



SDLP

Social Democratic & Labour Party

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As Member of Parliament (Westminster) for the constituency of Foyle, comprising the mainly nationalist towns of Derry and Strabane, and as a Member of the European Parliament for all of Northern Ireland, I am acutely aware of the deep-seated unemployment problems afflicting our community. My party and I are committed to working peacefully, persistently and constructively to alleviate those problems.

The Unemployment rate in Northern Ireland is officially said to be 23% but my party believe the real figure to be higher. In some particular areas of the region such as Strabane it is over 50% of the male population. Such areas of high unemployment are invariably mainly Catholic or nationalist. Unemployment is much higher among Catholics than Protestants. Historic reasons for this include the adverse effects of the border on the economic life of areas such as my own constituency, practice of discrimination by employers and discrimination by the old Unionist government (abolished in 1972) in its public expenditure and industrial policies neglecting more Catholic area.

In founding our own party out of the Civil Rights Movement it was our hope to redress these problems along with issues of housing, government structures and practices and the need for reconciliation among our people. We have made progress on many fronts, seeing the abolition of the old Unionist regime and now the creation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the establishment of a non-biased housing agency which has greatly improved our housing situation and the establishment of a Fair Employment Agency to help combat discrimination with the enactment of a Fair Employment Act.

The lack of progress in improving the relative employment situation of Catholics has its roots in several factors. Northern Ireland has lost thousands of jobs due to world recession and British government monetarist policies which my party has always opposed. We have also lost jobs and investment because of unrest and violence. The New Ireland Forum published a report which indicated that 39,000 jobs were lost between 1970 and 1979 due to violence, these losses were mainly in Catholic areas where the IRA bombed and shot "economic targets". It is also a fact that despite a degree of success the FEA did not have sufficient weight to attack discrimination on the scale required.

It is important to note the role played by job losses in frustrating any improvement in the situation. My party sees investment and job creation as being an essential ingredient to improve the position of our people. We are of course pressing for much stronger anti-discrimination measures with more power going to the FEA to enforce and police properly Fair Employment principles as such change is also essential.

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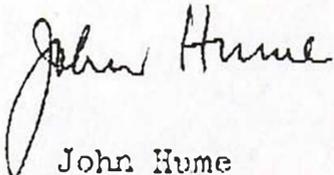
The message for people in America who want to help to improve things in Ireland is to use whatever influence they have in a positive way to create investment in areas of high unemployment. That is the most immediately effective way of improving the employment position of Catholics.

I know that there is genuine concern to help among Americans including that expressed by many who support the MacBride Principles. My own party has a charter for Fair and Just Employment which covers all the main points in those principles and others which they miss and puts all this in the context of an actual operative framework that can translate them into practices rather than just leaving them hanging there as general principles.

While applauding the sincerity of people supporting the MacBride Principles, I am concerned that they are missing some of the basic points about our unemployment/discrimination problem. I am particularly concerned that some impressions of these Principles or the campaign for them has already served to discourage potential investment in Northern Ireland and could certainly do so in the future. We need every encouragement for every bit of investment that could come our way. A campaign which gives potential employers the impression that investment in Northern Ireland will be fraught with political problems, or be the cause of shareholder or customer campaigns, might help other areas to attract that investment instead but it will not help areas of high unemployment in Northern Ireland.

The people in these areas need investment creating jobs and they need legislation and a public agency in Northern Ireland to ensure that access to those jobs is fair. This applies principles of fair employment where it matters, giving full assistance to the conscientious employer and sanctioning the defaulter. Only an approach offering the creation of jobs as well as principles and procedures which can secure practices of fair employment can offer hope to those caught in our unemployment/discrimination bind.

I should briefly stress that as a sponsor of the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement, I fully support sanctions against Apartheid. I do not accept the equation which some make between the MacBride Principles and such sanctions. No serious student of the politico-economic framework of either region could support a case that the problems of Unemployment and discrimination in Northern Ireland can be solved by measures which are designed to help bring down a particular regime. Also the equation would suggest a disinvestment motivation in the MacBride Principles which I know many of their proponents have very clearly denied.



John Hume