

Address by
Charles J. Haughey T.D.,
President of Fianna Fáil,
on the occasion of the
First Annual Dinner of the
Friends of Fianna Fáil in America.
New York, Friday 1st March, 1985.



Our dinner this evening is presided over by one of the greatest and finest Irish-Americans of any era, Thomas W. Gleason.

At the age of fifteen Teddy Gleason went down to work on the docks of New York for 10 cents an hour and rose to become President of the International Longshoremen's Association and a member of the Maritime Advisory Committee. Courageous leader, tough negotiator and brilliant organiser, he is at the same time the trusted friend of the longshoremen and the valued advisor of Presidents.

We are honoured by his presence and grateful for his support.

It is with a feeling of great personal pride that I follow in a long line of Irish leaders who have come to this great city of New York to talk about the state of the Irish Nation to those who are either Irish themselves or friends of Ireland.

Let me first of all try to convey to you something of the deep and abiding pride that we at home in Ireland take in the contribution that Irish-Americans have made to the building of America. Let me also, as a representative of the Irish people at home, endeavour to convey to you something of the gratitude we feel for the crucial support the Irish in America have given in Ireland's struggle for independence and in our efforts to achieve political, economic and social progress.

These are difficult times in Ireland, but I want to bring you a message from those who have not lost their faith or their courage. These are troubled times in Ireland, but I want to bring you a

message of hope and outline the way in which we can build a new bridge of confidence and forge a constructive partnership between the Irish at home and the Irish in America.

I have come to the USA to chart for Irish Americans a clear course through the fog of confusion that exists today about the state of the Irish nation, its legitimate objectives and the manner in which they can be achieved. I want to set out clear guidelines whereby Irish-Americans can make a significant, positive contribution to the welfare of the people of Ireland without fear or favour and with malice towards none. It is my earnest wish to remove any doubts and uncertainties that exist and show you the clear way ahead, neither the road of faltering appeasement nor the path of self-defeating violence but a way which is securely based on sound principles of justice, freedom and a people's right to self-determination.

Ireland is an ancient nation whose roots and culture go away back into the mists of time beyond the boundaries of recorded history, a nation that embraces all the people of Ireland and whose national territory comprises the whole island of Ireland. She is an ancient nation struggling to establish herself in the modern world, to reaffirm the integrity of her nationhood, to secure for all her people a full and satisfying way of life; and to bring peace and justice to all the different and diverse strands of her national community.

Our herculean efforts to build a modern economy were succeeding beyond our expectations prior to the onset of the present world economic recession. We sought investment from around the world, we brought in new technology, we welcomed international enterprise.

In the last few years the world economic recession has brought a serious interruption to that steady progress. There has been a falling off in endeavour and a loss of will. But those of us who have faith in the Irish people and in their industry and intelligence see this as but a temporary setback, an obstacle to be overcome. While we know that only the Irish people themselves can defeat the difficulties we face and that our economic and social salvation depends on our own efforts we are also conscious that trade and commerce today are international; that investment flows freely across frontiers, that technology is becoming a sophisticated international commodity and industry is increasingly dependent on research. All these factors combine to emphasize that there must be an international dimension to our own endeavours. They tell us to seek out partnerships, and joint ventures, and investment from outside, and especially, from this great economy where so many of the captains of industry are already our friends.

It is our intention in Fianna Fail at the earliest possible moment, to launch a comprehensive programme of national economic recovery for Ireland. We see no reason why Ireland should not take her place firmly and confidently among the advanced, high-technology, nations of the world. We are well placed geographically with a reserve of undeveloped natural resources and a young, intelligent, flexible population. There is a wealth of ability, initiative and enterprise. What is needed is firm political leadership committed to a comprehensive programme of national economic recovery.

When the time comes to implement that programme we shall be looking for a major American input into the process of national recovery. There is already some first-class American participation in

the Irish economy. Over 300 US companies have found a very attractive and congenial environment in Ireland where they have invested over 4.5 billion dollars, are employing 37,000 people and achieving a very satisfactory rate of return on investment.

I would like to avail of this visit to make it clear to American business that Ireland is still a very attractive centre for investment. The package of incentives is still the best in Europe; there is ready and easy access to the largest trading entity in the world, the European Economic Community, with a market of 270 million people.

Almost two years have passed since representatives of all the political parties in Ireland who seek to restore the ancient and historic unity of the Irish Nation, by constitutional, political means came together in the New Ireland Forum. We set ourselves the task of examining realistically the present day situation and how in our considered opinion, peace, justice and stability could be brought to the six counties of Northern Ireland, to Ireland as a whole and indeed, to the islands of Britain and Ireland.

We were conscious that the tragic situation which has existed in Northern Ireland has been a constant source of tension in the relations between Britain and Ireland and has prevented the establishment of normal friendly relations between these two neighbouring countries.

