

ULSTER LEADER ASSAILS AMERICAN SUPPORTERS OF MACBRIDE PLAN

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LONDON - John Hume, the leader of Northern Ireland's moderate and predominantly Catholic Social Democratic and Labor Party, says that those Americans pushing for the MacBride principles to ensure equal opportunity for Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland "just don't know the damage they're doing."

The American campaign behind the MacBride principles "is allegedly being waged on behalf of the people I represent," Hume said in an interview last week. "I regard the people behind it as serious and sincere, but they're not helping us -- they're doing us damage

"There's nothing wrong with the principles as principles," Hume said, "but their main effect is disinvestment in Northern Ireland. We need jobs and not principles if we're to tackle our problems of discrimination and unemployment."

The MacBride principles are named after one of their key formulators, Sean MacBride, now 83. He was a former leader of the Irish Republican Army in the 1920s and '30s who became an internationally known jurist and diplomat, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1974 and the Lenin Peace Prize in 1977.

In November 1984, working on the basis of the Sullivan principles, designed to promote equal opportunity for black workers in South Africa, MacBride drafted similar goals to be applied to Northern Ireland on behalf of the minority Catholic population there, including a plan to increase the participation of Catholics in the Ulster workforce.

As with the Sullivan principles, drafted by Rev. Leon Sullivan, a Baptist minister from Philadelphia, the intent was to create pressure on US firms and other companies to endorse these principles or face loss of business or disinvestment by their shareholders.

Pushed by Rev. Sean McManus of the Washington-based Irish National Caucus, a lobby that works closely with a Belfast priest, Rev. Brian Brady, who helped draft them, the MacBride principles have gathered converts and support in America.

Last year, New York Gov. Mario Cuomo signed a bill restricting state investments only to those companies that subscribe to the principles; Sen. John Kerry has raised them on the floor of the Senate; they have been much discussed in the Massachusetts Legislature, which already has passed "the MacBride Law," requiring state disinvestment from companies that provide firearms, munitions or support to the security forces in Northern Ireland.

The principles grew out of McManus' and Brady's failed efforts in 1983-84 to deny a Belfast-based aircraft manufacturer, Short Bros. Ltd., a US Air Force contract on the basis of job discrimination against Catholics. The Air Force went ahead, on the basis that Short Bros. was working with Ulster's Fair Employment Agency to increase its proportion of Catholic

workers, but British authorities were embarrassed and stepped up their efforts to ensure equal opportunity.

Though praising the commitment of those Americans pushing the MacBride principles, Hume said they miss the point: "Even if all jobs were provided fairly in Northern Ireland, which they're not, we'd still have 25 percent unemployment.

"I'd say to them in America, If you're so powerful, please get companies to invest in areas of high unemployment in Northern Ireland. That's the only way to crack both discrimination and unemployment," Hume said.

The threat of MacBride, Hume said, can cause a US company considering an investment in the European Community to take up proposals from other countries -- Ireland, Belgium, Italy or wherever, which offer aid and tax incentives similar to those provided by the British in Northern Ireland.

Discrimination against Catholics in Ulster had to be attacked on the ground, not in America, Hume said, noting that the British "have already published a green paper suggesting sanctions against unfair employers."

British officials share Hume's unhappiness with MacBride, which urges affirmative-action programs and quotas for Catholics, on the US model, that are illegal under British law. "The last thing Northern Ireland needs at the moment is disinvestment or the discouraging of new investment for jobs," said Nicholas Scott, British minister for Northern Ireland, in an interview.

"We have a clear commitment to equal opportunity," Scott said. "But the only way you can shift an existing pattern of discrimination is by creating new jobs, not by ensuring that there are less of them."

But the British are moving -- pushed by the Irish government under the Anglo-Irish accord, which gives Dublin a consultative say in the running of Northern Ireland -- to give greater emphasis to equal employment.

Under the September green paper, "The Charter for Employment Equity," the British propose to place "a statutory duty on the public sector to practice equality of opportunity." The government would require the public sector, which provides half the jobs in Ulster, to commit to fair employment and to undergo regular monitoring by the existing Fair Employment Agency.

