

**PEACE THROUGH THE JOINT DECLARATION
A CHALLENGE TO ALL,
A THREAT TO NONE**

JOHN HUME

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If this crucial time in our history is not to become another of the "ifs" of Irish history, it is a time for deep and immediate reflection by all sections of our people and in particular by all our political parties. Let none of us forget that the Provisional IRA and its members are a product of, among other things, the traditional nationalist philosophy with which we all grew up. A philosophy that the essence of patriotism - a la 1916 - was the nobility of dying for Ireland and struggling against the British occupation of Ireland. All the major parties in the Dail were born out of that philosophy and their founders were the progenitors of it. Let me quote the unanimous declaration of Dail Eireann, not 1918 but 1949:

"Solemnly reasserting the indefeasible right of the Irish Nation to the unity and integrity of the national territory.

"Reaffirming the sovereign right of the people of Ireland to choose its own form of government and, through its democratic institutions, to decide all questions of national policy, free from outside interference.

"Repudiating the claim of the British Parliament to enact legislation affecting Ireland's national territorial integrity in violation of those rights, and

"Pledging the determination of the Irish people to continue the struggle against the unjust and unnatural partition of our country until it is brought to a successful conclusion:

"Places on record its indignant protest against the introduction in the British Parliament of legislation, purporting to endorse and continue the existing partition of Ireland, and "Calls upon the British Government and people to end the present occupation of our six North - Eastern counties and thereby enable the unity of Ireland to be restored and the age long difference between the two nations brought to an end".

If any politician in Dail Eireann were to make that declaration today he or she would rightly be accused of using Provo language. I reiterate all of that to underline that it is the responsibility of all of us, particularly Southern Nationalism to do everything in our power to remove the last remaining legacy of that attitude and to bring Sinn Fein, the IRA - its members and supporters - aboard the mass movement that is now afoot for the totally peaceful resolution of our conflict, the consistent victims of which have been the Catholic population of Northern Ireland. Let us not forget either that in the 1918 elections it was the Catholic population in the six North - Eastern counties that were the only people in Nationalist Ireland who did not vote Sinn Fein, particularly the people of West Belfast, because they instinctively were aware of the real Irish problem since they lived right on the front line and have been throughout our history the main victims of the sectarian pogroms of every generation.

The first major challenge to that traditional nationalist thinking in this century came from within the North through the civil rights movement, the first major step on the road to a peaceful and final resolution of our problem with its demand for equality of treatment for all our people in housing, jobs and voting rights.

The next step on that road is reconciliation among our divided people since reconciliation can only take place on the basis of equality. That reconciliation or healing process will lead in time to an entirely new Ireland based on agreement and on respect for our diverse traditions and whose model will probably be very different from any of the traditional models of the past.

In my first election in 1969 my central point in challenging traditional nationalism was that it was the people of Ireland who were divided not the territory and that such division could only be healed by agreement. Our party - the SDLP - was the first

party to put the word consent into its original constitution. That word is now central to the approach of all parties in the Dail and indeed Sinn Fein in the very flexible language that they have used throughout the public debate on the peace process have also moved in that direction given that they have publicly agreed that any final solution must involve the agreement of our divided people, an agreement which must earn the allegiance and agreement of all our traditions.

Charles Haughey was the first Taoiseach to put the Northern problem back in its proper context with the Anglo-Irish Council set up in 1981. The context of the problem, the British-Irish context is the only context for a solution. Garret Fitzgerald and Peter Barry developed that approach considerably in the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Indeed when history is written that agreement, particularly Article 1C will be seen to have been the first major step in the current peace process when it declared that if the people of Ireland North and South reached agreement on Irish unity that the British Government would legislate for it. On that basis I pointed out that the British Government had now declared its neutrality on the question of Irish unity and had therefore removed any justification for the use of physical force. Sinn Fein engaged in public debate with myself and the SDLP a debate which led to our first public talks with them in 1988. Afterwards the debate continued on their stated reasons for armed struggle and that public debate led to Peter Brooke's November 1990 speech making very clear that Britain had no longer any selfish interest in Northern Ireland either economic or strategic. That continuing debate led to my private talks with Gerry Adams, talks in which we made publicly clear that our objective was a total cessation of violence and agreement involving both Governments and all parties, an agreement which would have to have the allegiance and agreement of all traditions.

