



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 101st CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 135

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, MAY 1, 1989

No. 51

Senate

JOHN HUME ADDRESSES THE FUTURE OF NORTHERN IRE- LAND

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I recently had the opportunity to read the remarkable and eloquent address by John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party in Northern Ireland, to his party's annual conference in Belfast last fall.

Mr. Hume is well known to many of us in Congress, and his frequent visits to this country and to Capitol Hill have helped educate us all about the true dimensions of the long-festering conflict in Northern Ireland and the most realistic means to reach a peaceful settlement of that conflict.

In addressing his party's conference, Mr. Hume restates the case against violence and repeats his call for all sides to come together to settle their differences around the conference table and create a new relationship for the future.

I believe that all of us in Congress who have worked with Mr. Hume—and many others who wish to know more about the complex situation in Northern Ireland—will welcome the opportunity to see his perceptive address, and I ask unanimous consent that it may be printed in the RECORD. I also ask consent that a profile on Mr. Hume which appeared in the Christian Science Monitor last week may be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

ADDRESS BY JOHN HUME, 18TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND, NOVEMBER 25-27, 1988

In recent times we have been reminded of a lot of anniversaries. Remembering the past is something of an obsession in this country. The future, discussing it or shaping it, doesn't quite seem to popular. Decisions might have to be taken. Leadership might have to be given. Our attitude to the future is paralysed by our obsession with the past. Indeed I have often thought that our over-indulgence in the past is a reflection of a much deeper weakness in our psyche as a people—our lack of self-confidence to stand on our own feet, in our own time, with the ideas of our time facing the problems of our time. How often do we hear figures of the past used to justify the actions of the present?

Of course, it is the voices of our extremes who continually invoke the past under the guise not only of being the true inheritors of that past but the only inheritors of it—the keepers of the holy grail—thus endowing themselves with a sanctity of purpose which justifies any words, any actions or any deed. No matter how provocative, no matter how horrific.

It does not seem to have occurred to them that if their heroes of the past had followed their example, they would hardly have figured in the history books. Instead they are significant historical figures specifically because they did not allow themselves to be paralysed by the past but were people of their time—realising that problems had to be faced in the context of their time. Put more candidly, there are not too many shopkeepers around today who would run a corner shop as it was run during one of the prominent periods of our history. Yet there are those in political life who want the

problems of this country faced as if nothing had changed since 1690, nothing had changed since 1916.

One of the ironies is of course that these extremes are in many ways mirror images of one another. The lack of self confidence exhibited in the arrogance of their rhetoric and actions being only one of their common denominators. We see it in the demand, and the need, to hold all power in one's own hands, in the anxiety to have political structures made in the image of one tradition. It is evident in the rejection of tolerance and the need for domination. It is visible in the abandonment of peaceful processes for violent action and violent excess. It is proclaimed by attitudes that seek victory and not accommodation. It is trumpeted by those who are so sure of their Irishness that they need to remind us of it constantly. Their eyes mist over with self-righteous emotion as they wave national flags as their cherished possession. They don't seem to notice that the real level of their respect is measured by them painting their flag on kerbstones for everyone to trample upon.

The Unionist people have a long and strong tradition in Ireland. They have a rich Protestant heritage and a great pride in their tradition. They have pride in their service to the crown, pride in their contribution to the United States, pride in their spirit of industry and achievement, in their work ethic and in their faith. Their special mettle is believed by many of them to be expressed in victories in battles long ago, battles regularly commemorated.

Yet that pride is not expressed in self confidence. It is expressed in an archaic supremacy and in a desperate fear that they cannot survive in accommodation with other traditions. They must live apart. Living apart may have been tolerable, indeed it may have been very acceptable as long as their hold on power was underpinned by successive British Governments. That is no longer so.

