

SPEECH OF DR. FRANK GOGARTY, Chairman of the
Northern Ireland Civil Rights Assoc.

This is an historic occasion. Never since the great days of Sinn Fein have so many Irish-American societies been brought together at any one time for the single cause of justice for Northern Ireland.

I congratulate the National Association for Irish Justice for their achievement - an achievement, however which could not have been possible but for all those people who behind the scenes have worked so hard over the past few months to make this occasion a success. It is people like these who are the backbone of every movement. On behalf of the executive of the Civil Rights Association, I would like to record our appreciation and gratitude for their tireless devotion to our cause.

Of people like Pat Garland, Lennie Glazer and Brian Heron who, out of nothing, have created this dynamic organization, I have only the highest praise. I recognize the great efforts required and the long hours they devoted to their mission. The National Association which they have labored to establish is a credit to them and we in Northern Ireland - especially the people of the barricades, have much to be grateful for as a result of these efforts. It was natural, therefore, that when Bernadette Devlin came to America to raise funds for relief that it was to this National Association she turned to organize her tour. I wish this conference every success.

At this point it will be necessary to redefine the relationship of the C.R.A. and the N.A.I.J. and before I do so I would like, first of all, to list the demands of our movement. Our aim - since Britain is morally responsible for all the injustices in N. Ireland - has been to urge the Westminster Government to legislate directly to ensure basic civil rights for all the citizens of N. Ireland. Such legislation under section 75 of the Ireland Act of 1920 would guarantee:

- (i) UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE AT 18 IN ALL ELECTIONS;
- (ii) ALL ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVISIONS BY A WESTMINISTER BOUNDARY COMMISSION;
- (iii) REPEAL OF THE SPECIAL POWERS ACT AND THE PUBLIC ORDER ACT (TOGETHER WITH THE AMENDING BILL) TO ENSURE THAT EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS FREE FROM ARBITRARY INTERFERENCE BY THE STATE AND ALL GROUPS HAVE THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION;
- (iv) THE OUTLAWING OF DISCRIMINATION AND INCITEMENT OF RELIGIOUS HATRED;
- (v)
- (v) THE DISBANDMENT OF THE ULSTER SPECIAL CONSTABULARY AND THE CREATION OF INDEPENDENT MACHINERY TO ENQUIRE INTO CITIZENS' GRIEVANCES AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE POLICE FORCE;

Over the past 12 months we in the civil rights movement have campaigned hard and always our tactics have been strictly non violent. Despite this, however, innocent lives have been lost, hundreds have been maimed and thousands have had to flee their blazing homes in terror of the violent forces unleashed against them. For the past year the people of N. Ireland have had to endure an agony of civic strife, and in spite of all this - after all the fear, the terror, and the physical suffering; after all the vast devastation of property, we are almost as far from winning those fundamental rights which we demand and which are the God-given heritage proper to the full dignity of mankind.

Other speakers from N. Ireland will assess just how much or how little we have won and I will only cover briefly the purpose of our visit and how we evaluate your involvement.

Your societies over here are many and varied - some exile, some cultural, others political. All however are united by a common bond - a fellow feeling of sympathy for the people of N. Ireland. Your difference from each other is the badge of your identity - a thing to be cherished and proud of.

But the passion for freedom which characterizes the Irish ethos is a common bond which unites us all. And it is this bond which must be emphasized and consolidated in a union of purpose.

We in the civil rights movement have in the past been torn by internal dissensions - by jealousies and uncharitable suspicions. We have, I hope seen the last of these things. The danger, as I see it now, is that much of the internal conflicts which threatened to shatter our movement in the early Spring of this year has become transplanted unto the American scene. This danger is very real and must be resisted.

That is why, I believe, it is so important for all of us here today to play an earnest and sincere part in this conference. There are occasions for voicing differences, but this is neither the time or place. Here today we must unite under the banner of justice - the National Association for Irish Justice. The NAIJ is your organization, and what you make of it depends entirely on you and you alone. Here I would like to endorse what Brian Heron said that the National Assn. is the only organization mandated by our executive to speak on our behalf of the N.I.C.R.A. and as such, its main function for us is to mobilize and co-ordinate the activities of all other sympathetic organizations. It is an umbrella association within which each society and group has its own personal contribution to make without any loss of autonomy or identify. We all hope that the committee which you elect at this conference will be broadly representative of Irish American Societies in general. This, I believe will be a measure of your strength and potential.

Since our arrival here we have been made aware of the sharp divisions which pre-occupy the time and energies

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of Irish American groups.

What is it in we Irish that makes us each believe that he alone knows best how to undo Irish wrongs! Why is it that we must always attack - not the injustices, mark you, but our fellow Irishmen who believe just as passionately as we do in the cause of justice. Because we knew best we dragged Parnell into the gutter. In our wisdom we persecuted O'Donovan Rossa and without a conscience we murdered Michall Collins.

There are many, I fear, only too anxious to do our enemies job and denigrate one of the great Irish leaders of our times - Bernadette Devlin. I am not here to speak on her behalf - not that she stands in need of defending. But I am citing her as an example of this peculiar characteristic of self-destruction within us all.

I make this point also to emphasize the threat of the divisive influences already at work and to remind you that we in N. Ireland have overcome all our past disputes and that the civil rights movement in England has also passed through a similar phase.

On the other hand, here in the United States not only do you have your splits but you have done something else, you have succeeded in imposing your disputes on the civil rights movement in N. Ireland. When I say this I hasten to add that it has been brought about by a very few. Nevertheless, it has happened.

I will make one final point and this I want to make quite positive. We in the civil rights movement have far enough problems on our hands as it is. We are not going to tolerate for one moment any attempt by any group here in America to divide our movement. Your societies have been generous. You have all individually worked hard on our behalf and your help has been magnificent, but at the risk of losing your much valued support rather than risk the splitting and destruction of our movement, we are prepared to forego all further aid from all or any American groups so as to preserve our unity and integrity.

The people of N. Ireland have had to suffer enough and their plight must not be exploited.

If any society is not prepared to continue its support in the understanding we shall work out through this conference, then I say, just leave us alone and allow us to get on unhindered with the task in our own way.

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conference of the NAIJ, City Center, New York.

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