We deliberated long and earnestly; listened carefully to a wide spectrum of views, opinions and submissions and finally concluded unanimously that the particular structure of political unity which we would wish to see established was a unitary state achieved by

agreement and consent, embracing the whole of Ireland and providing irrevocable guarantees for the protection and preservation of both the Unionist and Nationalist identities. That was the solemn conclusion of the democratically elected representatives of three-quarters of the Irish people after twelve months of detailed and mature discussion and consultation. Despite subsequent attempts to misrepresent the outcome the Forum was unequivocal in its support for a unitary Irish state. It stated clearly that this was the way in which lasting peace and stability could be established in Ireland in our time.

The Forum Report also proposed that the immediate way forward was for the two governments, British and Irish, to convene an all-round constitutional conference to settle by agreement the constitution and structures of the new unified state.

The publication of that Report was acclaimed for its generous approach and its realistic appraisal of all aspects of the situation. There were bright hopes and expectations that real progress was at last about to be achieved on the basis set out in the Report. But then, as has so often happened in the course of Irish history, at a fateful meeting in Chequers in England on 19th November 1984, the British Prime Minister slammed the door on Irish hopes and aspirations and excluded any possibility of progress for the foreseeable future. Disappointment mixed with anger spread through nationalist Ireland. It is from that background of angry frustration and disappointment that I have, as so many Irish leaders before me have done, turned towards America to seek to establish a new and powerful source of support for the cause of Irish unity at this critical stage in our history.

Americans proudly give their loyalty to the great democracy of which they are citizens and which is now the greatest power on earth and in space. More than any other nation, the United States of America shapes our modern world and charts the course of events.

To be a citizen of this great power brings with it its own responsibilities, and, in particular, a duty to ensure that around the world, America is the champion of justice and freedom and that American policy is guided always by the noble principles that inspired the founding fathers of this great nation.

For Irish-Americans there need be no difficulty in discharging that world responsibility. It can be readily and happily reconciled with that deep affinity they have with the land of their ancestors. Their vision of their own country as the powerful defender of freedom around the world will readily and naturally accommodate support for the freedom and independence of Ireland.

Irish leaders at home have a responsibility too; a duty to strengthen and sustain the Irish-American connection, to make sure that Irish-Americans are fully informed of the true situation at home in Ireland, made aware of our hopes and fears, our national political, economic and social plans, our successes and our failures.

I am the first to acknowledge that we have not fully measured up to this responsibility nor done enough to keep Irish-Americans reliably informed of the true position at home. There has been a major failure of communication in recent decades. Conflicting and confusing signals have been coming from Ireland to the Irish in America. There has been no clear message on policy; no specifically

enunciated national objectives behind which all right-thinking Americans could rally and to which they could give their unambiguous up-front support. More often than not the official message was negative, condemnatory and critical.

Americans who wished only to offer genuine support and encouragement were met with suspicion, rebuff and disapproval. The time has come for all that to change and change radically. Where there was antagonism and suspicion we must now create a whole new atmosphere of constructive dialogue and co-operation as the basis for an effective, powerful Irish-American voice arrayed in legitimate support for clearly defined Irish national objectives political, economic and cultural. Irish-American public opinion is a sleeping giant that must be awakened and fully motivated with a clear understanding of, and support for, Ireland's real and urgent needs.

The major setback to Irish unity at Chequers last November intensifies and makes urgent the need for Irish-American support and understanding. We must develop a broader, wider concept of the Irish nation; one which includes not alone all the people on the island of Ireland, but embraces also in a friendly, supportive and definable relationship the Irish everywhere and especially here in the United States.

There are many millions of freedom-loving Americans who do not fully understand the enormity of the situation that prevails in the North-Eastern part of Ireland. I believe that if they did understand it, they would not agree that American foreign policy should countenance its continued existence.

How many Americans know that in a part of the island of Ireland, part of the European Community there is not, in fact, democratic government and that the area can only be governed by force and the constant deployment on the streets of fully armed troops and police?

How many Americans know that in that area nearly two and a half thousand people have been killed and many thousands maimed as a result of civil strife and the breakdown of the political structure?

How many Americans are aware that the entire judicial system and the administration of justice are discredited; that a system of mass trials is operated by the authorities whereby persons are convicted and sentenced on the evidence of paid informers; that plastic bullets are regularly fired at the civilian population by army and police killing and maiming innocent persons?

How many Americans know that in that area a large section of the community is subject daily to oppression and harrassment by armed security forces; that there is open discrimination in employment; that almost half the population is totally alienated from the institutions and processes of government and that normal community life has ceased to exist?

We must arouse Irish-American public opinion, forty million strong, to the true state of affairs in Northern Ireland; to the anachronism that Northern Ireland represents in the Western World, and to the fact that it is a permanent affront to the concepts of western parliamentary democracy.