The fundamental change that has taken place as a result of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is a change that is deeply and fully understood by every Unionist. It is that their exclusive hold on power has gone and it is not coming back. Their veto on British policy which they have always had, and which goes to the heart of our problem here, has gone and is not coming back. Their loss is uncomfortable for their leaders, for while they held that privileged position, they never had to be politicians or exercise the art of politics, which is the art of representing one's own view while accommodating others with fairness.

For traditional Unionism in Northern Ireland, other points of view have never actually existed. To this day, as they trumpet about the proposals that they have placed before the British Government about the future of Northern Ireland—the future of us all—the insult doesn't seem to have occurred to them. Not only have they not presented these proposals to those of us who represent other views—views which must be accommodated if we are to have a future—they haven't even published them for the information of their own followers. They are still oligarchs. The faithful will line up when the drums beat. The other points of view, to which lip service is publicly paid, don't really count.

Their loss is painful and difficult for them, but it is very healthy indeed, not only for themselves but for the whole community. Mrs Thatcher has done for Unionists what John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson did for the whites of Alabama in the 60's. She has done something that in their deepest hearts they knew needed to be done but couldn't ever do for themselves. She has stripped them of ascendancy and privilege and in so doing has done a service to us all—by placing us in a politically equal footing.

What Unionists should understand, however, is that the boot is not on the other foot. Our experience has taught us too much for that. In addition, contrary to the oft-expressed line of our political opponents, the Anglo-Irish Agreement has conferred no special benefits on the SDLP. Instead, it is addressing the problem, a problem which its authors recognise will be resolved only in time and by a steady building process. Coercion or conquest is not part of either our intent or our policy.

The challenge to all of us is the same and the challenge is one that has never really been faced up to in this island in all its aspects and implications. When groups of people who differ share a piece of earth, they sit down and sort out their relationships; they accommodate their difference to their mutual satisfaction. That is what happens in every stable and peaceful democracy in the world. When it doesn't happen, there is no stability, there is no peace. There is conflict.

We either take up that challenge now, sit down with representatives of the rest of this island, in the self-confidence that we can not only represent but achieve the protection of our various traditions, or we do not; and instead we pass on this outdated and costly quarrel to the next generation. If we do, it may well take us a long time. That

should not hinder us. The willingness to search for accommodation, and to stay with the search in spite of difficulty, must be supreme. We have a lot to conquer. We have to overcome the legacy of the deepest mistrust, the sequence of hurts and injustices piled high upon one another of which each section of our people has its own valid tale to tell. But we should realise that those hurts, those injustices, indeed our whole present situation, are the symptoms and the product of the attitudes that have built our present intolerable society and that have failed to address a simple yet fundamental question, how do we share this island piece of earth together, in a manner that gives supremacy to none? Should we address that question today, we will transform the atmosphere throughout this island and the good will towards us across the world, where our wandering people have left such a mark, will be overwhelming.

There are also those who are mirror images of traditional unionism. They too believe in "themselves alone" as the only answer to the problem of a deeply divided society, without the slightest reference, apart from the verbal ritual genuflections and lip service, to the existence of anyone else. Self-determination of the Irish people is their objective, they say. The Irish people are defined by them, if we judge by their actions and their contempt for their views and opinions of other Irish people, as themselves alone. They are more Irish than the rest of us, they believe. They are the pure master race of Irish. They are the keepers of the holy grail of the nation. That deep seated attitude, married to their method, has all the hallmarks of undiluted fascism. They have also the other hallmark of the fascist—the scapegoat—the Brits are to blame for everything, even their own atrocities! They know better than the rest of us. They know so much better that they take unto themselves the right, without consultation with anyone, to dispense death and destruction, by destroying Ireland's people, they destroy Ireland.

