

Speech by President Albert Baird given to Dublin Rotary Club 28th February 1994 on the occasion of a visit by fifty members of Belfast Club to the Dublin Club *(It received a standing ovation)*

Knowing that I was the after-lunch speaker, I looked around at the carefree faces of my Belfast colleagues and was reminded of the words inscribed on W C Fields' tombstone, at his own request: 'All things considered, I'd rather be in Philadelphia'.

I will certainly look back on today as the highlight of my year as President of the Rotary Club of Belfast.

The initial suggestion that the long-standing friendship between the Rotary Clubs of Dublin and Belfast should be strengthened by today's visit and by a reciprocal visit later this year, came from President Finbarr and his Dublin Rotarian colleagues. The number of my fellow Belfast members who enthusiastically agreed to participate has ensured the success of our joint meeting. To be truthful, I cannot say whether President Finbarr Ambrose or President Mary Robinson was the greater carrot!

I would like to thank you, President Finbarr, for inviting us here today and for the superb arrangements made for a memorable day.

Comparison of our two clubs reveals some striking parallels. It was an Ulsterman, William Morrow, a returned Yank, who first brought the concept of Rotary across the Atlantic in 1911 and, in conjunction with his Dublin brother-in-law, William A McConnell, formed your Dublin club some months before the formation of our Belfast club. The Dublin club is thus the first club in Europe.

Our two clubs are remarkably similar in size, having in each case approximately 100 members. Both clubs are amongst the small number of District 1160 clubs which have admitted lady members and I am delighted that two lady members of our Belfast club are with us today. Since 1911 the Dublin club has provided 15 District Governors compared with 14 from our Belfast club. However, we can claim that in 1922 it was a Belfast member, Charles E White, who came up with the title, Rotary International, by which our great international fellowship continues to be known. Charles White's grandson Alan White, our 2nd Vice-President, is here today and it is probable that one of Alan's sons will become the first fourth-generation Rotarian in District 1160.

Whilst I have mentioned the parallels between the Dublin and Belfast clubs, I have a more personal association with the Dublin club. In 1959 your Past President, Ernest Goulding, recruited me to join the business which he then headed. The five years which I spent working with Ernest before transferring to a sister company in Belfast were the happiest and most exciting of my working life and created a permanent bond of friendship. My knowledge of Ernest's enthusiasm for Rotary influenced me to join the Belfast club when I was invited to do so. Ernest was one of two men who greatly influenced the course of my career, and if he had not asked me to go to Belfast, I would not be standing here as President of the Belfast Rotary Club. Born in Drumcondra, I will have to survive for a few more years before I can say that I have lived longer in the North than in this city where I grew up.

My Dublin was the North side stretching from the Bull Wall to the Phoenix Park and my clearest memories of Dublin relate to the 1940's and 1950's. Nowadays, driving through Drumcondra into Dublin, I sometimes envisage myself standing on Binn's Bridge as a boy watching horse-drawn barges going through the adjacent lock. Looking up the canal towards Mountjoy Gaol, which, since Brendan Behan's Jingle Jangle Old Triangle ditty, everyone knows as being 'On the banks of the Royal Canal', one can see the only place in Ireland where a canal, a railway and a road run alongside each other. Further up Dorset Street I see the spire of St George's which I attended in my Dublin days. St George's, designed by Francis Johnston, is, I believe, the finest Georgian Church building in Ireland. It saddens me to see this great gem of early Georgian Dublin in a state of decay without any apparent move by the civil authorities to preserve it for future generations. The magnificent bells of St George's are now only a memory perpetuated by reference in one of the stories in James Joyce's *Dubliners*. Binn's Bridge was the half-way mark on my daily walk to

school in Mountjoy Square for six years. During those six years I was greatly influenced by the finest mathematics master in Ireland at that time, John Aloysius Campbell. He was a remarkable Ulsterman whose influence really determined my subsequent academic and professional career. If I needed any personal justification for our TABU programme, my debt to the memory of John Aloysius Campbell, a Catholic Ulsterman teaching in a Dublin Protestant School, would more than suffice.

Despite my being a Dublin-born non-political animal, President Finbarr suggested that you would welcome some comment on the recent developments in Northern Ireland.

Let me first tell you of the visit to the Linfield Supporters' Club on the Shankill Road paid by the 'man from the future' with his orb, featured in the Harp Lager ad. He accepted a challenge from a Linfield fan to answer three questions about the future.

The first question was: *'How will the Republic fare this summer in the World Cup?'*

His answer was that the Republic would be eliminated in the first round.