Albert Reynolds and Dick Spring did not just carry on the debate. They took action leading to the Joint Declaration in which for the first time a British Government defined the problem clearly and committed itself to promoting agreement among the people North and South and to legislating for any agreement that emerged from the representatives of the people North and South, acting without external impediment. Self-determination!

I reiterate all of that to underline that in the past 20 years an intensive debate has gone on within and throughout the traditional nationalist community North and South leading to a fundamental re-appraisal and a clear commitment that any final solution must not only be based on agreement among our divided people but must also respect the diversity of our people as well.

Throughout that time no debate of any description has taken place among Unionists. Both leaders who tried were brought down by physical force, physical force supported by both the DUP and OUP. The price that the people of Ireland have paid, particularly the Catholic community in the North has not been spelt out very often by us since we are anxious to leave the past behind. However, at this time let us spell it out. The Unionists brought the gun into Irish politics in this century. The British Parliament voted clearly for Home Rule for Ireland in 1912. It was not independence, it was autonomy within the UK. Yet the Unionists, overthrew it by the physical force of the UVF. It should be pointed out that the fundamental basis of the rule of law in the UK is the sovereignty of parliament. It was overthrown. The price that the people of Ireland and the Northern Catholic community in particular paid for that totally undemocratic act has been terrible. The basis of the rule of law - agreement on how we are governed - has never obtained since in Northern Ireland. Instead the UVF's reward was the setting up of Northern Ireland, based on a sectarian headcount to assure one party rule. Throughout the seventy years of that government and parliament

the Catholic community was subject to awful discrimination on all fronts. Successive Prime Ministers boasted that they never employed a Catholic. Catholics could not even join the Unionist party even if they had wanted to!

Then when Terence O'Neill tried to gently change the atmosphere he was brought down by the first violence of the past 25 years by the Ulster Protestant Volunteers and indeed their sectarian mob attacks on West Belfast, the burning down of Bombay Street and the killing of nine Catholics in one night led to the birth of the Provisional IRA. Then when Brian Faulkner reached agreement with the SDLP and the Irish Government they brought down the first mixed government we ever had again by an open coalition involving the DUP, OUP and the loyalist paramilitaries. Since then there has been no indication of any description from Unionist political leadership of any wish to face up to the central problem of reaching agreement with the rest of us. Indeed since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 they refused to talk to anyone until 1991! Since then the odd one of them who had the courage to even suggest a move has had to withdraw quickly under the force of Dr Paisley who is in practice the true leader of the Ulster Unionist people in the eyes of the world. Sadly the very positive and honourable quality of that people have no political leadership whatsoever.

In spite of all that what is quite remarkable and quite unnoticed is that the vast majority of the Catholic population in spite of the raw bigotry and injustice have never sought any form of revenge, have totally opposed and never been involved in any violence and have simply sought equality of treatment and agreement. Indeed in those areas of Northern Ireland where the SDLP is in clear majority the policy of respect for both traditions is clearly put into practice. The city of Derry the second city which was the worst example of extreme injustice and discrimination under the Unionist regime is a very powerful

example of the SDLP policy of respect for both traditions put into practice.

All of which brings me to the central issue that must be resolved if we are to at last produce lasting peace on this island - The attitude and methods of Sinn Fein and the IRA. In spite of the fact that they are a product of our history, as is their philosophy the major responsibility rests on them and them alone to recognise that their philosophy is out of date and that there is no justification of any description for their methods. These points have been central to my public and private dialogue with them. I was the first politician to publish in detail the statistics of death throughout the past 25 years. Those statistics reveal that republicans have killed six times more human beings than the British Army, the RUC and the UDR together. More than half of their own members were killed by themselves. The pattern of the violence also reveals that every year more than half of all people killed were innocent civilians. Even if one believed in militarism how could that be justified particularly when the clear pattern of killing innocent civilians will continue.