I had discussions with them recently. The talks were designed to explore whether they were willing to lay down their arms and join the rest of the people of this island in the lengthy and difficult search for peace based on real self-determination. I put some questions to them about the price of their means and method, about the consequence of victory for their viewpoint, about peaceful alternatives which already exist. They replied with sheaves of paper reiterating well-worn declarations about nationhood and the

rights of the Irish people to self determination, while ignoring the single most self-evident fact that strikes very human being in the world as they look in at Ireland—the Irish people are divided on that very question, the question of how to exercise self-determination. Agreement on its exercise will never be brought about by force and violence but only by dialogue, and all the signs are that such dialogue will be neither easy nor brief.

For people who proclaim their Irishness and their pride in Ireland so loudly and so forcefully, they are remarkably lacking in either the self-confidence or moral guts to sit round and talk with their fellow Irishmen and persuade them that their vision of Ireland is a better one. Their decision in particular to use guns and bombs to "persuade" their Protestant fellow Irishmen is not only an extreme example of lack of faith in their own beliefs or in the credibility of them, it is an attitude of extreme moral cowardice and a deeply partitionist attitude. For its real effect is to deepen the essential divisions among the Irish people.

And it isn't just the Unionist people who are their victims. Leaders of Sinn Féin have been saying recently that the Nationalist nightmare has not ended. They are dead right because they and their military wing are the major part of that nightmare. There is not a single injustice in Northern Ireland today that justifies the taking of a single human life. What is more, the vast majority of the major injustices suffered not only by the nationalist community but by the whole community are the direct consequences of the IRA campaign. If I were to lead a civil rights campaign in Northern Ireland today, the major target of that campaign would be the IRA. It is they who carry out the greatest infringements of human and civil rights, whether it is their murders, their executions without trial, their kneecappings and punishment shootings, their bombings of jobs and people. The most fundamental human right is the right to life. Who in Northern Ireland takes the most human lives, in a situation where there is not one single injustice that justifies the taking of human life?

Let the record speak. Up till last Saturday 2,705 people have died in the twenty-year period of the current troubles. 31% of these were members of the security forces. 14% were members of paramilitary organisations. 55% were ordinary civilian men and women from both sections of our community, 69% of whom were from the Catholic community and 31% from the Protestant community. And who killed all those people?

The statistics are devastating. 44% were killed by the Provisional IRA and 18% by their fellow travelling "republican" paramilitaries. 27% were killed by Loyalists, 10% were killed by the British Army. 2% were killed by the RUC and 0.28% by the UDR. In short, people describing themselves as Irish republicans have killed 6 times as many human beings as the British army, 30 times as many as the RUC and 250 times as many as the UDR.

And wait! One of their main claims is that they are the defenders of the Catholic community. Of the 1194 members of the Catholic community who died, 46% were killed by Loyalist paramilitaries, 37% by people describing themselves as republicans and 17% by the security forces. And in the last ten years since 1 January 1978, of the 305 members of the Catholic community who have lost their lives, 112 (37%) have been killed by people describing themselves as republicans, 105 (34%) by loyalists and 88 (29%) by the security forces.

In the last 20 years, republicans have killed more than twice as many Catholics as the security forces and in the last ten years have killed more than the Loyalists! Some defenders. And I haven't even mentioned their "mistakes". Was it O'Casey who said "The gunmen are not dying for the people, the people are dying for the gunmen?"

In addition, all the major grievances today within the nationalist community are direct consequences of the IRA campaign and if that campaign were to cease so would those grievances. The presence of troops on our streets, harassment and searching of young people, widespread house searches, prisons full of young people, lengthening dole queues leading to the emigration of many of our young people, check points, emergency legislation. . . .

Even Joe Soap has the intelligence to know that if the IRA campaign were to cease, then the troops would be very soon off our streets. If they were, they would neither be harassing young people nor searching houses. Check points would disappear, emergency legislation would be unnecessary. We could begin a major movement to empty our prisons, particularly of all those young people who were sucked into the terrible sectarian conflicts of the '70's. And of course we could begin the serious job of attracting inward investment aided by the enormous good will that peace would bring.

