

Address by Mr. John Hume, Deputy Leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party of Northern Ireland at the Second Annual "Ireland Fund" Dinner in New York, May 18, 1977.

I was honoured to receive the invitation of The Ireland Fund to be present here tonight. While your organisation is new you have already shown that you are dedicated to helping Ireland in a practical manner and particularly to helping in a completely non-sectarian manner those of my countrymen and women-and the children of Ireland - who carry the greatest social, mental or physical handicaps.

Your charity and dedication are in line with the traditions of concern and generosity which the people of America and the Irish in America have always shown for the Irish people at home right from the very foundation of the United States of America.

In showing this concern Americans are giving expression in an Irish context to those propositions which stand at the heart of their own country.

It is now almost two hundred years since the United Irishmen - that Society to which Ireland owes its Republican tradition - made the following statement in the year 1797:-

"This Society (The Society of United Irishmen) is constituted for the purpose of forwarding a brotherhood of affection, a community of rights, and a union of power among Irishmen of every religious persuasion; and thereby to obtain a complete

reform in the legislature, founded on the principles of civil, political, and religious liberty."

In making this statement the United Irishmen, many of them Presbyterians from the northern part of Ireland, were expressing for Ireland ideals which already had their close counterpart inscribed in the American Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution of the United States:-

"that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness - That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed...."

(and for the Constitution:)

"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution...."

The similarity and congruence of the words of the United Irishmen in Ireland and the American Founding Fathers should not surprise us. Not only were "American ideas" in the air in Ireland, in Dublin and in Belfast, but Irishmen, mostly Northern Presbyterians, were closely and actively associated with the deliberations that led to the American Declaration and Constitution - men like Thomas McKean, George Taylor and John Dunlap.

It is in keeping with these great American charters that the United States of America today forms a unity in diversity, a land whose richness is that it encompasses many traditions and excludes no person on the grounds of sex, religion or racial origin. No tradition has the exclusive right to the definition of American, no section dominates. Instead all are woven together, without loss of distinctiveness, and your land is richer because of its differences.

In Ireland too the ideals of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, the ideals of the United Irishmen of forwarding a brotherhood of affection, a community of rights and a union of power among Irishmen of every religious persuasion, these ideals were to inspire our finest civil traditions. The flag of Ireland became the tricolour of Green, White and Orange - White symbolising the United Irishmen's ideal of a brotherhood of affection between Irishmen of the older, mostly Catholic and Gaelic, Green tradition and the newer Irishmen, Protestant and often Presbyterian by tradition, whose symbol is the colour Orange.

The tragedy for Ireland today is that this self-same ideal - unity in diversity - which has such relevance to a solution to the Irish problem today and which was so clearly enunciative of Northern Irishmen in America, has not been handed down in the land from which they sprung.

For in Ireland something has gone very wrong. In the North of Ireland especially something today is very seriously wrong indeed: in an area almost the size of Connecticut over 5,000 bombs have exploded in the past seven years; almost 18,000 people have been injured; over 1,700 people have been killed, - mostly civilians, men, women and children endowed by their Creator with the right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness; death and maiming, a strange way to forward a brotherhood of affection between Irishmen of every religious persuasion.

It is not my purpose to apportion blame. There have been faults on both sides of the Community where Catholic Irishman is separated from Protestant Irishman by corrugated iron fences, by barbed wire, and lines of British soldiers. Ireland's Protestant tradition - a long and proud tradition in the history of Ireland - has tragically fallen in Northern Ireland in many cases into the hands of a negative and sterile leadership that hides behind negative and sterile slogans such as "no surrender - not an inch - what we have we hold", a negative and sterile attitude that is headed towards long-term failure, confrontation and death, because it refuses to recognise the existence of another tradition in the community. It is an attitude which may be summed up in the words "ourselves alone".

