

ADDRESS BY MR. JOHN HUME,
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC & LABOUR PARTY,
NORTHERN IRELAND

to the

206th Annual Dinner
of the
Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, Philadelphia

Thursday, March 17, 1977

Mr. President, Members of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick,
Distinguished Guests, Gentlemen

For me to address you here tonight, this St. Patrick's Day of 1977, is a great and signal honour. I am both humble and proud to realize that the list of distinguished guests of honour of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick begins with the first President of the United States, George Washington himself, and that it includes so many of his successors in that office which has no equal - the President of the United States.

Secondly, I recognize that, by inviting me to address the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, you are expressing your concern for the problems that afflict the people of Northern Ireland.

Thirdly, your own approach to the actual Constitution and venerable traditions of your Society, which from its origin has united all Irishmen of every tradition and has insisted in sharing responsibility for the administration of your Society equally between both Irish traditions - is an approach which corresponds to my own view of the possibilities which lie open for the future of Northern Ireland.

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In the year Eighteen Hundred and Thirty-Two when your Society was still young, still engaged in the pursuit of its primary purpose, namely 'the Relief of Irish Emigrants', the newspaper in the Irish city from which I come, the Derry Journal, had this to say (and I quote) of those who were leaving their port for Philadelphia in great numbers.

We can well suppose that there are not a few of them who are anxious to find in the forests of this new world a refuge from the feuds and bickerings which prevail to such a deplorable extent in their own country'.

It would appear that they not only left the bickering and division behind them but found a means of healing division and accommodating difference that has not only stood the test of time but has relevance in finding a solution to the problem of Ireland today.

Many of those early emigrants were not only founders of your own Society, founded on a non-sectarian partnership but actually founders of the United States as well.

It is no accident that your self-same founders were among those who inspired the Declaration of Independence of this great country, who contributed their pragmatic idealism to the elaboration of the Constitution of the United States, here in this very city of Philadelphia.

Among these principles, so clearly enunciated, were those which recognized that diversity is a good and enriching thing for any country, the principles that no country should ever be forced into the restrictive mould of one single strand among its traditions to the exclusion of the others, but should instead be as a patchwork quilt, beautiful because it is one in spite of the diversity and distinctiveness of its difference.

Your Constitution has always held to basic human rights in conformity with which all traditions have a positive role to play when harnessed to a common purpose and no tradition is denied the right to its share in decision-making at the highest level.

This thinking, which inspired both the Declaration of Independence and the subsequent Constitution of this great country, was inspired by those who were your founders, men like Thomas McKean, George Taylor and John Dunlap, men of Ulster Protestant stock, men prominently associated with the Declaration of Independence.

The tragedy for Ireland has been that these same principles, so clearly enunciated by Northern Irishmen in America, have not been handed down in the land from which they sprung. The price of such failure has been exceedingly high. Today in Northern Ireland, after seven years of turmoil, over 1,500 people have met violent deaths. Over 17,000 people have been injured. Over 5,000 bombs have exploded. The North of Ireland, in area, is roughly the size of the State of Connecticut. It has a population of one and a half million people. Today, in that community, Catholic is separated from Protestant by corrugated iron fences, by barbed wire, and lines of British soldiers. If that situation does not force us to challenge traditional attitudes of the past and traditional approaches to a solution to the problem in Northern Ireland, then nothing ever will, because there is one thing of which we can be certain - past approaches have failed.

Past approaches have led us to the grave and to the situation in which the people of Northern Ireland now find themselves. To challenge traditional attitudes requires moral courage, a quality, unlike physical courage, for which we Irish have not been noted.

No matter how revered the past political Gods who have handed these attitudes down to us, we must state bluntly and clearly that these attitudes have failed the Irish people - these attitudes have led us into confrontation and conflict on both sides of our great divide. The traditional attitude has been to seek victory for our point of view - victory for our point of view in a divided society simply means conflict and confrontation. Conflict and confrontation we have had and we have over 1,500 graves to prove it.

If we were asked to sum up the Irish problem in one word, that word would be division - not the line on the map which divides Ireland, because that is only a reflection of a much deeper divide, but the division between our two great and powerful traditions. Such a divide is a human divide and such a divide cannot be healed by violence. One cannot unite a country by dismembering its people.