The dialogue concentrated heavily on the political reasons for the IRA campaign because they believed in those reasons, which are traditional Irish republican reasons and which are the reasons that motivate them. Put succinctly those reasons, which are very public, are that the British are in Ireland defending their own economic and strategic interests by force. My argument was that while these reasons did exist in the past and that while the British position historically was due to Ireland's links with Spain and France and Britain's wish to close the back door to her European enemies that was no longer true in today's new Europe where Britain is sharing sovereignty not just with Ireland but with all her former European enemies down the centuries. The legacy of that past remains. We are a deeply divided people. That is today's clear problem and it cannot be solved by any form

of force or coercion. The final reason given by Sinn Fein is that the British are also preventing the Irish people from exercising the right to self determination. My response to that is that the facts are that the people of Ireland, unfortunately, are divided on how that right is to be exercised and it can only be brought about by agreement between the people North and South and the real task was to harness all resources, particularly the British Government's to bring about such agreement. Their challenge to me was to prove all that.

I kept both Governments fully informed throughout of the nature of my dialogue with Sinn Fein, though I emphasised that the dialogue was my responsibility, not theirs, and I would take full responsibility for it.

The result was the Joint Declaration in which the British Government make clear not only that it has no longer any selfish, strategic or economic interests in Ireland but that it is for the people of Ireland alone North and South to come to agreement and that the British Government is committed not only to promoting such agreement but to legislating for whatever its outcome. Clear self determination!

It is worth also pointing out that the change in the historic British position is not just a matter for direct clarification by the British Government. They are now committed to it in international agreements with other Governments. European Union commits all 12 countries to an "ever closer union" between the peoples of Europe. That clearly means an ever closer union among the people of Ireland as well as between Britain and Ireland and 10 other countries. Borders are gone all over Europe. The Irish border in real terms is also gone except for the British army checkpoints. The IRA could remove those tomorrow by laying down their arms. The real world in Ireland then will be that there is no border, there is free movement of goods, people and services and the activity that would arise from that will consistently break down the real border in Ireland, which is in

the hearts and minds of our people.

The challenge to the IRA and Sinn Fein is clear. There is no justification of any description for the taking of a single human life. Let them lay down their arms and join everyone else in the real task of breaking down those barriers in our hearts and minds and in tackling the real human problems of economic deprivation which is what politics is really about - the right to a decent existence for all our people in their own land. They cannot be unaware of the mass movement and strength of the Irish at home and abroad that the peace process has created and that strength will achieve more than any guns or bombs without any human tragedies.

Given the personal commitment that I have given to that process I think that I am entitled to ask them to do that now. For the first time in 70 years the energies and talents of all Irish people at home and abroad including the enormous political clout of our friends in the US and Europe would be united and at our disposal. The real challenge to the IRA now is - are you in the genuine Republican tradition of Tone which is to unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter which clearly cannot be done by force or are you in the territorial tradition of the Defenders, a tradition of no hope?

As for the British Government, John Major has put peace in Ireland at the top of his agenda, the place where it should be because it is the greatest human problem facing his Government and there is deep appreciation of him for that throughout this whole island. What is deeply resented in Ireland is that certain of his backbenchers for purely internal party reasons are putting obstacles in his way. If the killing that is taking place on our streets were taking place in the streets of Britain, would they not give him a carte blanche to do everything in his power including direct dialogue if he deemed it necessary.

Their defence is that they are protecting the interests of the Unionist people. Are they? The bottom line of the Prime Minister's position, the Irish Government's position and indeed my own position is agreement among our divided people. Agreement threatens no section of our people. Indeed it is the ultimate guarantee to the Unionist people challenging them to recognise that they must trust themselves, stand on their own feet and for the first time reach an agreement which will protect forever their heritage and their tradition. Their real strength lies in their geography, their numbers and their convictions because our problem cannot be solved without them. Their refusal to do so since 1912 has been an enormous cost to the people of Britain and Ireland.

The irony is that the British Government has made very far reaching agreements on their behalf over their heads with the peoples of Europe who have far less in common with them than their neighbours in the island of Ireland. Indeed if the Unionists continue to refuse, led by Dr Paisley, to reach agreement and rely on the British Government and Parliament to sustain the unacceptable status quo instead of tackling the fundamental problem of agreement and persuading them to reach such agreement would those backbenchers care to reflect on Winston Churchill's foresight in 1912 when he said in opposition to Bonar Law's support for the UVF's opposition to Home Rule and insistence on the Unionist veto:

"Half a province cannot obstruct forever the reconciliation between the British and Irish peoples". The peoples of both islands, particularly the people of Northern Ireland have paid a terrible price for ignoring his advice. Will the Conservative Right Wing take his advice now or are they more British than Churchill?