In recent weeks there have been happenings that have given hope to some that the Protestant tradition in Ireland will again discover its true heritage and its adherence to the concept of civil and religious liberty. Leadership has been given, not by the leaders but by the led, as ordinary men and women courageously and on some occasions with their lives, rejected a blatant attempt at creating outright sectarian domination. One hopes that this will be the first step in a new concept of leadership that will emphasise togetherness rather than separation as the basis of a stable and lasting peace.

On the other hand the Irish Nationalist tradition - a tradition with which the majority of Irish people and most Irish-Americans would identify - appears in its more extreme instances to have lost its way; to have forgotten that its flag demands equality and brotherhood between Irishmen of every religious persuasion and ethnic background; to have become slogan minded and anti-people as if to say (as used to be said more widely before Vatican II) that "error has no rights", that people do not matter, that it is patriotic to unite a piece of earth irrespective of what the people on that piece of earth think; the attitude of mind that believes it is even right to do so by force; that it is right to die for it and that it is right to kill for it and to daily murder the concept of brotherhood in Ireland. This is also an exclusivist attitude. Both these exclusivist attitudes - the attitude of exclusive

Protestant domination and the exclusivist romantic activist attitude - are bent on destroying one another, on destroying their own traditions and the very concept of the United Irishman. Both these exclusivist attitudes are only too ready to invoke the Divine sanction while denying to their fellow countryman his Divinely endowed rights to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.

I am glad of the opportunity to say here in New York, unequivocally and clearly that when Senator Kennedy and Governor Carey spoke out recently against the use of violence in Ireland and against the organisations who perpetrate it they were speaking for the vast mass of the people of Ireland and their words were widely applauded. It is somewhat ironic that those who criticize them in the U.S. do so in the name of Human Rights in Ireland when in fact what Governor Carey and Senator Kennedy are doing is taking a strong stand in defence of the most fundamental human right of all - the right to life - and in condemnation of those organisations in Ireland who would deny that right. When the right to life itself is threatened in any society that society itself becomes brutalised and all human rights are threatened.

Senator Kennedy and Governor Carey, along with their colleagues, Senator Moynihan and Speaker O'Neill, are in the finest traditions of the United States of America in upholding the right to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

They have also underlined the fact that all men, whatever their ethnic origin or religious allegiance, are created equal and that Governments must derive their just powers from the Consent of the Governed. This is particularly relevant to the North of Ireland today and it is because of these facts - the necessity of equality, the necessity of consent - that the brotherhood which the United Irishmen have made explicit in the words "Equal, full and adequate representation" can now be promoted only by a partnership between the two Irish traditions. The road towards that partnership will be long and hard; it will take long and patient years; it will require long and unspectacular thought and labour.

But there must be a beginning, a first step in what may well be a journey of a thousand leagues, for there are no longer any instant answers.

There are no longer any instant answers because legislation condemning discrimination in employment will always be difficult to apply and easy to evade, at least in the private sector, while there are still not enough jobs to go around and those who have jobs are unwilling to lose them for themselves or their families. There are no instant answers because two mutually suspicious and antagonistic orthodoxies, each possessed of its own self righteousness, will each require patient and difficult periods of self-reflection, if their adherents are to develop the moral courage to overcome

their divisiveness. There are no instant answers because without the development of an economic and spiritual climate the poor will lack hope, and poor men-and poor children-in either camp will the more easily be stirred by demagogues to wreak their mutual destruction.

There is often a thrill about such bloodshed, a thrill of excitement or a thrill of horror, and there is little about which to wax romantic in the spilling of sweat; but it is a far greater test of character to unite our wills to build and not to destroy.

We may, however, take heart in this struggle from the fact that it was such qualities of character that led the American Founding Fathers, with Irishmen among them, to persevere and form a more perfect union. It was such moral courage that led the United Irishmen to pledge themselves "in the awful presence of God" to persevere in endeavouring to form a brotherhood among Irishmen. Their work is unfinished and we, despite ourselves, are called to the same awesome and painful labour of giving meaning to our flag of Green, White and Orange and of working to build among Irishmen of every religious persuasion the noble edifice of peace, of equity and of brotherhood..

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