The price of their method and its costs to their own people was one of the three basic questions that I put to Sinn Fein. They did not reply except to blame the Brits. The

British presence is responsible for everything. An amazing statement which absolves them from all responsibility for their own actions. Why not therefore plant a nuclear bomb and blow the whole place to bits and blame it on the Brits. That is their logic.

The strange irony of course is, as they deliberately refuse to recognise, the British position on Northern Ireland has shifted. As I have said before, if the British and Argentine Governments were to announce tomorrow that they had signed an internationally binding agreement, setting up a permanent Anglo-Argentine Conference with a permanent secretariat in Port Stanley to deal with the problem of the Falklands/Malvinas, would the whole world not regard it as a significant shift? That is what has happened here. The whole world recognised that. The Unionists recognised that. In practice this shift has meant the removal of Unionist veto on British policy, the removal of their exclusive hold on power. Ah but, say the Provos, the British are here defending their economic and strategic interests and are keeping the people of Ireland apart in order to do so. Hence our armed struggle is justified.

The British have no economic interest in Northern Ireland any more. It costs them 1½ billion pounds per year. British business can now locate anywhere in the European Community without having to rule the particular territory. In a nuclear age, what possible strategic or military advantage is there for Britain to have bases in Ireland? They had been closing them down steadily until the troubles began.

Politically, in spite of the views of individual members of their party or their Government, the official Government position, internationally binding on them, is that if the Irish people want unity and independence, then if those who want it persuade, not all, but some of those who don't, thus creating a majority in Northern Ireland, then they can have it. What sort of Irishman or republican is it who will not take up that challenge, but instead believes that guns and bombs and deaths of Irish people are necessary instruments of persuasion? I'll tell you what sort of Irishman he is, he is not a republican at all, he is a moral coward because he refuses to face the long hard slog of breaking down the barriers between the Irish people.

What sort of Irish republican is it who can ignore the fact that the methods he is using are bringing more suffering on his own people? Would any genuine Irish republican, given the starkness of the statistics I

have outlined, not reconsider his whole approach and his means and method in particular? The truth is of course that their method has become more sacred than their cause. In their minds it is blood that is the essential qualification for a patriot, not sweat. Concepts are more important than people. Pieces of earth are more important than people.

The glib tongue of Danny Morrison told us about the armalite and the ballot box. The same glib tongue also let slip that their objective was not Irish freedom but "power in Ireland" with the different instruments in each hand. Earlier, in the 70's, the same tongues told the people to burn their ballot papers because those who stood for election to councils created by the British were collaborators. We don't hear that now. The same glib tongue told us that 1975 was the year of victory. Now 13 years and a lot of graves later, we are told that in the 20th year of the troops on our streets, the British will be weakening. The victims of all of that, including the young people who emotionally believe them, aided and abetted by the desperate sectarianism of the 70's, have paid with their lives or their liberty. Many of them now fill our jails.

My challenge to any of those people in Ireland, North and South, today who regard themselves as republicans is to accept the straightforward offer made to them in our talks. Lay down your arms once and for all. Join the rest of the people of Ireland in the search for ways and means of breaking down the barriers with our Protestant fellow citizens, in persuading them to join us in building a new Ireland that reflects our diversity and respects all our traditions, and in persuading the British government to commit all its resources to the same end. If they were to do so, then the atmosphere in this whole island and in the North in particular would be transformed and the nightmare of all our people would be truly at an end.

Meanwhile the Anglo-Irish Agreement remains the target of both Unionist and Provo. I never cease to be amazed when I read some of the critics, some of whom should know better. I find that they don't seem to have much understanding of what the Agreement actually is or else they simply haven't read it. The Treaty of Rome set up the European Council of Ministers to deal with the questions referred to it under the Treaty. It set up a secretariat called a Commission drawn from all countries represented in the Council to service the Council. The Council meets regularly. It has regular

and open disagreements. Ministers sometimes even walk out. But nobody says that the Treaty of Rome should be scrapped or is a failure. Difficulties or failure to reach agreement is usually the responsibility of one or other of the Governments, not of the Treaty itself. Yet in spite of numerous difficulties, they plod steadily on towards their goals and now over 40 years after the Second World War who would have dreamt when the Treaty was signed that such progress could have been made?

