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STORMONT CASTLE,
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6 March, 1970

Sir,

To-day I leave Belfast after rather more than six months as the representative of the United Kingdom Government in Northern Ireland. The appointment was the first of its kind; it followed the rioting and mayhem which characterised this province from October 1968 to August 1969 and was one of the matters agreed upon between the central and provincial governments in the Downing Street Communique of the 19th of August. In nature rather more than ambassadorial and rather less than gubernatorial, it represented "the increased concern which the United Kingdom Government had necessarily acquired in Northern Ireland affairs through the commitment of the Armed Forces in the present conditions". It may be helpful if I describe the present state and future prospects of the province as they appear to me on my departure.

The Past

2. If ever there were a case of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children to the umpteenth generation, the Irish problem is it. For seven hundred years the English in their folly sought to govern the Irish and employed every method including, alas, the plantation of colonists to achieve their aim. When they grew weary of ill-doing and decided, towards the end of the nineteenth century, to leave the Irish to their own devices, their Scots-Calvinist colonists shouted : "Hey, what about us?". The inevitable non-solution was partition, with two Irish governments, an independent native Catholic one in Dublin and a subordinate, colonial, Protestant one in Belfast; the main thing, at the time, was to /.....

The Right Honourable
James Callaghan M.P.,
Home Office,
London S.W.1.



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was to enable Westminster to wish the Irish problem away. It is hardly surprising that, until mid-1969, Ulster was, and felt, remote, neglected and unhappy.

3. Ulster is a land inhabited by two minorities, each with the defensive-aggressive attitude of a minority. It is a tribal society and the two tribes, the colonists who did not want to be absorbed by the natives and the natives stranded by partition on the wrong side of the border, like and trust each other about as well as dog and cat, Arab and Jew, Greek and Turkish Cypriot. Separated from birth by ghettos in the towns and from the age of five by educational apartheid at school, it is hardly surprising that they mix as naturally as oil and vinegar. In fear of domination by the South, Unionists took care to dominate the North. Orange-Protestant ascendancy is what Ulster has been about for the fifty years of its existence; ironically enough, it has been the existence of British-style democracy based on universal adult franchise which has guaranteed and perpetuated a most un-British-style injustice towards the Catholic minority.

4. But the minority, though perhaps more sinned against than sinning, has been far from blameless. In true Irish fashion, the Micks have enjoyed provoking the Prods as much as the Prods have enjoyed retaliating. Catholic attitudes have been at best ambivalent and at worst treacherous. It makes the Prods' blood boil - and all Irish blood boils at a very low temperature - to see the Micks enjoy the superior material benefits of the British connexion while continuing to wave the tricolour at them. In the summer of 1969, it made their blood boil over to see the Civil Rights marchers demanding equality of treatment while offering in return something less than equality of loyalty.

5. So in Belfast in August 1969 the Protestant Shankill marched on their neighbours in the Catholic Falls and burned out their houses and sprayed them

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with bullets. Popular Catholic belief has it that the march was led by the Commissioner of Police of Belfast in person, riding in an official armoured car and shooting official bullets as he came : Mr. Justice Scarman is at present sitting in Belfast to establish the truth. And Protestant blood is still simmering under the humiliation of seeing a government of the Protestant ascendancy dispensing justice to Catholics at Westminster's insistence in the name of equality of citizenship. Altogether too many of them have only one thing in their hearts : hatred; and only one desire : vengeance. Altogether too many of them look to the one man with charisma in Ulster, a man of God, the Reverend Ian Paisley, to give it to them. It is small wonder that Ulstermen seem in my short experience to be a nation of pessimists : they have a lot to be pessimistic about.

The Present

6. Even so, although gloom tends to be the prevalent physical and moral climate of Ulster, things are immeasurably better to-day than they were six months ago. When the Army moved in, Ulster was on the brink of civil war; to-day, a tolerable calm prevails in the streets, Catholics sleep without intolerable fear in their beds, the ban on demonstrations and marches has been lifted and marches and demonstrations take place in tolerably good order. The Army under Sir Ian Freeland has kept the peace and has even been able to reduce the number of battalions committed to aid the civil power. The police under Sir Arthur Young, disarmed and beginning to smile, are recovering their morale and increasing their numerical strength. Then, Ulster was a land of discrimination and injustice : today, the symptoms of discrimination are being treated by law and the causes of discrimination - too few houses and too few jobs - are being tackled by a substantial injection of finance from Westminster. Then, the Unionist Government was disorientated and the

Opposition /....

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not attached
Opposition in a state of near-hysteria; to-day, the Government is slowly recovering its confidence and the Opposition is pretty relaxed. I attach a note by Mr. Anthony Hewins summarising the present state of the reform programme.

