

Olof Palme Memorial Lecture John Hume - November 1990.

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I am very pleased to be here in Leeds tonight to remember a man of very special qualities who devoted his life to sponsoring improvement in his own society and an understanding of the need for real change in the international community.

Olof Palme's record of activity, insight and inspiration on human rights, non-violence disarmament and the creation of a new international economic order could usefully form the subject of lectures commemorating the uninhibited principle which distinguished his work as a Socialist Leader.

However, as someone who was touched by what I knew and saw of Olof Palme I think that it is more important that we try to emulate his approach in the problems that confront us rather than simply commemorate his efforts on those fundamental global issues on which he challenged our attention. Therefore I propose to speak about issues in the immediate political environment within which my party and I operate. This is not to ~~relieve~~ ^{relieve} or postpone the importance of addressing the inequities of the world economic order, the obscenity of armament or war mongering and the need to develop new types of international relationships. Rather it is to recognise that others can perhaps more competently address those issues with us and to suggest that the spirit of his approach can and should be applied to problems in Ireland and between Ireland and Britain.

I would particularly stress that Olof Palme always strove to analyse and tackle problems on a holistic rather than a reductionist basis. He assessed and addressed problems within their wider context and saw that developing new relationships and structures among nations was not an idle and remote game of statecraft but is crucial to providing positive prospects which will touch the lives of ordinary people.

That has very important lessons for Ireland and Britain. Not just with regard to the advisability of developing new processes and structures to advance the totality of relationships between both islands but also to underline the importance of seeing and pursuing those relationships within the context of the changing European order.

That change in the European order is continuing apace at two levels. One is the growing integration of the European Community based on the realisation that the democratic nation state is no longer a sufficient political entity to allow people to have adequate control over the economic and technological forces which affect people's opportunities and circumstances. (The task is to ensure that those arrangements and institutions which develop shared policies and programmes are democratically based. The issue is the need to optimise the real sovereignty of the peoples of Europe rather than ossifying our democratic development around limited notions of national sovereignty which only give space to multi-national vested interest.) I will speak particularly about

the EC context of British-Irish relations.

However, there is a second level on which the European order is changing. The transforming scene in Eastern and Central Europe has opened the prospect of the Common European Home. That has been powerfully symbolised by the Paris Charter signed less than two weeks ago at the meeting of the CSCE.

It was, in a way at least, unfortunate that the Government party in the UK was in the midst of a leadership crisis during the CSCE meeting. I say that, not out of sympathy for the lady or the party, but out of regret that a very important international achievement was overshadowed and is not being sufficiently appreciated in public consciousness.

But an even deeper regret is that Olof Palme was not there to celebrate and enhance that achievement. We should not forget that when Breznev first proposed what is the CSCE the reaction of most people ranged from apathy to cynicism. Above all leaders in the West, Olof Palme saw the attractions even then of pursuing this then obscure facility in international relations. He could see a scenario where such a framework would be accepted as an essential and effective way in which the whole breadth of Europe could enjoy security with each other rather than defence against each other. His whole approach to the arms race and the intensification of military alliances was to cut through the rhetoric of prejudice and suspicion. He proffered the

devastating simplicity that we can only obtain real security with others rather than against others.

Accordingly he advocated not just acceptance of the CSCE model but active development and use of it. Against the indifference and doubts of others Olof Palme has now been vindicated. We will never know whether we could have got further earlier on this road if Olof Palme's gifts had not been so tragically denied to us. We can only speculate on how well he would have challenged Gorbachev and Western Leaders with his vision of the potential for new relationships and his standing as a skilled and sincere advocate.

The process represented by the Paris charter marks fundamental change in the nature of the defence and security debate in Europe. That has significance in British and Irish relationships because it underscores the fact that whatever strategic considerations inspired British attitudes to Ireland in the past are obsolescent if not already obsolete.

This is in turn reinforced by the ongoing development of the European Community. The EC dimension has significance beyond the strategic consideration. It represents a changing economic interface between countries. The process of the Single Europe underlines the fact that whatever economic considerations historically informed British policy on Ireland can no longer be held to apply.

It is notable that Mrs Thatcher, that most dominant premier, in the end fell essentially on the issue of Europe. This indicates just how far reaching; even in crusty Tory quarters, is the re-appraisal of Britain's place in the world in the context of new European configurations. Against that background a re-appraisal of Britain's role in Ireland is hardly refutable.

In a recent far-reaching speech, the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has stated in pretty bald terms that Britain has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Ireland. His assertion is that Britain is not out to manipulate or maintain its presence or partition in Ireland by way of fulfilling British interests. He underlined that Britain is not opposed to political unity in Ireland and went further in saying that if a majority of people in Northern Ireland express a wish for a United Ireland then Britain would make the necessary political provision to facilitate that.