The Anglo-Irish Conference and secretariat are modelled on the Council of Ministers and Commission. We have witnessed the same sort of hiccups, and the same slow progress. But, as with Europe, the faults lie not with the Agreement or its intentions but with one or other of the Governments who operate it. We should also remember that one of its strengths is that Governments change and some will be more active than others, yet each can make its own distinctive contributions to the building process.

These are not views that are borne of three years experience of the Agreement in operation. These are views in keeping with the strategy that this party has followed and is following for a considerable period of time. At this conference three years ago, six days before the Agreement was signed, I told this Conference and had repeated it often since that we supported the British-Irish talks then taking place because the British-Irish framework is the framework of the problem embracing all the relationships involved. I made it clear in that speech that we did not "expect a final settlement or an immediate solution" from those talks and that our yardstick for measuring their outcome would simply be whether the proposals in any agreement that might emerge would help us to make progress. Contrary to suggestions that we hyped the Agreement, I specifically cautioned then:

"... as we learn from the experience of Sunningdale, even if there is an agreement, agreements of themselves don't make progress. There will be the question of its implementation. So no matter what the way ahead, agreement or no agreement, the SDLP will still face major challenges and major risks. There is no road towards peace and stability that does not contain risks. The challenge is not easy but the choice is. There is no other way."

And there is no other better peaceful way than the two Governments with all their resources working as closely as possible together. When the agreement was signed we issued the following statement:

"We are not under any illusions about the difficulties that will face us and will face both Governments. We do not believe that a final settlement of the Irish problem has been reached. We do believe that an opportunity has been created by the agreement in the setting up of a permanent Anglo-Irish institution to make progress towards our goals of peace and reconciliation. A great deal will depend on the implementation of the Agreement and on the policies, particularly in the field of justice, that emerge from the new joint institution. The SDLP will monitor that implementation very carefully. In the meantime we will give the new institution our full co-operation and ask everyone else to do likewise. It is an opportunity that can be developed if it is taken up with good will on all sides."

In both these statements it is abundantly clear that we foresaw, saw and see the Agreement through its instrument, the Conference, as a means for dealing with the problem on a regular basis and not as a solution. We also foresaw that the major area of difficulty would be the administration of justice. The past year has underlined that, in a very significant way, with a series of events that demonstrate starkly the deep gulf that exists on this question—The Stalker-Sampson Affair, Private Thain, The McAnespie killing, Gibraltar and its consequences in Milltown and the Andersonstown Road, the so-called broadcasting ban, the restrictions in the right to silence, the Craigavon inquests. All of these events tend to increase tension in the community, particularly when accompanied by the terrible IRA atrocities of the past 12 months.

The main burden for dealing with these issues against the background of those tensions has fallen on the shoulders of our party's spokesman of Justice and Deputy Leader Seamus Mallon. In spite of the breadth of those shoulders it has been no mean burden. To go up front for this party on any one of those issues is difficult enough, but on that whole dreadful series of events it is something else. They are controversial issues, they are emotive issues and in the present atmosphere of this society can be very divisive issues. When Seamus spoke on each and every one of those issues, let there be no doubt that he spoke for his entire party and he spoke with the strength and consistency that this party has always brought to issues of justice and order.

It has always been our view that the bedrock of peace and order, the bedrock of justice in every society, is consensus among the population on how it is governed. When

that consensus exists, then justice and order follow naturally—they are our police and our courts. However, when a society is divided, as ours is, on the fundamental question of how we are governed, then questions of policing and courts become very divisive issues indeed.