The second question was: *'What will the score be between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in the forthcoming European Cup Match?'*

The answer was that Northern Ireland would win 3-nil.

The final question was: *'What will a pint of Harp Lager cost, here in the Linfield Supporters' Club, two years from now?'* to which he replied, 'Two Punts 50.'

To be serious, the mood of guarded optimism in the North immediately following the Downing Street declaration appears to have largely disappeared with the continuance of terrorist activity. I personally believe that after years of an unchanged scenario, the cards have been reshuffled. I have an almost instinctive feeling that there is a real new hope for the future.

Before expanding on this, may I say that I have a great objection to perfectly honourable adjectives such as Catholic, Protestant, Unionist, Republican, Loyalist, etc, being used in association with such words as terrorist, paramilitary or killer. It is difficult to find entirely satisfactory words but I would suggest that the two factions be referred to as 'pseudo-Republican' and 'pseudo-Loyalist'. Also, when a human being is murdered, is it really necessary to refer to his perceived religious grouping?

Reverting to my view that there are grounds for hope, the events preceding the Downing Street declaration suggest, for the first time, that there are those amongst the pseudo-Republican activists who wish to move away from the so-called 'armed struggle'. Secondly, even if it does not achieve an early cessation of violence, I believe that the declaration will not have failed, but represents a decidedly positive measure. Not only has the UK Government formally confirmed the fairly obvious fact that it sees no economic benefit to itself from Northern Ireland, but the Government of the Republic has declared itself against any change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland which is not acceptable to a majority of the population of Northern Ireland.

To those who recall the hard-line 'anti-partitionist' stances of earlier years, it is clear that there is now a more mature realisation that territory is of no importance compared with harmony between the various groupings on this Island. With the issue of the joint Downing Street declaration, it will be much more difficult for the paramilitary bodies to deny that they are, in reality, fascist groups prepared to ignore the will of the people.

Above all, I am optimistic because of the evolution which is occurring at grass-roots level. More and more groups have come into existence with the purpose of promoting better understanding and harmony within Northern Ireland and throughout the whole island of Ireland - Co-operation North, Harmony Community Trust, the Corrymeela Community, Protestant and Catholic Encounter, Education for Mutual Understanding, the movement from parents themselves for integrated education and our own TABU programme - the list is very long. I believe that all these efforts will, in aggregate, more and more, albeit slowly, achieve a climate of opinion in which the pseudo-Republican and pseudo-Loyalist terrorists will tend to wither on the vine. Time has not stood still and just as the Republic has changed greatly over the last 25 years, the Northern Ireland of today is different from the Northern Ireland of 1970. Such bones of contention as the allocation of housing and employment practices cannot now be put forward validly by one side or the other as a continuing cause for grievance.

Coming from comfortable backgrounds, W B Yeats and other literary figures of his day tended to give violence a mystical, semi-religious sanctity. There is no 'terrible beauty' in the lives and deeds of the modern paramilitaries. Following the murder of Dominic McGlinchy and recalling the words spoken by the Pope on his visit to Ireland that *'Murder is Murder is Murder'*, I emphasise that the killing of McGlinchy was as much murder as the killing of any innocent person. There was a long account of his exploits in the *Irish Times*. Anyone who reads it cannot possibly fail to grasp the unspeakable sordidness of present-day violence in this country. It is from the victims of violence that time and again real beauty is revealed. There is an awful beauty in the action two weeks ago of the Catholic church worker in the Markets area of Belfast who held the bloody body of a dying RUC man in his arms and spoke words of love to him. There is an awful beauty in the life of Pauline Hagney, a part-time waitress at Rotary lunches in the Europa Hotel who, since her taxi-driver husband was murdered by a pseudo-Loyalist gunman, has made it her purpose in life that her four young children should grow up without being blighted by sectarian hatred. There is an awful beauty in the life of Mrs Hill who has devoted her life to the care of her husband Ronnie, formerly a popular outgoing headmaster who, in the long years since the Enniskillen bomb, has existed in a coma between life and death without regaining consciousness. And there is an awful beauty in the unforgettable words of Rotarian Gordon Wilson, whose instinctive reaction to the death of his beloved daughter Marie was one of pity for those who were capable of such a deed.

In Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, set in the North city tenements during the Civil War, Mrs Boyle expresses her anguish, following the murder of her informer son, by echoing the words of Mrs Tancred whose 'die hard' son was ambushed and killed on the other side: *'Sacred Heart of Jesus take away our hearts o' stone and give us hearts of flesh. Take away this murdering hate and give us thine own eternal love'*.

This prayer is as valid today as it was 70 years ago.