



Address by John Hume MEP MP
To the SDLP Convention to select a candidate for the European election.
Saturday 14 January 1984

In accepting this nomination I am deeply conscious of the honour which the party is conferring upon me. I am deeply aware, too, of the heavy responsibilities which this nomination entails both before and after the election. Between now and June we face a difficult task which will require the utmost dedication and the most intense hard work from each and every party member. However, the strength of this party has, from the beginning, been forged in the heat of elections. We are at our best in elections because they afford us the challenge and the opportunity of carrying out our ideals and our principles before the electors. The spirit and the courage of this party is seen to best advantage on the hustings and that is how it should be. Elections are like a cold shower - they can be a shock to the system, but they are immensely invigorating. This election offers us the opportunity to renew and strengthen our organisation, to sink our roots deeper into the community whose interests we serve, and to carry forward the struggle for peace, justice and reconciliation in this country. For that reason we welcome it.

And when the election is over, and the dust has settled, we face a wide range of problems on the European front. The community has never been in a more serious crisis than it is at this moment. Over the past few years we have seen a progressive breaking down of the consensus which has held the community together for three decades now. The deepening economic recession of the seventies hangs like a block cloud over the eighties, and has caused a headlong retreat into economic nationalism on the part of the major European states, most notably Britain. The continuing deadlock over the restructuring of community finances, precipitated by Britain, which remains unresolved after the Athens summit, is threatening to strangle the current operations of the Community. There is fundamental disagreement over the Common Agricultural Policy and the proposals to revise it. And, from an Irish point of view, the Regional Fund and the Social Fund are still too small, and too limited in their scope, to have the sort of major impact on our economies, north and south, which is needed to accomplish real progress towards the Community ideal of convergence.

These are the problems and challenges which we face over the next five years. The powers of the European Parliament itself are admittedly limited. But the Parliament does have power and is in a position to make an input into the solution of the crisis. Already the Parliament has signalled its impatience with

the failure of the heads of government to resolve their differences, by refusing to be a rubber stamp for the budget, and by blocking the payment of budget refunds to the U K and to Germany.

From our own point of view the Parliament has proved to be an extremely useful forum within which we have advanced the interests of our constituents on a number of fronts. I make no apology for listing the achievements of the last five years. The Northern Ireland public are entitled to know what these achievements are, and this party is entitled to take legitimate pride and satisfaction in them.

In June 1979 we published "A New Horizon", our manifesto for the first direct elections to the European Parliament. The first commitment we made in that Manifesto was to work for "a clear and vigorous regional policy designed to reduce differences in living standards between the various regions of the Community". Within a couple of months of the new Parliament assembling, and with the full support of my colleagues in the Socialist Group, I tabled a motion in the Parliament which called upon the Commission to evaluate the policies and resources needed to bring the north of Ireland up to the Community average as regards living standards and employment, and to put forward proposals as to how the necessary resources should be made available. In November 1979 the Parliament referred my motion to the Committee on Regional Policy for a full report, and also to the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment for their opinion. Shortly afterwards I drafted an analysis of the present economic problems of Northern Ireland which I presented to both committees, along with an outline of the sort of economic initiatives needed to lift the Northern Ireland economy off the floor. And with the assistance of my socialist colleagues in the Parliament I began to lobby the members of both committees. As a consequence the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment adopted my analysis and proposals, practically word for word, as their opinion, and the Report drawn up by the Committee on Regional Policy (the Martin Report) also embodied most of my analysis and proposals. That report was passed unanimously in the European Parliament, along with ~~the~~ motion, in May 1981 and was passed to the European Commission for action. In the Autumn of 1981 the Commission proposed as a first step in answer to ~~the~~ motion, some £28 million pounds for housing in Northern Ireland. There was opposition within the Council of Ministers to the idea of the Community giving assistance for house building in any state, and that opposition came mainly from

Germany and Denmark. Therefore in the spring of 1982 I flew to Bonn for talks with the responsible German minister, and shortly afterwards I met the Danish Premier Anker Jorgensen. The result was a compromise. The money (now increased to £63 million) was to be devoted to inner city development in Belfast, and the money thus released from government programmes was to be devoted to housing. The end of the story (or, more accurately the beginning) arrived last week with the announcement of £18½ million pounds for inner city development in Belfast, the first slice of the £63 million pounds which is the total agreed so far.

Perhaps as important as the announcement of this aid is the fact that Northern Ireland is now established as an area for special assistance in the European budget. The challenge of the next five years is to build on that position so that we can win further assistance to bring living standards here up to the Community average. Hopefully the £18½ million announced last week is only the beginning. One of our major objectives over the next five years must be to expand this budget commitment into a fully integrated plan for the development of our economy.

