

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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# SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY

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## PRESS RELEASE

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18th April, 1980.

STATEMENT BY MR JOHN HUME, SDLP PARTY LEADER AND EURO MP  
AT THE END OF THE PARALLEL CONFERENCE AT STORMONT, ON  
18TH APRIL, 1980.

There has been much speculation in recent days about a ready made plan which the British Government is about to hand down as a solution to the Northern Ireland problem. In my view no such plan exists. What does exist is a firm intention to act and so the next few months will be quite crucial as the British Government starts to face up to the problem. We in the SDLP welcome the fact that at last a British Government is going to begin to get to grips with a problem that has caused so much suffering and anguish to so many. However when they do finally apply their minds to it their ultimate success or failure will be determined, not by their willingness to listen to what people do not want because negative political attitudes have been at the heart of what is wrong in Northern Ireland but by their willingness to face up to the genuine issues.

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The next six months will therefore be a time of great opportunity. It will also be a time of great danger for if the real issues are not faced up to the result will be failure and this last state will be worse than the first. There is little to be gained in paying much attention to those "wet" voices who urge caution because this or that issue is unpalatable to this or that interest and therefore cannot be faced. Such an attitude is a certain recipe for failure. There are clear issues to be faced, they go right to the heart of the problem and they are self-evident to any objective observer of the scene. In our view there are three central questions - the relationship between the different sections of the community in Northern Ireland, the relationships between North and South in Ireland and the relationships between Britain and Ireland. They are all inter-related and underlying them all is the provision to lasting peace and security.

Neither should there be the false assumption that the placing of certain issues on the agenda represents victory or defeat for this or that interest. The only victory will be lasting peace and it should not be beyond our wit or ingenuity to devise structures which will give not only protection to all the different interests but a positive constructive role to them in any future arrangements. Those who oppose the placing of these issues on any agenda, however "moderate" or "liberal" their voices may sound are in effect among the real enemies of peace on this island for their attitudes are attitudes that will prolong the suffering. Does anyone in his heart really believe, for example, that one can create lasting peace in this island without settling

the relationships between North and South? In Edward Carson's prophetic words come to mind, speaking in the House of Commons on 13th June, 1912 "The only way you can treat Ireland, having regard to her special conditions is to treat her as one entity by this Imperial Parliament and the moment you try to alter that, the idea of governing Ireland with anything like peace falls away".

The placing of the North-South relationship on any agenda should therefore not be seen in terms of victory by the South over the North but as a genuine bid to create an agreed and lasting relationship that will be to the benefit of all, the fruits of which will be lasting peace.

The acceptance of the issues for an agenda logically predetermine who should be the participants in any discussion on them. Here again the voices of caution will be raised. They are not the voices of reality. There can be no lasting settlement to the problems of this island which does not involve the Government of the Republic of Ireland. Apart from the fact that the attitude of those political leaders who oppose such participation reflects a remarkable lack of self-confidence on their own part to defend the interests of the people they represent and to win positive gains at such a conference, it also flies in the face of the real situation. Those same political leaders are hard and constant in their demand that it is the duty of the Irish Government to play a major role in providing security for the people of Northern Ireland. This they have done, to a degree that has been publicly acknowledged by

the British Government, and at a great cost to the people of the Republic. This effort has been made to provide security for a part of Ireland over which they have no jurisdiction and for whose affairs they have had no responsibility. Is it reasonable or realistic to argue that that Government should have no say whatsoever in any future arrangements - just that they stand aside and be expected to pay a high price yet again if such arrangements break down?

The loudest voices of protest to such an approach will come from Unionist leadership. But it is time to firmly examine their reasons. They have not distinguished themselves in the past, to put it mildly, in their handling of this Government of Northern Ireland any more than they do at present in exercising the limited powers they exercise in local Government. And they should be reminded again of Churchills warning in 1912 "Half a province cannot obstruct forever the reconciliation between the British and Irish democracies".

Surely it is time for the Unionist people to come out from behind the negative slogans that have sheltered them for so long and to bring into play their positive talents that they have in plenty - surely it is not beyond the ingenuity and skill of people whose forebears played such a major role in the drafting of the American Constitution and the creation of a powerfully pluralist society from such diverse elements to do likewise for the people of these islands?

What is required is not the will to achieve victory for that abounds in plenty on all sides, but the will to achieve a solution. And the price is peace.