

**ADDRESS OF LEADER OF THE SDLP
MR. JOHN HUME, MP, MEP
TO THE
13th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE SDLP
IN THE
FORUM HOTEL, BELFAST
ON SATURDAY, 28th JANUARY, 1984**

Margaret Thatcher and the SDLP have not agreed together on many subjects so far. We find as 1984 begins that we are in disagreement with her on yet another issue, this time a literary one for a change. As she looks out the window of No. 10 Downing Street, Mrs Thatcher finds that George Orwell was wrong about 1984. As you and I look out our doors, be it up the road in West Belfast, among the Sperrin Mountains or in the Bogside, we find that he was not wrong about 1984. He was particularly and tragically prophetic when he described the lying slogans that oppressed and confused his hero Winston Smith from every street corner, from every wall and from every system of communication that he encountered:

**WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH**

We know how Winston Smith felt. For be it Mrs Thatcher's own NORTHERN IRELAND IS AS BRITISH AS FINCHLEY or the Unionists' THERE IS NO IRISH DIMENSION, or the Provisionals' grotesque MURDER IS DEMOCRACY, or any of the countless other major distortions of truth that are hailed down on this exhausted community, for the SDLP the challenge of 1984 is as George Orwell predicted: the challenge is to fight the Big Lie and to assert the truth. I believe that in 1984 the truth will prevail.

Mind you, although it is now accepted that our crisis here is the most serious crisis in the European Community today, Northern Ireland is not the only issue which is mired in lies. The very existence of our planet is far more directly threatened by competing lies than by competing rocketry. The arsenals of East and West are primarily swollen, not by the discoveries of science nor by the exertions of generals, but rather by the lies of those who hold and love power in both camps. The fact that billions of dollars are wasted on these evil machines while billions of people starve

or remain sunk in ignorance and ill-health, is itself a cruel demonstration of falsehood. Just because we suffer in Ireland does not mean that we do not feel for millions of our brothers and sisters who are the victims of outrage and war and tyranny elsewhere on earth. On the contrary. As the party of non-violence and justice and of ordinary people, the men and women young and old of the SDLP send to the oppressed of South Africa, of Latin America, of Afghanistan, of Iran and of Iraq and of the whole world a heartfelt message of compassion and encouragement: 'Endure; never give up; we shall overcome!'

These words must, of course, be our message to the people of the North. Never were they more badly needed. The political situation inside Northern Ireland was never so depressing. Our economy is in such tatters that the only way forward now must be to start virtually from scratch: if a team of economists had sought to create under laboratory conditions an example of industrial decline as a warning to the West they could not have succeeded in producing conditions as discouraging as those in which we are forced to bring up our children. Our society, hitherto so strong in traditions and religious values despite our divisions, is in a process of fundamental, almost terminal, disintegration. The individual and communal memories of young people recall only the troubles, only violence, only tension and hatred. The economic situation offers them little hope. It interacts powerfully on the political scene. Thus many of the young, the hope and anchor of the future, have become the easy prey of the cult of the armalite.

These are dark days in the North. Our job is to brace ourselves as never before and offer the people, more clearly than ever before, the only leadership which will create peace and stability now, leadership that is based on non-violence, courage, intelligence and creativity. Not blood, but sweat; not tears but brains and endurance. These are the qualities that we stand for now more than ever before. It is up to others also, not just the SDLP, to provide new thinking and new leadership. Even though the SDLP believes that no-one is irredeemable, not even Mrs Thatcher, not even Mr Molyneaux, not even Mr Adams – as we look around, the scene is bleak. I said last year that the British had no policy. This year even the British have to admit that they have none. We will not crow over them now. It is a pity that they and the Unionists did not see at the time, as we did, what a hopeless charade Mr Prior's Assembly would inevitably be. A British politician, Clive Soley, told the New Ireland Forum last week that Britain had no policy in Northern Ireland but crisis management. What management! We may be said to be as British as Finchley but we are treated as though we are far less British than the Falklands. There is at least a British policy for the Falklands, however bewildering, however unaffordable it may seem to most people. There is no British policy for us

except the same old set of blinkers for the same tired old Unionist nag. Intransigence, by Bigotry out of the Guarantee.

For Unionism 1983 was like every year since 1690. No surrender. Not an inch. Not a single idea which took account of the existence of people in this party or in the minority. No acknowledgement that Unionism bore any responsibility for this awful tragedy we share. No compassion. Chesterton must have been thinking of Unionist politicians when he wrote, 'the people who are most bigoted are the people who have no convictions at all'. Last year I was criticised for saying that I regretted that the Unionists had become a petty people. I wish I had been wrong. I wish I had been proved wrong in the meantime.