It has taken four years of patient, hard political work to pilot this measure through my own group, through two Parliamentary committees, through the Parliament itself, through the Commission, and finally, the Council. But the lesson is that it can be done, and that major benefits can be won from the European Community by political efforts. It is that sort of political effort and political expertise which we are offering to the electorate in June in contrast to the negative and destructive attitudes of our main opponents.

The second major commitment which we made in 1979 was to fight for the additionality of community assistance to Northern Ireland. Over the last five years we have raised this matter with such persistence that recent allocations of assistance to Northern Ireland from the Community, have had the requirement written in, that evidence be given that it will be used as an addition to ordinary government expenditure, and not as a subsidy which ends up in the British treasury. We must continue to raise the question of additionality until the requirement just mentioned becomes an automatic part of any funds allocated to Northern Ireland.

In "A New Horizon" this party pointed out that Northern Ireland was the only one of the priority areas of the community which did not have a special regional aid programme for farmers in its Less Favoured Areas. Immediately after my election to the European Parliament I raised this issue in Europe, and discovered that the reason we did not have such a programme was that the Westminster Government had not asked for it. The consequence of this embarrassing exposure was that the Westminster Government eventually did ask for such a programme, but indicated that they would not be putting up the 'pound for pound' share which is the norm in these cases. Eventually a programme worth £40 million was proposed in Brussels. I think it is fair to say that the din which we in this party kicked up over Britain's failure to put up its share of the programme played a major part in leading to a change of policy in Britain. The programme of special aid for the Less Favoured Areas which, with Westminster's share, amounts to £80 million is now in operation, and I believe we can take considerable credit for that.

A major grievance among northern farmers is the fact that many areas which could have qualified for inclusion in the Less Favoured Areas were left out from the time of our entry into the EEC. This deliberate neglect has still not been corrected, though I believe that it will be, very shortly now. Over the last ten years we have raised this issue at every level, and in the last five years I have raised it repeatedly in Europe. Against the most stubborn resistance, and the most disgraceful prevarication of successive governments at Westminster I believe the British government has been forced to play its part in correcting this injustice. At present the proposal to extend the Less Favoured Areas is being held up in the Council of Ministers for various technical reasons, but I believe that it will shortly be approved. There is the continuing danger that the new additions to the Less Favoured Areas will be treated less favourably by the British government than the established areas. That is a danger which we will fight to oppose until it is removed. Again, I believe, we can take considerable credit for the success of this campaign to correct a long-standing injustice.

In "A New Horizon" we made the following statement:

"We see the establishment of a
European Bill of Rights for minorities
..... (as a) framework for
policies to safeguard the political

economic and cultural interests
of minorities We
would intend to co-operate with
such representatives (from minority
areas) to form a lobby to
advance the common interests of
minority cultural groups".

In September 1979 with the support of my colleagues in the Socialist Group I tabled a motion in the Parliament calling for measures to protect and promote regional languages and cultures. That motion led to a major report by the Committee on Youth, Culture and Education (the Arfé Report) which was adopted by the Parliament in the Spring of 1981. On the basis of that resolution, based upon my motion and the Arfe Report, a number of conferences of regional cultural and language groups has been held and the result is the establishment of a Bureau of Minority Languages which will open in Dublin next week. That Bureau will, for the first time, provide a framework within which representatives of minority language and cultural groups can coordinate their activities, and seek to win greater assistance and support both from domestic governments and from the Community.

In the last section of our 1979 manifesto we made the following statement:

"In conclusion, we again draw attention to the idealism that has motivated the great movement towards European integration. It was born of the bitter experience of European conflict. A true European partnership has been forged today, and nations which have been bitter enemies for centuries work in harmony for their common benefit under agreed institutions. We have a great deal to learn from participation in that experience".

Conscious that the European experience of conflict resolution might be tapped for our benefit here in Northern Ireland, I tabled a motion in the European Parliament in August 1982 calling on the Parliament to draw up a report on the conflict in Northern Ireland, and to consider ways and means by which the European Community might contribute to the resolution of the conflict. That motion led to the Haagerup Report which has ruffled a few feathers here and there in the last few months. The main conclusions of the Haagerup Report have received widespread press coverage, and I believe they give considerable backing to much

of our case in relation to the Northern Ireland problem. The report is now making its way through the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliament, and will be debated in full Parliamentary session in March. This process will afford us the opportunity to raise the problems of Northern Ireland, political economic and social, at international level. Those who opposed the motion to have this investigation, and who opposed and refused to cooperate with Neils Haagerup have revealed much of their motivation in politics. They fear to have the curtains pulled back and the windows opened, because they fear they cannot defend what the world will see. We in this party are determined that the world at large will see, and there will be further opportunities to raise our problems on international platforms in the next five years.