While such expression of Britain's position is novelly lucid, the essence of this position was contained in the Anglo-Irish Agreement signed in 1985. That implicitly declared Britain to be neutral or agnostic on the question of a United Ireland.

As such this removed any possible justification for violence by the IRA or any others claiming to fight for Irish unity or freedom. My party and I see it as part of our task in searching for peace to spell that out to the political leadership of the

republican movement which espouses and uses violence.

Accordingly in talks with Sinn Fein we challenged their justification for violence. As far as they were concerned IRA violence was basically legitimate and effective because it was aimed at removing a British presence in Ireland which was based on strategic and economic self-interest. We offered an alternative analysis of the motives behind Britain's current function in relation to Ireland based on our understanding of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (and the process involved in that agreement) and on our reading of the macro-political changes taking place at the European level. In not succeeding to persuade Sinn Fein of this analysis it was my understanding that they deemed that the evidence to support our contentions was insufficient.

I would contend that the evidence which has mounted since then makes irrefutable our challenge to Sinn Fein's justification for violence. If they held our interpretation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement to be speculative and implicit, Mr Brooke's statement corroborates our case in a way that is both authoritative and explicit. Consistent with our case the ongoing effects of economic integration in the EC increasingly diminish the relevance of notions that Britain does or can defend a singular economic self-interest by its presence and financial outlay, in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, as I have pointed out earlier, both the nature of the EC's development and the factors

represented by the new relationships and role of the CSCE deny realism to the suggestion that Britain's position in Ireland is today guided by strategic interests.

It is of course true that historically British involvement in Ireland was motivated by both strategic sensitivities and economic selfishness. It should not be overlooked that Ireland has had links with Europe going back for centuries evidence of which can still be found in many parts of Europe today. It was precisely those links that brought England into Ireland in the first place because she regarded Ireland as the backdoor for her European enemies. The plantation of Ulster was England's response to O'Neill and O'Donnell's links with Spain. The Act of Union of 1800 was England's response to the French Revolutionary invasion of Ireland.

Now that has all changed. Britain is pooling sovereignty not just with France and Spain but with Ireland and eight other European countries as well. This is fundamentally changing British-Irish relations. The two Governments together participate in the ongoing process to achieve progress across the ever expanding range of Community issues. Common membership of a new Europe moving towards unity has provided a new and positive context for the discussion and exercise of sovereignty in these islands.

This is a context where there is a prevailing acknowledgement

that the nation state is not the last word in polity creation. There is increasing acceptance that policies and agencies operating only on a nation state basis cannot properly cope with wider economic and technological forces and trends which bear on our social circumstances and impact on our environment.

If democracy is to keep pace with reality then we have to operate new frameworks and programmes which can better match the scale and scope of those factors which require democratic control if the needs and will of the people are to prevail. Shared sovereignty and interdependence are therefore the issue because they are the method by which we can optimise democratic policy making in so many matters.

The old traditional notions of absolute and indivisible national sovereignty and territorial jealousy are now so inadequate that their promotion is destructive. It is important that the debate on European harmonisation is based on the right questions - not least in Britain where the utterances of some such as the Bruges Group sound like little more than the National Front on CD. That means not fixing on whether national sovereignty is being diluted but on whether democracy is being diluted.

All this clearly has significance for Ireland given that the historic difficulties in relationships within the island and between Britain and itself have hinged so heavily on attitudes and aspirations concerning sovereignty, territory and the

achievement or maintenance of separateness. The new European scene offers a psychological framework in which such issues can no longer really be pursued in absolutist terms. There is and will be growing appreciation that the value of interdependence can be achieved without sacrificing the validity of independence. The importance of this for a situation which has been described as one of conflicting nationalisms should not be overlooked.

The attitude of "Ourselves Alone " ("Sinn Fein") is certainly not a viable political approach whether it be of the Ulster Unionist or Irish Nationalist variety. Some Irish Nationalists and some Unionists have indicated that they regard European integration as an enemy's "latest trick". For one the EC is suspect because it undermines national sovereignty and the British have particular influence. For the other it undermines U K sovereignty and is a device which will remove the border in Ireland by stealth.

In treating the EC as an alien arrangement contriving threats to their purpose and identity they are on a variation of a theme of the Europhobes in Britain. They are also confirming an inherent lack of self-confidence in the very identity and values which, they claim, distinguish their people. It is hardly surprising that they should believe that European unity, co-operation and pooling elements of sovereignty threaten their position. they hve believed that respectful ccommodation with others on the same island would betray or undermine their

tradition.

