

**Hume, John.** (2001). Address by John Hume, MP, MEP, then SDLP leader, at the Labour Party Conference, in Brighton, England, (1 October 2001), [PDF; KB]. Derry: SDLP. ... [24118] - [Address]

## **SPEECH FOR JOHN HUME AT LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE 2001**

Welcome everyone.

We meet at a time when the world is facing the consequences of the tragic events in the United States. The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon show just how much damage that violence can do to a country, to people and to commerce.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my, and my party's deep sympathy to all the people of the United States, and especially to those who suffered the terrible pain of losing a loved one. To President Bush, his Senate and his Congress, I send my very best wishes in what must surely be a difficult and demanding time, and our thoughts are with all those charged with the responsibility of planning a course ahead.

Tony Blair will also feel the immense weight of responsibility at this time, but he has shown before that he has courage and wisdom, not least in making the peace process in Northern Ireland a top priority for him and his Government. Here at the Labour Party conference I congratulate him on winning an historic second term for his party, and on his performance on the world stage since September 11th. I also want to express my deep gratitude to the Prime Minister and his Government for the priority they have been given the peace process in Northern Ireland and the detailed work they have done to promote its full implementation.

We meet here against the backdrop of continued loyalist violence in Northern Ireland. There is no doubt that certain paramilitaries are actively working to overthrow the Good Friday Agreement. The recent appalling murder of Martin O'Hagan is a dreadful example of that. I would like to express my deepest sympathy to the family of this outstanding journalist.

It is quite clear that those behind this murder and the ongoing campaign to promote sectarianism which is taking place across Northern Ireland are doing so primarily to ensure that there is no restoration of law and order. They want to continue with their Mafia activities, and their drug dealing operations.

I want to see every effort being made to bring those behind such activities to justice, and to make sure that the destruction they bring to Northern Ireland is a thing of the past.

Another aspect of the difficulties facing the building of our new society is the uncertainty facing the institutions. Central to peace and stability is the full implementation of the Agreement in all its aspects. It is quite clear that immediate steps to resolve the decommissioning issue would be an extremely positive development. It would ensure the strength of our institutions, which is, as I have said, crucial to our objective of building a new society, and strengthening our economic situation. I call on those with influence to use that influence now to bring about a swift resolution of the arms issue so that we can get on with the job leaving our past behind us.

Decommissioning is an essential aspect of the Good Friday Agreement, not simply a Unionist demand. I hope it will start soon. Let me say also that there should be no attempt by any party to use the working of the institutions as a bargaining chip. Seeking to exclude any party from the process will not resolve the situation; it will only make it worse.

As I keep repeating, because it is so powerful, we should not forget that for the first time in our history, the people of Ireland have spoken on how they wish to live together when they overwhelmingly endorsed by the Good Friday Agreement. Therefore it is our democratic duty to implement the will of

the people and I hope that all parties commit themselves to ensuring in the near future that the institutions are fully in place, and that all of us are engaged in real politics so that by working together we can build a new society.

There are positive signs. Last week a new Programme for Government was produced by the Executive. Mark Durkan also launched his second budget, a budget agreed by the Executive, a budget which puts more money into Health, Education, roads, our infrastructure and every other aspects of local government. Since we were last in Brighton, Foot and Mouth has been dealt with in Northern Ireland in a thorough fashion which could never have been delivered through direct rule.

The Agreement works. The Assembly works. The Executive works and has proved that it can deliver. We must not, we cannot and we will not allow it to fall.

Let me draw attention to another development of a positive nature in Northern Ireland. That development is of course the dawn of a new beginning for Policing. Now for the first time in our history, a Police Service which can have the allegiance of the entire community is within our grasp. People can take it for granted that the SDLP voice will not only be there, it will be heard. We will work to develop the new Policing Service, a service which everyone can support and join.

In developing that service crucial decisions, including the scrapping of plastic bullets, must be made. Unlike other parties we will not shirk our responsibilities and will play a major role in the decision making process to govern that new service.

Now as the world lives through the dark consequences of the horror of September 11th, there is a natural world-wide concentration on conflict resolution. We the people of Northern Ireland are in a position to offer the world some much needed good news. We can show the world that dialogue, politics and leadership can map a course away from despair, darkness and death. We can highlight the fact that there is a better way, and we can do that through making the Good Friday Agreement a beacon for the world in these dark and uncertain times. We can and we must lead the way. Let all parties do so.

ENDS Date 01/10/01