7. The politics of the streets are in consequence giving way to the politics of the ballot box and the centre of interest and concern is moving from the Catholic to the Protestant community. In 1969, the Civil Rights movement could get the Catholic masses on to the streets to demand the redressal of Catholic grievances and make the reputation of men like John Hume in the process. Nominated bodies - the Police Authority, the Central Housing Authority, the Community Relations Commission - representative of the whole community, are now being set up to redress the built-in injustice of undiluted democracy as it works out in practice in this province. In early 1970, therefore, the steam is going out of the Civil Rights movement and men like Hume are enhancing their reputation by cooling the situation. Civil Rights demonstrations throughout the province on the 7th of February against the Public Order Act, and on subsequent week-ends in Armagh and Enniskillen, lacked real popular backing and were virtually flops. The Opposition has returned to Stormont. But in winning its cause it has lost its former purpose and now seeks a new role. In trying to form a united opposition party out of the present medley of Nationalists, Republicans, Labour and Independents, it is attempting fusion with some pretty fissionable material. But it is encouraging that the attempt is being made : a non-nationalist opposition with an economic and social programme could give a lead in breaking down the sectarian divisions of Ulster politics. It deserves support. The decision of the Northern Ireland Labour Party to seek affiliation with the British Labour Party is rather at variance with this trend.

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8. It is on the Unionist side that the clouds are gathering. Understandably so, since the reform programme strikes at the roots of Protestant-Orange (but not necessarily of Unionist) power : the police and local government. The Royal Ulster Constabulary has been civilianised and is in the process of conversion from a police force to a police service on the British pattern : its para-military strong-arm squad, the 'B' Specials, is to be stood down and its replacement, the Ulster Defence Regiment, stood to on the 1st of April. Physical power will have shifted from the Ulster Police to the British Army, political power from Stormont to Westminster. Similarly with local government. A nominated Central Housing Authority will take over the building and allocation of houses, driving a coach and horses through democratic local government, and a Review Body has been set up to determine whether local government has a future and, if so, what. Local government councillors, the practitioners of discrimination and the cadres of the Unionist Party at the grass roots, are alarmed, understandably.

9. The Protestant backlash is already clearly visible. It is also clearly audible, since it is accompanied by a series of so far minor intimidatory bomb explosions. In constituency associations, moderates are being ousted and hard-liners voted in to office. The Prime Minister, Major Chichester-Clark, has himself lost the vice-chairmanship of his own constituency association. Two Paisleyites have won seats to that disgrace to democracy, the Belfast Corporation. Two Stormont by-elections are pending for seats originally held by Lord O'Neill and Mr. Richard Ferguson at Bannside and South Antrim : hard-liners are expected to be nominated and elected to both, thus shifting rightwards the balance within the Unionist Parliamentary Party. At present, the Northern Ireland Government is genuinely committed to reform; the Cabinet is united and commands a majority in its Parliamentary Party.

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It is slowly recovering its confidence. But it is reforming against the prevailing mood among its supporters in the country. It is doing its best; whether its best is good enough is another matter. Fortunately the electorate, provided the Government's will and majority hold, does not have to be consulted for another four years, and in four years massive aid from Westminster ought to have improved the quality of life and therefore the mood of the province.

The Future

10. Seen from Stormont Castle, however, 1974 seems an awful long way away. Reality consists of surviving from week-end demo to week-end demo, from back-bench meeting to back-bench meeting, from confrontation to confrontation with the Unionist Central Council. The immediate future is strewn with minor and not-so-minor pitfalls - Miss Bernadette Devlin's appeal, the Easter marches, the Stormont by-elections, the Scarman tribunal. In the middle distance looms a major hazard : the report of the Review Body on Local Government; it is expected in May and then, it is assumed, the crunch will come. That, at any rate, is what Unionist irreconcilables like William Craig and Harry West are saying. That, certainly, is what Major Chichester-Clark's Government believe during their periodic fits of depression; that, again, conditions their behaviour when their spirits are low. Still, they have taken every fence so far in tolerably good order; the horse is still running and the jockey is still up and both seem to be getting their second wind. The Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Porter, a man of great fundamental decency and liberality of view, who has borne the brunt of the battle in recent months, is piloting the Police Bill through Stormont with considerable firmness and skill and the threatened hard-line opposition has turned out in practice to be distinctly paper-tigerish.

11. If the /....



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11. If the struggle for the heart and mind of the Unionist Party does come to a head in May and on the issue of local government, the outcome will depend, obviously, on the resolution of the opposing forces. The essential questions are: on the one hand, will the present Government continue to maintain the will to govern; or will it prefer, as Major Chichester-Clark tells "Panorama" and anybody else who cares to ask, to go back to farming? On the other, are the Craigs and Wests of the Unionist Party conducting a shrewd, calculated campaign aiming to bring down the Government at a moment of their choosing; or are they merely a bunch of deposed and frustrated King Lears, threatening to "do such things, they know not what they are, but they shall be the terrors of the earth"? And what can Her Majesty's Government do to ensure that we get the right answers?