The best that any political party can do in those circumstances, and it is the best, is what this party through its spokesmen has consistently done. That is to offer full and unqualified support to the police force in seeking out anyone who commits a crime. All we ask is that it be done impartially within the rule of law. Given our experience, that is hardly an unreasonable qualification.

The only final answer to those problems is therefore democratic consensus and agreement on how we live together and govern ourselves leading to total unity behind the institutions of the agreed order.

We have welcomed the many advances that the agreement has made in dealing with the symptoms of our deep-seated problem and we have listed them many times. We have also criticised not only the failures to advance but steps in the wrong direction such as the presently emerging package of so-called tough action. But through all this we keep our eyes firmly fixed on the main purpose of the agreement, which is to provide the means for dealing with the underlying deep-seated problem or disease which gives rise to all these symptoms.

It is in this area, the area of creating movement in the underlying problem, that we believe the Agreement has its greatest significance and has created real opportunities for everyone who wants a real solution. It has removed the unjust Unionist veto on British policy, it has removed their exclusive hold on power, and this time the British Government, unlike many of its predecessors, has not succumbed to blackmail.

In so standing firm, it is cutting through the vicious circle that has paralysed all political development in this country. In the past, as in 1974, when British Governments backed down before the threats, they confirmed the leadership of Unionism in the hands of the no-surrender, no-compromise brigade and reinforced the basic appeal of the IRA that the only thing the British understand is force.

This time that is not happening, and there is a new and fluid political scenario that opens up major opportunities for those who want solutions. I keep saying "Those who want solutions" because we still have too many who simply want victory for their

point of view. When will they learn that they are not the people? Like ourselves they represent only a section of the people and all sections have to be involved and accommodated in any solutions.

The next stage for those interested in answers is obvious. It has to be dialogue and discussion which address the problem of our unsettled relationships. It may take time to bring it about, but since it is the essential next step, we must keep our eyes firmly fixed on it and use all resources to bring it about. Let us also keep repeating that the objective of such dialogue is not either coercion or conquest, it is simply agreement on how we share this island piece of earth.

Let us therefore call once again for a conference table. Let the main subject of discussion at that conference table be clear—how we share this island to our mutual satisfaction. Let us also agree in advance that agreement reached on this fundamental question would be an agreement that would transcend in importance any previous agreement ever made, because it would address and settle a relationship that has never been addressed and that goes right to the heart of our quarrel—the relationship between the Unionist people and the rest of the people of this island. And before we approach the conference table or agree to its agenda, let us meet to talk about the mechanisms whereby any such agreement is endorsed by the people, both North and South, so that there will be absolute reassurance before we begin that sell-outs are impossible and that all traditions will have to be respected.

Does anyone doubt that such a conference table, even though it might be in existence for a very long time, would transform the atmosphere throughout this island and release enormous energy and goodwill which would in itself make possible things which now seem impossible? And would not an agreement endorsed by the people of the North and the people of the South be a true expression of self determination that would bring us lasting peace?

The door to such a table should be open to every party with an elected mandate. In practice that means that every party sits down on the same terms, bringing nothing to the table but their own beliefs and powers of persuasion. There should be no place at this table for any party if it is either using force or reserving the right to use force if they do not get their way.

While we engage in all of this, 1992 looms. The completion of the Single Market with freedom of movement for people, goods and

services, leading to the abolition of all commercial frontiers and the creation of a commercial United States of Europe with a market of 320 million people will have a much greater impact on the daily lives of the people of this island, North and South, than any of the other matters that we spend most of our time discussing in this society. Yet this party is one of the very few bodies to take it seriously and to take the necessary steps to make all our people aware of its implications and of the need to prepare. But I don't intend to dwell on it at any great length today since we have devoted special conferences and special publications to it. I wish simply to draw lessons from it about our own basic problems.

