

**Hume, John.** (1973). Extracts from Address by John Hume, to the Merriman Summer School, Scarriff, County Clare, on 26 August 1973. (Reported in *The Irish Times*, 27 August 1973).

The only people in Ireland who could resolve the issues between Ireland and Britain, with recurring violence and death were the Northern Unionists .... They should hold their heads high and ask Britain to stand aside while they negotiated a lasting settlement to the problems of Ireland with the rest of the people of Ireland.

The importance of Irish sovereignty should not be underestimated as it was at the moment by most Irish political parties. Ireland's entry in the EEC had given strength to our independent position.

Economically she was not so related to Britain as she had been.

Mr De Valera's greatest contribution to the nation had been his insistence on the total sovereignty of the Twenty-Six counties. The External Relations Act was a demonstration of this.; Ireland's neutrality during the last war was another. The return of the ports and the 1937 Constitution were also important. Although historians would argue that this legislation intensified a difference between North and South and between Catholic and Protestant in the North and that they hardened the intransigencies of the Unionists, this was not true. They might be true in the short-term but in the long-term the emergence of an independent sovereign state in one part of Ireland would turn out in the end to be the most powerful influence in reaching a final settlement and in the coming crucial negotiations on Anglo-Irish relations would be supremely important.

There were two central themes in Anglo-Irish relations, the internal relations between Catholic and Protestant in Ireland and Anglo-Irish relationships. This was so in 1921 and it was also so today.

Partition was a settlement that nobody wanted, and it had not worked. The Unionists had been given a dominant position and they had maintained it solidly. Their attitude was, "what we have we hold" and of "no surrender". This siege mentality was based on a deep-seated insecurity and was maintained under the premierships of Craigavon and Brookeborough. It meant total political, social and economic discrimination against Catholics.

The Nationalists on the other hand did not believe the State would last. This led to their abstentionism and permanent opposition because they had no hope of achieving change. They became the representatives of the under-privileged in the North. Placed in such a hopeless situation they became inevitably extremely negative in their attitude.

People often ask why there was no development of the labour movement in the North. This could be traced to the fact that the North was founded on a sectarian headcount. This was why it was obvious that Northern Ireland's problem could never be solved in the context of the Six-County area. This was a fact that Britain consistently refused to face.

In the South during the period of the premiership of Mr De Valera and before very little attention had been paid to the North. No Irish political party had put forward a programme for Irish unity, for instance. There had admittedly been considerable achievements in the Republic. De Valera had taken Collins seriously in his statement that the meant freedom to achieve freedom. He had proceeded to dismantle the Treaty step by step and he had used the strength of his position to establish the sovereignty of the country.

The explanation of the apathy in the South towards the North could be traced to the tensions which followed the Civil War and the fact that the South was engaged in the task of building its own institutions. What was incontrovertible, however, was that the North and South grew apart.

Mr DeValera himself had admitted that he had little knowledge of Northern Ireland. This in itself became an encouragement to the Unionists to increase their dominance.

A situation then existed in which 23% of the Irish people or 2% of the population of the United Kingdom were dictating relations between Ireland and Britain at a very great price. A great deal of the history of the last 300 years has been related to the whittling away of the power of the Protestant ascendancy. The Unionists must realise that their real security could only lie in the community of Ireland.

The present government should not underestimate the strength of its independent sovereign position in the crucial months ahead., nor should it surrender any part of that position to the false liberalism of placating the Northern Unionists that same attitude of placation had governed British attitudes towards Ireland for the past three centuries with very tragic results. This was not time for any Irish Government to allow its policies to be governed by the same attitudes. Only when the question of the sovereignty of the island of Ireland had been settled could there be any real or meaningful generosity on all sides. The Unionists had the key to achieving that situation by asking Britain to stand aside while they agree with their fellow-countrymen on the conditions for a new Ireland, independent and sovereign.