

SPEECH BY MR. JOHN HUME M.P., M.E.P., LEADER OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY OF NORTHERN IRELAND, TO THE MEETING OF THE CONFEDERATION OF SOCIALIST PARTIES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY IN MADRID ON 10 APRIL 1985

Mr. President,

We are gathered here in Madrid which, together with Lisbon, is about to be added to the list of European Community capitals. The accession of Spain and Portugal is testimony to the fact that the European Community ideal, though it may occasionally appear to wane, is still a powerful force in European and world affairs. It is the first duty of political leaders here in Madrid to note the significance of this event and accordingly, Mr. President, I should like to extend an advance but hearty welcome to the new members of the European Community, Spain and Portugal.

Mr. President, We are here to discuss international political problems and the role of Europe in the world. I am the leader of the smallest party in this confederation. It may be that we do not have a great deal of experience of international political problems where I come from but I do not need to stress that in Northern Ireland we do have experience of problems. That such problems have their solution in the broader context of the European Community is something that I feel particularly acutely here in the capital of Spain. Spanish-Irish relations are centuries old. They are as warm as they are deep. The beginnings of English colonisation of Ireland and indeed the roots of the present conflict in Northern Ireland led to the departure from Ireland in 1607 of the leadership of the old Gaelic order in the North of Ireland. Our Chieftains, the O'Neills and the O'Donnells, sought refuge and exile in Spain. I am reminded of the strength

and depth of those links when I walk out of this hotel and find myself in Calle O'Donnell. Of more enduring historical importance and of immediate relevance to the present problem in Northern Ireland is the fact, Mr. President, that this period in Irish history represented the end of what might be termed Ireland's European outlook and vision and the beginning of what might be termed our obsession with Britain. Previous to this period, Ireland's external vision had been directed towards Europe. From that point forward, Mr. President, Ireland and Britain became locked in a historical impasse from which neither country has been able to escape totally. Northern Ireland today represents the reality of the failure of Britain and Ireland to sort out their differences. Its people are the victims of that failure.

The entry of both countries to the European Economic Community has, I think, Mr. President, assisted in no small measure in giving us a wider framework and vision in which, it is to be hoped, we can ultimately resolve our differences. Without over-stressing history, we can say, Mr. President, that our return to Europe has given us a new and a wider vision in which our mutual obsession with our neighbour can be placed in context.

I represent a party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party of Northern Ireland, from the last remaining area of conflict within the boundaries of Europe, which if I may say so, must be seen as anachronistic at a Congress of European Socialist Parties and in a Community whose very existence is the antithesis of conflict and division. What other political parties present at this Congress can take for granted - democratic institutions, consensus, government of the people, by the people, for the people, my party cannot take such things for granted. My party is neither in government nor in opposition. My party comes from a divided society. Our role is to create a framework in which differences can be

accommodated and, in effect, to create through the democratic process and in the teeth of intolerance and violence, institutions and structures in which consensus can be found and maintained as the bases of democratic order. The President of the Spanish Government said yesterday that he was proud of his party's contribution to the consolidation of democracy in Spain. I feel that here in Spain there might be a special understanding for the problems of the society which I represent, given its difficulties in accommodating difference, given its search for a truly democratic base. I should like to congratulate President Gonzalez on his party's contribution to the preservation of the democratic ideal in Spain, to its reestablishment and to its forthcoming incorporation in the European Economic Community.

What is important I think is to note the contribution that membership of the European Community can make to the strengthening and underpinning of democracy. This vital role of the Community is made manifest by the fact that the new democracies of Greece, Spain and Portugal will be strengthened by means of an integrated Mediterranean programme to assist in the confrontation of serious economic problems, that new democracies, as my Spanish colleagues will appreciate, be seen to be economically sound and stable. Thus there is a quintessential link between the preservation of democracy and the solution of serious/^{economic} problems. This in many respects is the ideal of the European Community which sought not only to accommodate political differences after the second World War, but to enshrine that accommodation in a European Economic Community. I come from a society which is beset not only by fundamental political problems, but also and perhaps as an inevitable consequence by some of the most severe economic problems in the Western World. Northern Ireland has the highest unemployment of any region in the European Community. I come from a society with deep problems of economic deprivation and youth unemployment.

We are deeply conscious of the interaction between political and economic problems and of the challenge to democracy represented by the cancer ~~of the~~ of the enforced idleness of so many of our young people.

There are flickering signs that just over a decade after joining the European Economic Community, Ireland and Britain may be able to find a way out of the dark tunnel in which their relations have been trapped since the 17th century. The solution to our problems lies in finding democratic institutions and structures with the necessary economic backing in which consensus and acceptance of difference can be accommodated as they are in the societies in which you all live. The European Community with its history of conflict far deeper than ours, and its experience of conflict resolution is an inspiration to us and a flame of hope.

If we should be so fortunate to find that we can work out a political framework for the accommodation of our differences in Northern Ireland, then are we unreasonable if we ask our European colleagues for solidarity by insisting that they contribute to the underpinning and preservation of such a framework in the same manner as they have done for the democracies of Greece, Spain and Portugal by offering to assist with a major and essential programme of economic reconstruction that would give hope to our youth and faith in the future of the democratic process.

I have a further reason, apart from the strengthening of the forces of democracy, for welcoming the entry of Spain and Portugal into the EEC. The great and abiding failure of the existing Community has been its inability, or worse, its unwillingness, to reduce the regional disparities and imbalances that exist. The powerful industrial nations of the EEC have paid lip service only to the notion of regional policy

The poorer regions of the Community have watched in alarm at the mounting evidence that the Community of Nine was no more than its critics said it was - a rich mans club - as it paid lip service only to the creation of an effective regional policy. We are glad to have the accession now of two powerful and historic European nations who understand deeply and instinctively the problems of regional disparity and deprivation and we of the deprived regions of Europe look forward to align with them as in the Socialist group of the European Parliament we look forward to building an alliance with their new members of our group in order to achieve a regional policy that will finally realise one of the major aspirations of the Treaty of Rome - the equalisation of living standards in all corners of the European Community.

We are about to enlarge the European Community. It is essential in so doing that we lose neither the distinctiveness nor the differences of its component parts. We must continue to recognise that the essence of unity is the acceptance of diversity. The European Community exists because of such recognition. We in Ireland must draw inspiration from its achievements in ending war and conflict among its peoples. Indeed it is only when we in Ireland can accept that the acceptance of diversity - not victory, not conversion - is the essence of unity in a divided society will we achieve our dream of a truly united Irish people.