not breathed a word of his intention to the party leaders with whom he had been in consultation a day or two before. It was soon rumoured that the Prime Minister personally had given the orders, as it was also rumoured that she personally had prompted the deferment of the publication of the Boundary Commission's draft proposals for Ulster's additional five or six seats in Parliament. The subsequent steps were pushed ahead at breakneck speed so that the conference could begin its work early in December; and in a unique interview given to the New York Times the Prime Minister announced that, in default of agreement, her government would "impose" constitutional changes on Northern Ireland, though that was not easy to reconcile with the Government's professed neutrality as between the various "options".

One thing is certain. If Prime Minister Lynch had given instructions for all this, it could not have been more closely in accordance with his wishes. In recent weeks he has been heard saying on both sides of the Atlantic that he was not looking for Britain's immediate withdrawal from Ulster but wanted instead to see a fully devolved government here as the first step to what the Irish Nationalist calls "re-unification", but with British troops responsible for security in the meantime. In this stance, which was hailed as "moderate", he asked the American government to withhold support from the I.R.A., was promised American money if agreement could be reached in Ulster, and incautiously let fall some words about helicopters on the Border which got him into hot water. The Daily Express had the flavour exactly, if unwittingly, right when a few days ago it concluded a leader favourable to Mr Lynch with the sentence: "Mrs Thatcher can strengthen Mr Lynch's hand at this time by reinforcing her proposed initiative on Northern Ireland".

I will only say this. If a personal deal had been made between Mr Lynch and the Prime Minister whereby she would do her best to fulfil the Taoiseach's political demands in return for unspecified assistance on his part in dealing with the I.R.A., the U.S.A., the E.E.C. or who knows what, not a single thing that has happened - from the apparent gaucherie of the Secretary of State to the emotionally charged involvement of the Prime Minister herself - would have needed to be different. It is against that background that I tonight address the following open letter to the Prime Minister.

"Dear Margaret,

I am venturing, as a senior Privy Councillor and one who has concerned himself deeply with the affairs of Ulster for the last ten years, to offer certain advice. I do so in the belief that you and I share the same devotion to the Union, the same sense of national honour and - in our differing situations - the same dedication to the safety and well-being of our fellow-subjects.

What I have to say is that any deal or agreement with the government of the Irish Republic, whereby that government would somehow assist Britain in return for political concessions in Ulster, would be the road to disaster. Quite apart from your own assertion, which I support, that the internal affairs of any part of the United Kingdom are the exclusive concern of the U.K. alone, there are two facts which it is vital to understand.

One fact is this. Whatever his own inclinations, Mr Lynch cannot deliver. No government of the Republic can be seen to be effectually assisting the security forces in Ulster against the I.R.A. and survive politically. That is the reality about the Republic. I make no complaint and no moral judgment. I only say: it is an unchanging fact of the situation.

The second fact is that our Roman Catholic fellow-citizens in Ulster can only be safe when the permanence of the parliamentary Union is placed beyond all reasonable doubt, because only that can deprive the I.R.A. of the power to terrorise and blackmail them. If Her Majesty's Government is - I do not say perceived, but even misunderstood - to be seeking constitutional arrangements which the Taoiseach could regard as the first step to "re-unification", the consequence will be an immense encouragement to the I.R.A. and the loss of many more lives than would otherwise have been claimed.

Please do not think that I underestimate the pressures upon you from those at home and abroad - in the Republic, on the Continent, in America and in the Foreign Office - who, even if they are well-intentioned, do not understand these realities. But they are pressures which have to be withstood for the sake of those who can only look to you. The idea that terrorism in Ulster can be bought off or counteracted by constitutional changes of any kind is a natural but dangerous delusion. The men of violence will interpret every move made under that impression as evidence that they are bound to win and are already winning; and the population at large will be rendered correspondingly more vulnerable and disheartened.

I have to warn you solemnly that, if Her Majesty's Government were now to throw the affairs of Ulster back into the melting pot of the dark era 1972 to 1975, it would incur a needless and fearful responsibility.

Yours ever,

Enoch"