Forty-three years ago, the Second World War ended. Europe was devastated, its major cities in chaos, millions of its citizens lay dead. The bitterness between ancient foes, particularly France and Germany, was deeper than ever. Looking across that bleak landscape, if someone had stood forth and forecast the Europe of the 1980's, he would have been described at worst as a fool and at best as a dreamer. Yet it happened because leaders stepped forth and had the vision and the faith to suggest new ways. They recognised that the peoples of Western Europe, with their deep differences and distinctiveness and with their fear for their survival alongside competing cultures and peoples, had chosen the wrong path to preserve and protect their differences. They had pursued confrontation, which, led them into many bloody conflicts with those whom they distrusted. The results had been devastating for Europe as a whole.

After 1945, led by men of vision, they tried a new way. They sat down with former foes to hammer out agreed institutions which settled relationships and preserved differences. No one would have believed in 1945 that by 1992 they would be moving towards a United States of Europe, and yet the Germans are still German and the French are still French. One thing is certain. They would never have achieved it had they continued to dwell on the past and call up the ghosts of the past. That approach would have led, as it always did and as it does here, to conflict in every generation. Can we here not learn the same lesson? Can we not sit down with former foes, with those whom we distrust, and hammer out institutions which will settle our relationships and preserve our differences?

Is it too much to ask that we invest in the future for a change? For we haven't finished with our anniversaries. Very substan-

tial ghosts of the past loom in the 300th anniversaries of 1689 and 1690—the Siege of Derry and the Battle of the Boyne. In addition to our own local quarrel, those dates were symbolic of a wider and deeper European quarrel. That quarrel has long been laid to rest in Europe. So have subsequent and more bitter ones.

The question we face is, will these anniversaries reinforce our spirit of confrontation or will we truly commemorate them as quarrels of the past by finally laying to rest our ancient quarrel?

This party is ready to play its part in that process, however long drawnout. Let us all have the self confidence and real belief in our own traditions to sit down and begin that process.

[From the Christian Science Monitor, Apr. 27, 1989]

**IRELAND'S "STATESMAN OF THE TROUBLES"—
JOHN HUME REDEFINES NORTHERN CON-
FLICT AND SETS FORTH POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
(By T. Patrick Hill)**

John Hume has an unshaken belief in the power of reasonableness.

To him, the resolution of conflict in Northern Ireland will come only by the acceptance of religious diversity—and trustful negotiations over how to "share the island."

As a founder of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, Mr. Hume projects a distinct moral vision unusual in a country torn by sectarian prejudice. Yet his view is one that has earned him grudging recognition from unionists, who favor the continued constitutional link with Britain, as well as respect from nationalists, who want some form of Irish unity.

Hume recalls that the United States Constitution was fashioned in good measure by Irish Presbyterians. They had been driven out of Ireland by religious bigotry and did not want that to happen again. So they helped draft a Constitution, the essence of which is the acceptance of diversity. "And that's my basic philosophy," Hume insisted. "The essence of unity is the acceptance of diversity," he said in a recent interview in London.

It is also the fundamental insight tragically missing in Northern Ireland, Hume believes, and one that cannot be given by outsiders, including the British. The Irish must learn it for themselves, he said.

The difference between Hume and other political leaders in the North is most evident in their definitions of the central problem. Ken Maginnis, a unionist member of

Parliament, believes the overriding issue is violence, which needs to be addressed by military measures and selective internment. But Hume, appalled as he is by the North's incessant bloodshed, sees the violence as a symptom of a deeper friction.

"It's a problem of a conflict of relationships which hasn't been resolved," he explained, referring to relations between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and relations between Britain and Ireland. "But the central relationship is between Protestants and the rest of Ireland, because that's the one that has never been faced up to."

Hume prefers to speak of his political roots as his personal roots. He was born in Derry in 1937. The oldest of seven children, he cannot forget that his father, a Catholic, was unemployed for 20 years and had to struggle even to provide a two-bedroom house. At that time, Derry was a gerrymandered town where, despite a Catholic majority, unionists (Protestants) controlled jobs and housing.