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On the one hand, there has been Ireland's Protestant tradition - a long and proud tradition in the history of Ireland - one that ^{has} is consistently sought to protect its rights and its traditions. It is right and proper that all Irish people should support the maintenance and preservation of the Protestant tradition and the protection of its rights. The tragedy for Ireland has been that the leadership of that tradition has consistently sought to maintain its position by negative means and by maintaining all power in its own hands. Today, the leadership of that tradition is more negative and sterile than it has ever been and hides behind negative and sterile slogans such as 'no surrender - not an inch - what we have, we hold'. This approach is basically an 'ourselves alone' approach, an approach which refuses to recognize the existence of another tradition in the community; an approach which, by its sheer exclusiveness, by its sheer concentration on concern solely for its own point of view, can in the end only lead to conflict and confrontation. When, in a divided society, a political leader looks across the divide at his counterpart on the other side and says 'not an inch', that political leader is sowing the seeds of violence for he is denying the very essence of what

politics are about - give and take - and the reconciliation of different points of view in society, and the creation of forms of Government which allows different points of view to coexist together and to be harnessed for the common good. Those leaders can continue to wrap their flags about them, to beat their drums as their chests fill with pride, and to feel loyal and true to their cause. But there is one thing of which they can be certain - they will fail. Their short-term popularity will merge into long-term failure, because this approach has failed before and it will fail again, and the leadership of the Protestant tradition in Ulster must find a new way forward; a way which recognizes the rights and traditions of their fellow citizens; a way which does not involve conquest of one tradition by another; but a way which does not depend for its security on Acts of a British parliament but on genuinely agreed partnership, new and positive between both our traditions and which can evolve towards a new non-sectarian society of which we can all be proud.

On the other hand, there is the Irish Nationalist tradition, a tradition with which the majority of Irish people and most Irish-Americans would identify. We have had handed down to us a romantic notion of Ireland which bears little relationship to the reality of life among the people of Ireland today. It is an attitude of mind which says that it is patriotic to unite a piece of earth irrespective of what the people on that piece of earth think; the attitude of mind which thinks that it is even right to do it by force; it is not alone right to die for it, but to kill for it; the attitude of mind that wraps a green flag round us, beats our drums, sings our patriotic songs, and lets our chests fill with pride; that believes that such is the true tradition of patriotic Irish endeavour; an attitude of mind which seeks to define Irishness in a narrow sectional sense, excluding from it those who do not conform to the narrow mould into which they would wish to pour us all. How often have we heard the ideal of Irish unity proclaimed emotionally and loudly from platform after platform - yet how often have we heard anyone tell us how they propose to achieve it? This, too, is an exclusivist 'ourselves alone' attitude, one which virtually ignores the other

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tradition, or worse, think/s that it knows what
is best for it.

We too can continue with this attitude but we can be certain that it will fail, for it has failed before and will fail again, and we have too many graves to prove it. How very different is this over-emotional and fanciful make-belief from the original, true ideal of Irish Republicanism.

How sadly has the present vicious parody departed from the doctrines set forth with calm and equity by the Organization of the United Irishmen, composed, I would stress, mainly of those Presbyterian Irishmen whose kith and kin were at that same time giving their hearts and minds to the enunciation of the great principles of the Republic of the United States here in Philadelphia.

How pertinent for all Irishmen, North and South today, are the very words those Presbyterian United Irishmen spoke in Ireland almost two hundred years ago in 1797, and I quote :

'This Society - the Society of United Irishmen -
is constituted for the purpose of forwarding a
brotherhood of affection, a community of rights,
and a union of power among Irishmen of every

religious persuasion; and thereby to obtain a complete reform in the legislature, founded on the principles of civil, political and religious liberty'.

How much does it behoove us today to take to ourselves the pledge of those United Irishmen, which reads :

'In the awful presence of God, I do voluntarily declare that I will persevere in endeavouring to form a brotherhood of affection among Irishmen of every religious persuasion, and that I will also persevere in my endeavours to obtain an equal, full and adequate representation of all the people of Ireland'.

This doctrine, these ideals are the inheritance of all who live in Ireland, be they Catholic, Protestant or Dissenter.

This doctrine, these ideals of the United Irishmen form a guiding star to lead us through the desert of our present tribulation to a new Ireland - even to a new haven of promise in Northern Ireland - to a land of peace, justice and brotherhood.

This doctrine, these ideals of the United Irishmen are those which have been most manifestly betrayed by those who for too long have stolen the name of Irish Republicanism, those who daily murder the concept of brotherhood in Ireland.

Without brotherhood, we will have only soil. Without brotherhood, that Irish soil will form only our common Irish grave.

But how can we promote brotherhood? How can we give to all our people what the United Irishmen have made explicit in the words 'equal, full and adequate representation'?

Given the circumstances of today, given the depth of bitterness and division, that brotherhood can now only be promoted by partnership between the two Irish traditions, a partnership to govern within Northern Ireland, and a partnership between both parts of Ireland. By working together, over long and patient years, we can build the understanding and friendship to replace the prejudice and hatred that now divides us. It will be a long, hard road for there are no longer any instant answers. All that we require is the same vision, the same moral courage and the

same steadfastness that inspired those who left the shores of Ireland two centuries ago and built a new Republic in the United States of America, whose institutions derive their just powers from the consent of the governed and whose Constitution forms a unity in diversity, a land whose richness is that it encompasses many traditions and excludes no person on the grounds of sex, religion or racial origin.

In this spirit, I salute America.

In this spirit, I raise the toast to Ireland.