Within the nationalist section of the community the cancer of violence has deepened and has hardened its grip. Violence is itself an incalculable evil. Murder is murder. What is more, violence makes the problem worse. The violence and hatred of the Provisional IRA have been around a lot longer than the SDLP – some of our critics seem to have forgotten that fact. In this generation the Provisional IRA have destroyed not alone lives but the hopes and the happiness of thousands of families; they have deepened the divisions in this community which got to the heart of the problem; what is more, they have created a degree of sympathy and support for Unionism and even for its intransigence, in Britain and around the world, such as never existed. This is what the Provisional IRA have to offer, this is what they could be said to have 'achieved'. All Sinn Féin can add is insult to injury. I use those words deliberately. They insult the people by assuming that an intelligent people, however difficult their lot, will not see the irreconcilable contradiction between the bomb and the ballot paper. The people are troubled and alienated by the brutal callousness of Britain, by the blank intransigence of Unionist politicians, but they are neither evil nor foolish. They know, from their own terrible experience, the cost of violence. They were the only ones not to be completely taken aback by the recent estimate of the New Ireland Forum that the cost of violence to the economy of Ireland from 1969 to 1982 amounted to over 11 billion pounds sterling. They know that the Provisional IRA and their supporters are responsible for a large part of all the murder and destruction. They see the IRA cause millions of pounds' worth of destruction and they are not impressed by Sinn Féin's complaints about housing conditions. They know the IRA have bombed thousands of jobs out of existence and have kept thousands of other jobs out of Northern Ireland by murdering industrialists; they are not impressed by Sinn Féin's exploitation of the IRA's dole queues. An old friend of mine in the Bogside summed it up: 'If you lose your job in a bomb, the Provo Advice Centre will ring the Dole for you!' He is no fool. Neither are the rest of us. Sinn Féin's policy is the policy foreseen by George Orwell, the

policy that the bigger and more blatant the lie the more people you're likely to fool. They are morally and factually wrong. We will prove that. We *must* do so, not for the sake of mere victory, but to save this community and this country from self-destruction. Every one of us sees the process of unravelling of the structure of civilization going on in our own local community: the most basic roots that hold people together in civilization and that withstand barbaric chaos are being weakened and hacked away by the violence of the Provos and by the lies of Sinn Féin.

After Kinsale as after the Famine our ancestors and their poets saw this same darkening threat looming over the Irish people:

'Óm sceol ar ardmhagh Fáil ní choldaim oíche
's do bheoigh go bráth mé dála a pobail dílis;
gé rófhada atáid 'na bhfál ré broscar bíobha,
fá dheoidh gur fhás a lán den chogal tríothu.'

'At the news from Fál's high plain I cannot sleep.
I am sick till doom at the plight of its faithful folk.
Long have they stood as a hedge against hostile trash
but a lot of the cockle has grown up through them at last.'

Our ancestors resisted the threat in their day. No-one in Northern Ireland is standing out against the tide of nihilism today except the SDLP.

It is not enough simply to shout 'Stop!' What are we offering the people as an alternative to chaos? First, we are not prepared to be merely negative. Second, we are engaged in the most positive and challenging application of the will and the intelligence to this crisis to have taken place since partition.

When the New Ireland Forum was first mooted it was summarily dismissed as a pipe dream and then, once to the chagrin of our critics it had been established, it was sneered at as a charade. That has now changed completely. In the absence of any British policy following the final collapse of the Assembly, and in the absence of any unionist policy, the Forum is seen by all sides as the only serious effort to find a solution that is now happening. What is more, it is taken very seriously indeed by all parties in Britain, even the Tories, and they have all made this clear. In passing, I must say that I was very pleased that a party from the North was received at Westminster on Monday last for the first time as part of an *Irish* and not a British delegation. That party was, of course, our own.

And I want to pay a warm tribute to the leaders of the three parties from the Republic in the Forum. They have given it their undivided attention. They have shown a commitment to a solution of the problem of the North and its people that has risen above party political differences. In that commitment lies our real source of hope. An agreed final statement from that body, representative of four out of five people on this

island would be a powerful statement that would have to be listened to and will provide a unifying rallying point for Irish people everywhere.

We have played a very central role in the deliberations of the Forum, the first time since the Civil War that the constitutional politicians have tried to work out together a set of realistic ideas to bring peace and stability now into the lives of all the people of this community. The Forum's report will, I hope, be ready within weeks and it will, I assure you, put the Irish question at the centre of the British stage more undeniably than has ever been the case.

The Forum will, I believe, succeed. By that I mean that it will lead to real dialogue with the British and, I hope, with the Unionists and create conditions for real political progress and the creation of peace and stability in Northern Ireland. I do not mean in the distant future. I mean in the short term.

Some people have dared to say that the party that has been central to this great strategy is exhausted, irrelevant, too middle class, too rural. Again the Big Lie. I believe it is the literal truth to say that none of those people has spoken to me or to you or has visited our communities. Yes, they have spoken to those whom *they* wish to prevail, be they the Provos or the Unionists or their allies, but they have not spoken to the ordinary people.

