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# Conference 2015: Finance Minister Arlene Foster



21 November 2015

Speech by Finance Minister Arlene Foster to the 2015 DUP Annual Conference.

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**Arlene Foster MLA**  
Minister for Finance and Personnel

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Mr Chairman, Party Leader, fellow Democratic Unionists let me say from the outset what a privilege it is to be standing with Unionists who know what it is to be Standing Up For Northern Ireland.

I want to take this opportunity to pay particular tribute to Peter for his over forty years of public service and for his dedication to this party and the cause of unionism. It has been an honour to serve him as our leader. Peter's dedication to Northern Ireland and to this party cannot be overstated and I know I speak for many when I say we owe you a debt of gratitude for your selfless years of service.

Just six months ago the people of Northern Ireland returned us not only as the largest unionist party – we received more votes than all the other unionists added together – but as the largest party in the Province in both votes cast and seats won.

Together across the country we achieved a tremendous victory and through the confidence placed in us by the people our Westminster Members are working, and winning for Northern Ireland. In Parliament, as elsewhere, it is the DUP that is advancing the Northern Ireland agenda.

I want to particularly acknowledge the time and effort given to the campaign by our party members. In particular we express our delight to once again see a Democratic Unionist MP for East Belfast – Gavin I know will continue to serve his constituents with distinction.

It was with particular joy and satisfaction that we watched as my friend and colleague Nigel Dodds MP was elected to serve the people of North Belfast.

The combined efforts of nationalism were defeated in North Belfast with Nigel winning an increased majority. The disgraceful and sectarian tactics employed by his opponents backfired and the sword of truth cut ribbons through the tissue of lies.

In my neighbouring constituency of Upper Bann unionists resoundingly backed the experience, vigour and common decency of David Simpson and for the third consecutive term he has been returned to speak for Upper Bann in Westminster.

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I want to pay tribute to William for his work in South Antrim. His loss was a disappointment on election night but we will bounce back in South Antrim. William has been a great encouragement to me and I have no doubt he has further public service ahead.

Conference, it is this party that has been to the fore in promoting unionist co-operation for the benefit of unionism. No-where more so than in the great constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone. As the largest unionist party in the area we stood aside to assist in unseating the absent MP Michelle Gildernew. In doing so we secured representation for the people and gave hope for the future.



***I want to thank all the DUP voters for helping win back Fermanagh and South Tyrone for Unionism. And I say unashamedly from this platform today that Mike Nesbitt should never forget that it was not Ulster Unionists who won this seat from Sinn Fein; it was Unionists. When unionists work together with fellow unionists then great things can be achieved.***

Make no mistake, as unionists we are on the march. We are winning the argument that the Union is best for Northern Ireland. The truth is that the Union between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom has never been more secure.

As we survey the political landscape today we do so in grateful appreciation of the sacrifice and service of the brave men and women who heeded our Nation's call to serve. This year, in particular we remember those who made the supreme sacrifice in the First World War 100 years ago. Some of those who fought and died were very young as they went to battle in the Fields of France or the seas around the Gallipoli peninsula. But they went with a sense of pride and a sense of duty.

That same sense of pride and duty was evident in our security forces during our Troubles over the last 40 years as our men and women put their lives and that of their families at risk because of a sense of duty and loyalty.

I know that because my father served as an RUC officer. I remember the days of fear created by terrorist attacks and living in a border area constantly under attack. It was the worst of times but it shaped us, and today we remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice, safe in the knowledge that terror did not triumph over democracy nor will it ever.

The Northern Ireland that many of us grew up in has changed fundamentally. But such change has not happened by accident it has happened through strategic leadership and vision. The place we are proud to call home has been transformed because of the ability to see the woods from the trees and it has been moved forward because of men like our party leader, First Minister Peter Robinson. It is very easy to sit at the side and snarl; it is also simple to be shallow, snide and opportunistic - but when you are the leader of the largest party in Northern Ireland you have the heavy weight of responsibility on your shoulders. Sound bites and uncalled for apologies won't cut the mustard when you are faced with the challenges which have to be confronted over this past number of months. Peter Robinson had led us in negotiations with vigour, determination and he had a plan to succeed. Through his vision we were able to achieve an agreement on Tuesday and the commitments made in it will be good for the people of Northern Ireland. It reminded me of the last verse of a poem which is on the wall of my study at home, by Rudyard Kipling – Ulster 1912

“Believe we dare not boast  
Believe we do not fear  
We stand to pay the cost  
In all that men hold dear  
What answer from the North  
One Law, one land, one throne

If England drive us forth  
We shall not fall alone.”

We must looking forward have a pride, sense of duty and confidence in our own ability to deal with the challenges which lie ahead. We must ‘believe’ in ourselves and in our own identity and in doing so have the confidence to move ahead.

The Agreement deals with terrorist structures; deals with criminality in all its forms through increased resources and a new joint task force to tackle the cancer of paramilitaries. A new monitoring system will be created to monitor any paramilitary and criminal activity.

Our message is clear- if your in the terrorist business get out of it or you will be put out of it.

We have secured a financial package to assist our Province. We have allocated money to help working people and ensured we have a fair but affordable welfare system whilst moving forward to invest in our front line services such as health and education.

This is a good deal developed to deal with the two big issues that almost brought our devolved institutions to an end.

There are some who would have been happy for Direct Rule to return – those people never learn. Let’s just spell out what Direct Rule means for the slow learners

- Water rates
- Higher household rates
- End of industrial de-rating for our manufacturers
- Higher tuition fees
- Stringent cuts to welfare and tax credits
- The end of any prospect of lower corporation tax
- And above all else a failure of local political representatives from across the community to work together to provide stability for the future

Devolution has brought us the ability to craft a Government that is responsive to the needs of all the people of Northern Ireland whilst remaining and valuing our place within the United Kingdom. We have achieved a lot but we can do much more and for our part we pledge to work for the people as well build for the next generation.



***We must build a strong and positive Northern Ireland for all our citizens. I am encouraged that all the opinion polls clearly show that the vast majority of people are happy with the constitutional status of Northern Ireland.***

We must continue to persuade those in the nationalist and republican community that their interests are served by working together in Northern Ireland. All in society will be better served by building a stronger more prosperous Northern Ireland, a Northern Ireland where people want to come to visit, invest and more importantly live in.

And so it is with a growing sense of pride that I look to the Centenary of Northern Ireland in 2021. Many have tried to demean and belittle our beloved country over the years but we proved them all wrong and will continue to do so with a strong lead from this party.

Conference – ours is the party of Northern Ireland.

We are proud to be standing up for Northern Ireland and as we prepare ourselves to take our case to the people in the forthcoming Assembly elections I urge you to renew your determination, to believe in our vision and to look forward with confidence believing that together with humility and hard work we will prevail.

Thank You.

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### DUP Headquarters

91 Dundela Avenue  
Belfast  
BT4 3BU  
United Kingdom  
  
T (028) 9047 1155  
F (028) 9052 1289  
E [info@mydup.com](mailto:info@mydup.com)

