

NHC 1971

[Mr. Hume]

everyone know where they stand, and unless they fight for what they stand for, then we will descend even further into an abyss of violence. Let us admit it, there has been great moral cowardice on this question on the part of many people who have been elected. There has been a great deal of fence-sitting on fundamental issues on which there should be no sitting on any fence, issues as to whether this community continues along bigoted sectarian lines. That is fundamental: there can be no sitting on the fence on that choice.

Similarly, changing this society, whether it be done by outright violence or non-violence, is a fundamental choice and one on which there can be no sitting on the fence. Unfortunately, there are too many people who have sat on the fence and have refused clearly to denounce those who perpetrate violence on the streets, those who attempt to achieve political objectives by violent means, those who have no respect for human life and who seem to think that human lives are expendable as a means of achieving political ends, those who have no compunction in playing politics with the lives of innocent people.

There is no fence sitting on this issue, people simply must get up and say where they stand. Because so many have sat on the fence there unfortunately exists today in the community a great sense of frustration and a great feeling that nothing has changed. When people are frustrated, violence and striking out presents the easy, quick road, but in the long run it is the wrong road. Where civil wars are going on in the world today I am quite certain that the people participating, the ordinary people, if they had the choice, would regret the steps that led to civil war. We are in a situation today where violence can lead to that situation, and we must make it clear that we oppose it utterly.

The frustrations exist also because to many the letter of the law means reality of reform. This is something which should be exposed. The letter of the law is not the reality of reform; reform is meaningless unless changes in law are accompanied by a change in heart. It should be made clear to all people today who say that no change

has taken place that this is simply not true. There have been changes in this community and there must be more changes, but it takes time before legislative change becomes reality in the lives of the people and, if people interfere with the progress of that change by violence, then they only increase the frustration.

As Martin Luther King said:

"The line of progress is never straight. For a period a movement may follow a straight line and then it encounters obstacles and the path bends. It is like curving round a mountain when approaching a city. Often it feels as though you were moving backward and you lose sight of your goal, but in fact you are looking ahead and soon you will see the city again close by."

That particular quotation is very apt in our community at present. Progress is not in a straight line, but progress is taking place because I doubt if there is anyone in Northern Ireland who thinks that this community can ever be the same again. Because of the forces at work on both sides, some of them represented in this House, the choice we face is a very serious one and it can be expressed very simply—chaos or community.

In such a choice it behoves all public men to weigh their words with great care in order to ensure that nothing they may say or do will fashion that choice in the direction of the chaos that would appear to be facing us. We are talking today 50 years after the first lion. Members came to speak in this Parliament; we are talking in a Parliament which was the result of a settlement that satisfied no one at the time. Those who fought for the retention of union with Britain were not satisfied with this settlement because they fought for the union of the whole of Ireland. Neither were those who fought for an independent Irish Republic satisfied because they did not get one, they only got part of it.

The settlement satisfied no one and, indeed, there was a notable absentee from the first celebrations of the opening of this Parliament, none other than Lord Carson himself. Undoubtedly he regarded the settlement as a failure for him. Could a settlement which was regarded on all sides as a failure really be a success?

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I quote again George V in 1921:

"I could not have allowed myself to give Ireland by deputy alone. My earnest prayers and good wishes in the new era which opens with this ceremony, and I have therefore come in person, . . ."

Today, 50 years later, his granddaughter is unable to come in person. Even though the situation in 1921 would appear from history to have been an extremely serious confrontation—one of the most serious confrontations in Irish history—yet King George V could come to Belfast in peace and safety. But his granddaughter cannot come today, 50 years later. To me that represents a lesson that is staring us all in the face.

What has failed in Northern Ireland other than the system no one wanted? Surely that is the lesson that is staring us in the face, and are the confines of our discussion on the problems of Northern Ireland not too narrow? Should we not be discussing the system itself rather than tinkering with it any further? We can see clearly the minds of those who imposed this settlement upon us. We can see clearly that they regarded this whole question not just as a Northern Ireland problem but as an Irish problem. King George V said in his speech in 1921:

"This is a great and critical occasion in the history of the Six Counties, but not for the Six Counties alone, for everything which interests them touches Ireland."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 23rd June, 1921; Vol. 1, c. 20.]

That is still true today, and if anybody is at all in any doubt about it the events of the last two years surely prove that matters which affect the North of Ireland can have a serious effect on Ireland as a whole, particularly matters political.

There is in this northern community, and always has been, a basic aspiration towards the unity of this island. That aspiration has always existed and it has always been resisted by those who sit opposite. But I think that those who sit opposite perhaps have not appreciated the different concepts of unity which are held by different people and have different ideas because those who have gone forward this ideal in the past, and those who have said they propose to achieve it by peaceful means, have not presented any basic plan or programme before

the people who subscribe to this ideal as to how it can be achieved. That failure has made it easier for those who say that violence is the only solution.

We hear often from people who support violent men: "What were the peaceful men able to do? What were the parliamentarians able to do?" The reason they are able to say that with such conviction is because those who have put forward this ideal in the past, and have advocated peaceful means, have utterly failed to spell out to the people how a peaceful unity can be achieved. They have utterly failed to say clearly that the only unity in this island that is worthwhile is unity by agreement. No other unity is worthwhile because it will not solve any problems. They have failed to point out that there is no contradiction between aspirations for Irish unity and working for a prosperous North of Ireland.

There is no contradiction at all in those two aims. Indeed, it amazes me that there are those who think they can unite Ireland without first uniting the people in the North of Ireland because, in effect, the basic division which divides us all is sectarian—sectarian fear, prejudice and hatred—and unless we remove that division we are going nowhere along the road to unity on this island. Therefore in any change the basic yardstick by which I personally would measure would be whether or not it will promote a lessening of sectarian feeling in this part of this country. If it does that, or if it promotes basic justice in this society, then it is something which will always have my full support.

This is why the movement for reform is so essential and so important. It is essential and important, too, to people who have ultimate objectives which go beyond reform and equality of citizenship in the North of Ireland. It is important to those whose ultimate objectives go to the achievement of the ideal of Irish unity as the first step on that road must surely be full equality of citizenship. Not just treating us decently: full equality of citizenship. We are not looking for decency but we are looking for full equality of citizenship.