The SDLP is pre-eminently the party of ordinary people. The ordinary people, because of their genuine concern for peace and because they are not motivated by a greed for power or for vengeance will, if anyone can, solve this crisis. They are the only people who are prepared to make the necessary political and personal sacrifices for the common good. Far from being a party of the middle class, ours is a party of workers, the unemployed and small farmers. Let those who wish to vilify us or dismiss us look at who we really are. Let them, for example, do a survey of our local Councillors and publish the facts. How many people know that almost 20% of SDLP Councillors in Northern Ireland are unemployed? How many know that of the rest of them the large majority are small farmers and working men and women and that the professional and business classes who are supposed to dominate our party are but a tiny minority? 'The salaried and careerist politicians of the SDLP'. Another Big Lie. Where are they? Since 1972 when Stormont fell, the front line spokesmen of this party, apart from a few short months of the power-sharing Assembly and the Convention, have not earned a single penny of income from their political activities, yet they have continued to give service to the people. I am the only salaried politician in this party and then, only since 1979. No group of politicians in this country has given greater service or shown more self-sacrifice than the men and women who sit behind me on this platform. That lie I wish to nail and I

- make no apology for doing so. We are sustained neither by the State nor by bank robberies or kidnappings.

Our critics want either the Provos or the Unionists to prevail. They want some-one to *win*. We know that the real problem in this community is that neither side can win. We are the only party in Northern Ireland that has squarely faced up to the full dimensions of this crisis. It must be said that Irish nationalists have not in the past taken sufficient account of the complexities which must be accommodated in any solution for it to work. The nationalist and republican ideal has been hijacked by those who have substituted hatred of Britain, and of anyone who disagrees with them, for love of Ireland. There are, however, some powerful voices of the past who point the true direction of those ideals and it is in their tradition that we in the SDLP stand. Those voices have recognised that the piece of earth called Ireland is already united. It is its people who are divided and it is the immense task of facing up to the issues, prejudices and fears which divide the people of this land that are the real challenge of the nationalist and republican tradition.

In 1891 Charles Stewart Parnell, in virtually his last speech before he died, and in this city of Belfast where he rarely spoke, left us this statement:

'It has been undoubtedly true that every Irish patriot has always recognised from the time of Wolfe Tone until now that until the religious prejudices of the minority, whether reasonable or unreasonable, are conciliated Ireland can never enjoy perfect freedom, could never be united.'

Thirty years before the British divided Ireland Charles Stewart Parnell said that Ireland could never enjoy perfect freedom, could never be united until the differences among our own people were confronted and accommodated. That remains true today.

James Connolly recognised the same central truth in his historic quote: 'Ireland without its people means nothing to me.' Without its people it is like any piece of earth, a jungle. That remains true today.

Earlier in 1848 just as Ireland was emerging from the trauma of the Famine, the Young Ireland movement launched the Irish tricolour. Its colours were Orange, White and Green – in that order. As Meagher said in 1848:

'The white in the centre signifies a lasting truth between the 'Orange' and the 'Green', and I trust that beneath its folds the hands of the Irish Protestant and the Irish Catholic may be clasped in generous and heroic brotherhood.'

Ireland must be the most remarkable country on earth: our flag is a symbol, not of military heroics or of other ancient sources of pride, but of our most fundamental problem and of the dynamics of its solution. The

'Orange', surely an alien element in the traditional national concept, is given equal place with the 'Green', and they are held together, not in tension nor in war, but in the harmony of peace. It is the flag of a creative and peaceful future and, whether we or they like it or not, it is as much the property of the Orangeman as it is of the nationalist. It is certainly not the property of those who murder Irish Protestants. The flag stands for the survival of the full accommodation in harmony of both the Green and the Orange. That is why it symbolises the policy of the SDLP. The achievement of its symbolism is not easy. We know that. The dedication and patience required to achieve it is a lot less romantic but also less destructive than the escape route offered by the atmalite and the bomb.

We believe in and we will fight for the full accommodation of the Orange in all the legitimate elements of the Orangeman's birthright, including those which are alien and even uncongenial to us, in harmony and through a free process with the rest of the people of Ireland. We ask the Unionist people and the British to adopt the principles of this flag and to work to accommodate the 'Green' in harmony with their 'Orange'.

This is a more apt flag to fly over the City Hall in Donegall Square than the Union Jack which is the flag of one side only. Indeed, it is even more appropriate to Belfast than to Dublin.

I began by talking about falsehood, George Orwell's Big Lie. Of course the process of falsehood involves two parties, the liars and the deceived. The Hitlerian era and several other episodes of tragic history demonstrate how gullible, how almost wilfully blind, people can be. Those who were lived to regret it. So did their nation. Humanity as a whole paid the price.

Here in this flag, a symbol of peace, a symbol of recognition of the Orange as well as the Green we have the most dramatic example of colour-blindness that I know. This extraordinary symbol of acknowledgement of their rights has been banned for generations in Northern Ireland by Unionist governments and by their British mentors. On the other hand, it has been used for generations, in total and blasphemous disregard of its meaning, by men of violence as a symbol of vengeance and hatred against Protestants. Not even the story of the Emperor's nakedness provides as dramatic an example of the Big Lie and the deception of the masses.

The job of the SDLP is, as I said, to confront that Lie, to expose that deception, to insist on the truth and to create harmony. In 1984 we will restore to its full original significance and in the clarified vision of all the people, the full meaning of this flag which is our common inheritance and the symbol of our survival. I am confident that we can and will succeed.