It can be argued that experience of the European process is having an educative effect on such attitudes. Issues can be seen in a wider context than the narrow ground of our traditionally disputed local political arena. People can see others with different and marked historical and cultural differences working together, compromising and co-operating without any sacrifice of principle. They see this being done through agreed institutional frameworks.

The EC's structures were designed in such a way that, as well as allowing diverse peoples grow together at their own speed, EC institutions themselves have been allowed to change and develop in their purpose, operation and inter-relationship to keep pace with that growth and social, economic and environmental realities.

There are lessons in that for our quest for political arrangements which must accommodate different interests and identities, promote co-operation, provide for common needs and allow for agreed development and adjustment in the future.

I believe that we are benefitting from exposure to a political ethos and modalities which are not as psychologically restraining as the ethos of 'winner takes all' and the constitutional stagnancy of the British system. Both Unions and

Nationalist have sought to express their rights in terms of their territorial majority and other norms of the British system and nineteenth century nationalism but are now realising that there are other valid norms which we can assimilate.

The changes that have taken place in Europe offer us the challenge and inspiration that bitter conflict and tension can be replaced by co-operation and partnership without anyone being cast as victors or vanquished and without loss of anyone's distinctiveness or identity.

In this regard, it is surely significant that Franco-German reconciliation needed to find a wider forum to bring about the most lasting changes in their respective approaches. The sheer intensity and massiveness of the historical pressures towards division were transformed in the broader context of the original Community.

It is also significant that the Community came into being in limited areas which went to the heart of the relationships between the founding countries. They began with their common ground. They began with coal and steel, the critical products for waging war in Europe and sovereignty was pooled in these areas.

If countries and peoples that slaughtered one another in millions, twice in this century alone, can lay aside their past, can build institutions which respect their differences, which

allow them to work their common ground together, to spill their sweat and not their blood and to grow together at their own speed towards a unity that respects their diversity and evolves through patient agreements, can we on a small island not do likewise?

Indeed given that both parts of Ireland have already voted for that European process, have agreed to the pooling of sovereignty and new relations with Greeks, French, Germans, Spanish, Dutch, Danes etc, is it not long past time when we should build new and agreed relationships with one another?

We should also bear in mind that the Single Europe and the whole 1992 process will have an important impact on the border as we know it in Ireland. This should neither be exaggerated nor under-estimated.

This process will allow the border to ebb substantially from economic life on the island. It also provides a context which will require and should inspire policy programmes and administrative instruments which will be cross-border and all-Ireland in scope. Such a scenario is very well outlined in the Labour Party's Policy Document on Ireland.

This in itself cannot remove the political division. But it will allow the real essence of that division to be addressed rather than being distorted and deepened by economic, social and administrative divergences and rivalries.

It is not panglossian to suggest that people from both traditions in Ireland can absorb the lessons of European harmonisation and achieve convergence in the expression and pursuit of their identities and interests. A European dimension is hardly a new factor in Ireland's long running problems. Remember that events celebrated by Unionists such as the Siege of Derry and the Battle of the Boyne were not just local religious battles. They were part of a much wider European power play. On the Republican and Nationalist side Wolfe Tone is generally regarded as the "father" of Irish republicanism. His inspiration came from the French revolution and its intellectual protagonists while French military assistance was central to his strategy for rebellion.

Therefore both traditions, such as Unionist invocations of "civil and religious liberty" or nationalist espousal of republican ideals, have derived much of their strength or rationale from events or ideals originating elsewhere in the Europe of the past. Is it too much to suggest that we can share together in the spirit of the changing and future Europe?

Having presented the potential for new relationships within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain against the background of a changed and changing Europe I should perhaps indicate something of the role which Ireland might play in that context.

Like Palme's Sweden, Ireland has remained neutral from military

alliances whatever about its democratic or ideological affinities. Current developments serve more to vindicate that position than invalidate it. They do however call for a realignment of that neutrality to update it to present realities and potential achievements.

In this I suggest not that Ireland join NATO, whose relevance is more questionable now than previously. Instead I am suggesting that Ireland can play a particular role in promoting and enhancing the possibilities offered by the CSCE scenario. I believe that it can identify a common cause not just with other neutral Western states but also with countries of central and Eastern Europe who want to escape responsibly from the notion of two military conglomerates. In doing so Ireland can play a role that would complement the efforts of those in NATO member states who want to work to achieve real and complete pan-European security offering true peace rather than maintaining intra-European defensive modes albeit with less tension.

I think that is the challenge that Palme's vision offers to Ireland and as I say it complements the challenge it offers to responsible peace building opinion in Britain.

In the EC context, I think that Ireland has a particularly strong interest in ensuring that EC policy processes and programmes carry a strong regional orientation. This is part of ensuring the democratic effectiveness and legitimacy of the Single Europe