12. My own view is that Major Chichester-Clark, faced with a choice of personal preference or public duty, will opt for public duty. With one proviso, and that is that Her Majesty's Government continue to give him both their confidence and the tools to finish the job. His Army background of service to the State will, I think, encourage him to continue, but he will need all the stiffening we can give him. And this means a major economic New Deal for Northern Ireland on the basis of the Development Plan for 1970-75, including a real effort at urban renewal in the Shankill-Falls area. It is a bull point that the Minister responsible for putting through the reform of local government and setting up the Central Housing Authority is Mr. Brian Faulkner, the Minister of Development, the ablest politician in Northern Ireland. On the other side, my hunch is that the Craigs and Wests will be ready to talk but not to act: their performance on the Police Bill supports this assessment. A key figure at the fulcrum of the Unionist Parliamentary Party, Commander Anderson, has told me that he and his hard-line friends /....



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friends do not like the Government's policies, but they like and trust Jimmy Chichester-Clark: they will do for him what they would not do for his predecessor, Captain Terence O'Neill. But even with our full financial and moral support, it could be a close-run thing; without it, we shall have a constitutional crisis on our hands.

13. As I pack my bags therefore, I am cautiously optimistic, provided it is clear what I am being optimistic about. I am not forecasting a final solution to the Irish question, nor the merging of the two tribes of Ulster into one nation. I am setting my sights rather lower, on a containment, on the management of the Ulster problem. For things are immeasurably better here than when I unpacked six months ago. This is now in the process of becoming a more just and therefore a more peaceful society: the task of producing a more prosperous and therefore happier one is perfectly feasible. Your policy has clearly been right: to offer help, to insist on reform but to allow and enable Stormont to be the instrument of reform. Indeed there is no alternative except direct rule and no-one in their right mind wants that if it can be avoided: it would be even more difficult, even more expensive, and involve an even more open-ended military commitment.

14. The decisive factor in the equation, in my view, is the assumption by Westminster of its political and financial responsibilities and the provision of enough military power to ensure that its will prevails. During my time here, the Constitution has remained intact, but the power relationship between Westminster and Stormont has changed. In the past, Westminster was guilty of neglect and Stormont of arrogance: Westminster's sins of omission permitted Stormont's sins of commission. To-day, Westminster is deeply committed, militarily, financially, politically; Stormont is chastened but beginning to benefit/.....

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benefit from both help and supervision. The shift of power to Westminster has been necessary, beneficial and will, I hope, be lasting; but the new relationship will have to be cultivated with tact and understanding: the iron fist must be there, but in a well-padded velvet glove.

15. Since the partition of Ireland has produced a border and not a frontier, and since attitudes to partition, real or imaginary, lie at the heart of the Ulster problem, no report from Northern Ireland would be complete without a reference to relations with the South. I agree with Sir Andrew Gilchrist that to-day the North acts: the South reacts. So long as we keep the North quiet, the South will give us no trouble, for Mr. Lynch also went to the edge of disaster last August - and stepped back in time. His courageous speech to his Party Conference in January marked a change from fantasy to realism about the Irish question. If he recognises, as he now does, that force cannot be used to solve the problem of partition, he must come to realise that the only prospect of Irish unity lies in the seduction not the rape of the North. The South will, I suspect, be a long time a-wooing, if they ever start: the Irish tend to marry late, I believe. Meanwhile our policy should continue on present lines: to re-affirm the constitutional position, but discreetly and ex gratia to keep the Dublin Government informed and to encourage, when the time is right, discreet contacts, starting at official level, between North and South.

Envoi

16. It is not often given to members of Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service to be able to lend a helping hand at home. It has therefore been a rare privilege for me to serve in the Home Department. I am most grateful for the opportunity of helping you in your task of bringing peace and prosperity to this /.....

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to this troubled corner of the Realm and of working and making friends with so many new colleagues in the Home Civil Service : I would not have missed it for anything. It has also been a privilege to work with General Freeland and the Army; without the presence of the troops and the skill and tough-minded friendliness of their Commander, our political work would have been in vain and the future of Ulster bleak indeed. For them, and their tactful firmness in imposing the Queen's Peace, no praise is too high.

I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, to the Secretary of State for Defence, Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Washington and Dublin, the Permanent Representative at the United Nations in New York, and to the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

with the highest respect,

Your most obedient Servant

(Oliver Wright)

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