I think it is fair to say that, in the last five years, every one of the major commitments made in 'A New Horizon' has been delivered. That is a record of achievement of which this party can be ~~justly proud~~. There are, however, many major tasks still to be tackled, and these will be the main focus of our work in Europe during the next term of the parliament.

In economic terms Europe is now going through the most severe depression since the thirties. There are now more than 12 million people unemployed in Europe. In Northern Ireland we suffer 21 per cent unemployment, and in the most deprived parts of the North the percentage can reach 50 per cent. The nature of the recession we are going through in the 1980's is different from that of previous cyclical depressions. There has been a substantial breakdown of the economic order and that breakdown has caused a panic-stricken retreat into policies of economic nationalism. Each of the major economies has sought to protect its own position by increasing their exports ... to each other, and by reducing their imports ... from each other. Thus we have reached an international stalemate with the industrialised countries increasingly preventing each other from attaining a fundamental recovery. The policy of the Thatcher government and other right-wing elements, that expansion of public expenditure will not work any more, is a serious error. The real truth is that the European countries are so interdependent nowadays that a policy of expansion in one country will only be successful if the other European countries follow the same policy simultaneously. We believe strongly that the only way out of this crisis is by the coordination of the economic policies of the European states through the European

Community. With the assistance of our colleagues in the Parliamentary Socialist Group we will be working for the adoption of this approach.

The crisis affecting the Common Agricultural Policy is obviously of extreme concern to us, given the immense importance of agriculture in our economy. The squeeze on agricultural spending, precipitated largely by British pressure, illustrates once again how ill-served we are by having our interests represented in Europe by the Westminster government. The hysterical chauvenism of the British media, which has such an overwhelming predominance over all channels of public information, has completely distorted the nature and extent of the crisis. There can be no doubt that the C A P has produced unwieldy surpluses in the last few years, particularly in dairy products, and that steps will have to be taken to curb over production. However that does not mean that the C A P is an unsuccessful policy. Quite the reverse. It is an embarrassingly successful policy which has made the European community self-sufficient in food. The fact that it needs modification must be seen in that perspective.

The proposals to curb excess production of dairy products have given rise to great apprehension in Ireland north and south, and the term 'super-levy' has become a dirty word in farming circles. However, the alternatives to the super-levy, particularly the British proposal of a general price reduction for milk products would be disastrous for Irish dairy farming while leaving British interests relatively unaffected. It is the policy of this party that account must be taken of the different pace, and the different stage of development of Irish farming, and that measures to curb milk production must be aimed at those countries which have caused the problems. That is why we believe that there must be an exemption from the super-levy for all of Ireland. The British government have made it clear that they oppose an exemption for anyone, and that the only circumstance in which they will ask for an exemption for northern farmers is if the Dublin government achieve an exemption for Southern farmers. Therefore it behoves those of us who have farmers' interest at heart to support the case for an exemption for the whole island.

The proposals to revise Agricultural Structures policy, I have already welcomed, as a step in the right direction. The proposal to double the amount of money devoted to structure policy, and to lower the threshold for entry into grant

schemes will, I believe, be of overall benefit to Northern Ireland farmers. It will direct aid to those farmers who need it most, and it will widen the area of operation to include rural development through forestry, tourism and craft industry in the countryside.

We have campaigned for a considerable time, for a full-scale rural development programme. That remains one of our main goals for the future. Such things as a Rural Investment Bank, which would perform for agriculture the same function as the European Investment Bank does for industry and commerce, are important features of such a programme. There must be a concerted European effort to halt the drift into the urban centres, which has led to the growing paralysis and deterioration of our major cities; our policy must be to preserve and strengthen our rural communities, and by this means to create greater stability and prosperity in our society.

At the same time, the Regional and Social Funds of the Community remain too small and limited in scope to effect a transformation of the less developed regions of the Community. The regional fund must be expanded, and in particular the non-quota section must be increased. Equally the Social Fund must be increased and its role extended into the area of job-creation. If these changes were made the Community would be in a position to adopt a more flexible and regionalised approach to economic problems in Europe.

However, all of these matters must be seen against the backdrop of the continuing tragedy of Northern Ireland, the continuing violence and the continuing political stalemate. It is of course, our aim to harness the energies and experience of our European partners to help us resolve our political conflict and solve our economic problems. But unless these problems are tackled courageously and with realism here, our European partners will be unable to help. This remains the major task which we face. Through the New Ireland Forum we are working to break the deadlock and to generate new initiatives and new proposals for the future. The future of our community for some considerable time to come will be determined by the degree of success we achieve.

The election in June gives us an opportunity once again to put our general approach to the electors, and to win their support for our case. Let us do that in the full knowledge that we have the right approach and the right policies and

that, in the long-term perspective of history, truth and justice are more effective weapons than bombs and bullets.