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## IRA murder of Ian Gow MP

Ian Gow's sad friends hope events will speedily show he did not die in vain. To ensure this, the Government should implement Ian's own wise solution to the problem of Northern Ireland. I take the following summary from a letter he wrote to me shortly before he was murdered.

Ian believed that the IRA is fuelled by continuing uncertainty over Northern Ireland's constitutional position. This is exacerbated by the Anglo-Irish Agreement, over which Ian resigned from the Government when it was signed in 1985. Ian believed it was a mistake to confer on the Irish Government the right to represent the nationalist population of Northern Ireland when they have their own elected MPs at Westminster. Ian objected to the *McGimpsey* judgment of the Irish Supreme Court last March, when they held it was the duty of the Irish Government to make good the boast in their Constitution that Northern Ireland is part of the Republic. Ian believed the Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Brooke should press for steps to be taken to remove this obnoxious clause. So far as we know, he has failed to do this.

On Mr Brooke's current initiative to restore Devolution by consent Ian objected that 'the same Government which is resisting an Assembly in Edinburgh, on the ground that such an Assembly would injure the Union, is advocating an Assembly, with the support of the Irish government, in Belfast'. Ian wisely pointed out there can be no permanent resting place between the policy of retaining Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom and that of transferring it to the Republic. When I last spoke to him on 28 June 1990 he stressed that there can be no half way house between the Union and the Republic. It is one or the other.

Yet Peter Brooke's current aim is to set up a series of meetings which will lead, and I quote his own words, to a system which 'gives a role for both sides of the community'. The only role the nationalist side seek is to work towards leading the territory into the Republic. The only role the unionist side seek is to keep it within, and make it a fully-operative part of, the United Kingdom. One or other of these you can have, but not both. It is a logical impossibility, and 'talks' aimed at a compromise are therefore useless. Moreover the vain prospect of them impedes the true solution.

In a letter you published on 23 May 1990<sup>1</sup> I suggested that the British Government should stop shilly-shallying and declare its firm intention of treating Northern Ireland from henceforth as an integral part of the United Kingdom. Ian agreed this would be right, but no such declaration has been made. On the contrary, the shilly-shallying continues. For this the Government bears a weighty responsibility. So in memory of Ian Gow I would ask Mrs Thatcher and her Government immediately to abandon the unstated (but clearly signalled) belief that one day Northern Ireland will by general consent be handed over to the Republic. This flies in the face of all the evidence, and is what fatally keeps the IRA's armed struggle alive. There is much talk of the oxygen of publicity, but covert Government signals give a more potent boost. They nourish the terrorist with the oxygen of expectation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 53 above.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 1 August 1990.