The government would require any private company working on a public contract to be certified as fair by the Fair Employment Agency and to undergo regular monitoring of its hiring and training practices. The government would also seek power to deny grants to any company with 50 employees or more if it did not work to improve its employment practices.

"What we want to do is turn stated policy into practice," an official said, "with the government taking the lead."

While critical of some activists, Hume praised the "vast mass of Irish-Americans, who are against violence from whatever its source and who do not support the IRA.

Hume, who turned 50 in January, was instrumental in the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish accord, which he praises for removing the Protestant Unionist "veto" over British policy in Ulster, putting Catholics and Protestants "on an equal footing" and establishing "a permanent conference table" at which Northern Ireland's problems can be settled.

"To look at the accord as merely a shopping list of symptoms, like the right to fly the Irish flag in Belfast, is wrong," he said. "The accord must deal with the sickness in the society, the division between Protestant and Catholic, and it has produced a major psychological benefit for nationalists living there.

"If one can break down the barriers between the two communities," Hume said, "that will inevitably evolve to a kind of unity. You can't unite people by force. The question isn't the 'unity of Ireland,' which is a cliché, but how you unite the Irish people, both Protestant and Catholic."

His party's definition of Irish unity, Hume said, started from equality of treatment, which was happening now. That would evolve into "partnership, with the two communities working together to run the place, building up trust in one another."

Only over decades, he said, could that kind of partnership evolve into "completely new relationships with Ireland and with Britain."

Hume praised Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain for "calling the Unionists' bluff" and promoting a new British policy not subject to Unionist threats or violence. "In a way, Thatcher is the right person in the right place at the right time," he said. "The Irish situation has needed a British de Gaulle -- because only a conservative need not keep looking over his or her shoulder at the flag."

Hume said that Unionist politicians, hoping to hold a balance of power in a hung British Parliament after the next election, still had nothing positive to offer -- "if you took the word 'no' out of the English language, they'd have nothing to say."

But he is encouraged by the continuing debate inside unionism about the province's future. He was particularly pleased at a recent statement from the Ulster Defense Association, a legal Protestant paramilitary group, which acknowledged that "in a divided society, majority rule is profoundly undemocratic."

"They're not talking about an independent Northern Ireland, but a devolved government," Hume said, with power shared between Protestants and Catholics. "All that represents a major change, and it's indicative that the discussion is clearly going on."

Hume also noted these further positive points:

Terrorism and anger following the Anglo-Irish accord were now "nowhere near the level reached in 1974," during the crisis over an abortive power-sharing executive.

- Peter Robinson, the hard-line deputy leader of Rev. Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, "has collapsed as a hard man" upon paying a \$25,000 fine to an Irish court after pleading guilty to inspiring an illegal, violent demonstration.

- Applications "are pouring in from all over" for a share of the International Fund for Ireland, which was officially decried by Unionists as an "American bribe" to accept the Anglo-Irish accord. After the accord was signed, the fund was established with \$150 million over three years from the US government, \$7.5 million over 10 years from the Canadian government and \$170,000 from the New Zealand government. Three-quarters of the money, intended for the private sector, will be spent in Ulster, largely along the border.

- The IRA and its political wing, Sinn Fein, have been hurt by the accord, the infighting inside the Irish National Liberation Army and Sinn Fein's poor showing in the recent Irish elections. "Their claim has always been that they're waging war on behalf of the Irish people," Hume said. "Well, they're waging war on behalf of 0.93 percent of the Irish people," which was Sinn Fein's percentage of the vote in the elections.

"That is bound to hurt with their friends across the Atlantic, in Boston and New York," Hume said, while also hurting Gerry Adams, the president of Sinn Fein.

Adams won the parliamentary seat of West Belfast from Hume's divided party in the 1983 general elections. But in the upcoming elections, Hume said, with only one moderate Catholic candidate, "we think we can win it back."

Hume's party, which holds two seats in parliament, will run 13 candidates in the province's 17 seats, and is seriously targetting four of them: West Belfast, Fermanagh-South Tyrone, Mid-Ulster and South Down, Enoch Powell's seat.

"Wouldn't it be a great thing," said Hume, laughing, "if we could knock both Adams and Powell out of parliament?"