But by his own reckoning, Hume was fortunate. The year he turned 11 was the first year of a state-mandated IQ test. Any child that passed this examination was entitled to free education in preparation for university entrance. It was the break Hume needed to avoid repeating his father's experience.

"I was able to pass that exam, and went on from there right through university," he said. This led to his major role in shaping the history of modern Ireland as a member of the British Parliament at Westminster and the European Parliament in Strasbourg—and to becoming what Barry White, Hume's biographer, calls a "statesman of the Troubles."

After university, Hume returned to Derry in 1960. Conditions had not changed, but attitudes had. Self-help was the order of the day, and he accepted it eagerly. With four others and £5, Hume founded a credit union among the people of the Bogside, a Catholic ghetto. "and that wiped out the loan sharks."

Today the union has 12,000 members with £5 million (\$8.5 million) in assets. Hume also helped to establish a housing association to build homes for Catholics. But when local government denied permission, "We took to the streets in a civil rights movement." From there, it was just a matter of time before he became deeply involved in politics.

Hume advocates talks between unionists and the Dublin government and has outlined for unionists a new and far-reaching proposal: "Go and sort yourselves out with

Dublin to your own satisfaction," he said, emphatically rejecting the inference that this would result in a Dublin takeover.

"Let the agenda be—this is very carefully phrased—how we share the island." To succeed, Hume believes it is imperative that unionists, before they begin talks, get an agreement from Dublin that any resolution has to be endorsed by majorities in both the north and south of Ireland.

"That gives absolute security to the unionist people that nobody is going to try and walk over them. But it also means that, for the first time ever, the people of Ireland as a whole will endorse how Ireland is shared and run. And that removes all justification of violence," he said.

Hume's willingness to include all citizens prompted him, despite considerable political risk, to hold controversial talks last year with the leadership of Sinn Féin, the political wing of the illegal Irish Republican Army (IRA). Hume hoped to persuade Sinn Féin to renounce violence and take up the peaceful search for a new Ireland by addressing them on three specific fronts.

The first is the price of violence. As of last November, 2,705 people had died in Northern Ireland since 1969. Of those, 62 percent were killed by the Provisional IRA and associated paramilitary groups. The IRA has killed more than twice as many Catholics—the very people they claim to defend—as the British security forces have. "Some defenders" Hume concluded.

The second front is the IRA policy of driving Britain from Northern Ireland. Is there any certainty that would result in a united, independent Ireland?

Hume is convinced that if the British leave before there is agreement between the two communities in the North, conditions not unlike those in Lebanon will occur and the gun will become the source of negotiation.

The third is the IRA's justification for the use of force. Its argument has been that the British are in the North defending their own interests by force. But Hume believes that the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement has signaled a significant shift in British policy.

"They have declared their neutrality," he argued, "on the central issue that divides the people of Northern Ireland—union or [Irish] unity." That means that it is a matter of one side—those who want it—persuading those who do not, that unity is in everyone's best interest. "You can't do that by force," Hume said.

The real challenge, he believes, is to break down barriers between Catholic and Protestant citizens, persuade unionists to join nationalists in building a new Ireland, and urge the British to adopt this as their policy.

But whether it is union or unity, only a new Ireland, Hume believes, will be able to meet the challenges of the Europe of 1992.

"The completion of the single market with freedom of movement for people, goods, and services. . . . will have a much greater impact on the daily lives of the people of this island, North and South, than any of the other matters that we spend most of our time discussing," he said.

In Northern Ireland, it is unusual for political leaders to look forward in this way. Hume's ability to do so has been widely recognized in Europe and the U.S. Small wonder that Kevin McNamara, shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, says that John Hume "stands head and shoulders above anyone else in Northern Ireland, and, I believe, in the island of Ireland."