The regrettable fact is that American foreign policy at present does not acknowledge these realities. It must now become a major Irish objective to build up in America a public opinion which is fully aware of the true situation in the six counties of Northern Ireland and an understanding of the legitimate aims of Irish nationalism.

The deep-seated national desire for Irish unity is not something developed in any one generation or by this or that political leader. It is not the property of any class or creed. It is a fundamental, permanent aspiration which has been cherished by the great majority of the people of Ireland for as far back as we can go. The history of the world can show few similar examples of the aspiration of a people, defeated and disappointed so many times, but never failing to rise again and again, Phoenix-like from its ashes. That desire for freedom and unity is basic and imperishable. It can never be discarded as irrelevant as some would wish to suggest. To understand the reality of that aspiration and to proceed always in full sympathy and harmony with it is a natural and necessary quality of Irish political leadership and government.

Ireland must have a government deeply and totally committed to that belief; a Government which will speak to Britain from an openly nationalist standpoint and which will not seek to disguise its genuine and authentic purpose nor its belief that peace in Ireland will only come through unity.

Such a government should say clearly to Britain that her eventual withdrawal from Ireland is inevitable and that the time to begin to prepare for that withdrawal is now, so that it can be planned and peaceful and take place with universal international support and approval. The process of discussion is likely to be long, difficult and

complex, but that is all the more reason why it should start without delay.

All the friends and supporters of Ireland in America, all those who wish Ireland well must clearly understand that every year that passes proves the futility of violence and the tragic consequences that follow aid and support for violence. Irish nationalism is not inherently a violent political philosophy. On many occasions of great national resurgence, the national effort has been broadened out to encompass a wider ethos, and become a comprehensive cultural, literary and artistic as well as a political movement. In the course of its long history it has embraced great leaders who sought their objectives by constitutional political means and it is a matter of history that Irish-Americans of that time threw their weight behind the New Departure of Parnell and Davitt with great impact and effect.

I believe they can and will do so again if a clearly defined strategy which they can see is designed to secure the unity of Ireland is put before them with honesty and sincerity of purpose.

Let us not be in any doubt that the forces ranged against the Irish cause here in the United States are powerful, active and influential.

We must ensure that all our resources are mobilised effectively and wielded into a great legitimate democratic source of political strength and influence. Our aim must be a powerful Irish-American opinion which is fully informed about and in sympathy with Ireland's national policy objectives. Irish-American public opinion must be mobilised to mount an irresistible force of public opinion which will ensure that their country's foreign policy includes, as a major and specific

objective, the solution of the tragic problem of Northern Ireland. The key element in this strategy will be the communication to the Irish in America of a coherent set of national objectives by the Irish Government, a set of objectives behind which they can rally with confidence, trust and enthusiasm.

It must be a primary objective of both Irish Government policy and Irish-American effort to see that American foreign policy is directed to persuading Britain that the tragedy of Northern Ireland has gone on too long; that it is an unnecessary cause of instability and tension between two key countries of the Western democratic world and that the time has come when the suffering and violence and death and destruction should be brought to an end. Secretary of State Shultz has proclaimed that America is opposed to the spectacle of "Germany as one of Europe's oldest nations heartlessly divided". But Ireland is an older nation still and heartlessly divided also.

It would be a natural and internationally acceptable extension of American foreign policy at this time to fully accept the conclusion of the Forum Report and to actively promote the setting up under the auspices of the British and Irish governments of a Constitutional Conference which would settle the political and constitutional structures for a new Ireland united and at peace; an Ireland from which Britain could then withdraw with honour and acclaim. The time has surely come for America to use her great power and influence to solve one of the major political problems of the West and to eliminate a source of tension and trouble between two nations with whom she has the closest historical ties of friendship.

President Reagan at his recent inauguration offered Americans a new beginning and set out for them once more the American

dream. I want to offer to one proud, distinctive and powerful section of this nation, the Irish-Americans, their own dream; a dream of their mother country Ireland at peace and looking forward to the dawn of a great new era of dynamic economic development and social progress. Let me hold up to you a vision of an Ireland once more re-united, assured and self-confident, an island from which bitterness, anger and civil strife will have finally faded away and the energy and the genius of all her people are directed into fruitful and enriching endeavour. It is my conviction that no Irish-American can hold back from participating in that noble effort. I believe also that there is no doubt but that dream can become a reality if it has the active support of this great and powerful republic. When that day dawns, when the dream is realised the wheel of history will have come a full circle and one of the great debts of mankind will have been paid. America, which owes so much of its modern power and greatness to the work and sacrifice of countless millions of Irish immigrants, will have paid them back in full and generous measure. By doing so America will also have made a permanent and lasting contribution to promoting the cause of freedom and democracy in the Western world.

*Charles J. Haughey
addressing the United
Nations Congress.*

