



ADDRESS BY THE SDLP PARTY LEADER

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TO THE 16th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE SDLP

SLIEVE DONARD HOTEL, NEWCASTLE. 21-23 NOVEMBER 1986.

I usually begin my speech to Annual Conference with a reminder of the age of our party. We are 16 years old. We are one of the youngest political parties in Western Europe. When I realise that I myself was 16 years old before I took my first tentative steps outside of my native city; when I look today in this gathering at our friends from right across the world who have come to show their respect for and renew their friendship with this 16 year old Party; when I consider that this respect and those friendships have been forged in such a short period of time, then I think we can take a justifiable pride on our record and achievements, for such respect and friendships are not won easily.

On your behalf I extend a warm welcome to those who are closest to us — our friends from the Irish Labour Party, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the newly formed Progressive Democrats. These parties and their members have been in close friendship and solidarity with us from our foundation and we look forward to their continuing solidarity and friendship in the challenging times ahead. I also welcome here today our fraternal delegates from the European Confederation of Socialist Parties, from the Federal Republic of Germany, from France, from Britain, as well as the warm message of solidarity from our colleagues in Spain, Denmark, Austria, Israel, Finland, Sweden and Japan. We are particularly pleased in the past year to have forged links with the Democratic Party in the United States, a party whose leaders have stood in solidarity with us throughout the past decade. We have forged a link through the Democratic Party's Institute for International Affairs under the chairmanship of Vice President Walter Mondale, one of the great humanitarian figures of the twentieth century. We warmly welcome the presence of a delegation from the Institute here today.

This Party has been conscious from its birth of the need to develop international links. We are deeply conscious of the interdependence of the world in which we live and of the many decisions affecting the very fundamentals of our lives that are taken in the international arena and of the need, small though we are, to have a voice and an influence in those areas. In spite of the begrudgery of our political opponents towards those links we look forward to our members, and our young members in particular, continuing to open their minds to the wider vista of the real world and to bringing those minds to bear on the outdated quarrels that disfigure our own society. If our political opponents wish to remain in their mental ghettos, if they wish to march manfully towards 1690 while others, in the name of Ireland, conduct themselves with a savagery that is mediaeval, then that is their affair. We make no apology for taking steps to broaden the political horizons of our society or our members. Size or lack of its has always been a central element in our failure to solve our problems. Yeats puts it better:

“Much hatred, little room
Maimed us from the start”.

We live in a small world. Chernobyl and its aftermath confirmed that forever. It also highlighted the awesome risks of nuclear power — a risk of which we are all too well aware particularly here on the County Down coast where a range of nuclear installations face us across the Irish Sea. Most of them have safety records that give grounds for deep concern, whether it be accidental discharges into the sea or the atmosphere, ageing structures or easy-going management.

Our source of particular concern is Sellafield. Over three hundred accidents have taken place there since the 1950's. Earlier this year a series of errors and accidents followed misleading attempts at reassurance. It is irresponsible to allow Sellafield to continue to function. It is utter madness to add it to a THORP plant which will process waste with much higher levels of radioactivity. The risk of a single accident in a century with all its awful consequences for humanity removes all justification for the use of nuclear power. No generation, for its own comfort and economy, has the right to put future generations at risk.

Here in County Down public anxiety about Sellafield is understandably at its most acute. There could be no better spokesman for those fears than Eddie McGrady who has pressurised government, challenged British Nuclear Fuels and informed public consciousness. The SDLP held a special conference earlier this year to examine the threat posed by Sellafield. It was a clear indication of our concern to be as informed, thorough and responsible as possible in our approach to this major and fundamental issue. With these credentials we will continue to press for a shut-down of the Sellafield plant and, through our membership of the Confederation of Socialist Parties and our international contacts, we will continue to press the case for non-nuclear energy policies. Indeed we have already put forward proposals to the European Commission for a study of biomass potential in the Sperrins and in Tyrone and Fermanagh for we believe that the climate and soil of those disadvantaged areas could transform the economy of Northern Ireland and their inhabitants and turn those counties into a major source of energy for the next century.

More recently we held another conference "Africa: the Challenge of Change". In raising the issues of hunger, under-development and apartheid we are reflecting the deep concerns of our young people in particular who are much more conscious than previous generations of the interdependence of the world in which we live and of our responsibility to play our part in confronting and resolving those issues.

For a society that knows the full meaning of discrimination and non-citizenship, the brutal dehumanising cruelty of Apartheid demands that we strive to play our part in solidarity with the struggle of the people of South Africa. That demands total and comprehensive sanctions to help end a wanton crime against humanity, justice and democracy. Those who argue

people are the principle victims of that failure. The least we seek, and this is our first stage, is total equality of treatment for all our people and let us acknowledge the progress that we have made towards that since September 1968. Then, as equals, and this is our second stage, we must be prepared to accept our full responsibilities as members of this society and be prepared to join with our fellow citizens in every institution of this society in order to combine our talents in building prosperity, stability and peace. But there is another and more important purpose. Only by working together in this way and by building trust born of spilling sweat together and developing confidence in one another — a long term process — will we ever break down the barriers between Catholic and Protestant which are central to all our problems. Can any of our critics point to another way or a better way of achieving this necessary objective which is so fundamental to our future? It is only if this second difficult stage takes place will our relations even evolve into the third stage — the only unity that matters on this island, a unity that accepts our diversity and that is born of our common trust and sweat. Only by working to break down the barriers will agreement on how we live together in Ireland even come. And that unity will be all the more real because no one need fear it and because it must have the hallmark of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter upon it. Otherwise it is not unity.

That strategy we are willing to discuss with all constitutional parties with a view to improving it and developing it. I now propose that in order to ensure that there is a common and solid approach being pursued by all constitutional nationalist parties throughout Ireland both within and without the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I presume that they all agree that solidarity of approach and strategy is an essential element in ensuring steady progress.

Men and women of the SDLP, the time for rhetoric is long past. Our young people who are the real wealth of this island and who are looking for hope and leadership, deserve better. We face our future with confidence because we have been given the tools to do the job - tools which previous generations have not had. But we have no illusions. We know that the road ahead will have many set backs and many disappointments and the begrudgers will always be there to point to them as failures. We know that there is no road towards peace and stability that does not involve risks. We also know that this generation of young people particularly those who have grown up in the North during the past 17 awful years, will not be taken in by humbug. The challenge is not easy, as I said last year, but the choice is. There is no other way.

The challenge of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is not confined to the Unionists. It throws down the gauntlet to the rest of us on this island as well. Is there any nationalist or republican who can stand up and say that our past attitudes have served us well? When we proudly and emotionally proclaim the indefeasible right to sovereignty of the Irish people, do we even stop to think that it is precisely because the Irish people are divided on how that sovereignty should be exercised that we have a problem today and have had a problem for centuries? Do we even recognise, other than by lip service, the responsibility that rests on us to demonstrate that should our dream of the common exercise of that sovereignty be fulfilled, that we will actually and in practice cherish all the children of the nation equally, Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter? Do the Provos even begin to realise that their vision of Ireland as expressed both verbally and physically not only excludes the Protestant and the Dissenter but the Catholic who disagrees with them? Is our Ireland Catholic and Gaelic only? What price are we prepared to pay, if any, to include the Protestant and the Dissenter?

The Anglo-Irish Agreement asks us that question. The British Government has declared that Irish unity is a matter for those Irish people who want it persuading those Irish people who don't. Is that not what Tone meant when he suggested that his means of unity and of freedom was to replace the denominations of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter with the common name of Irishman? Is that not what Parnell meant when he said that we would never have unity or freedom until we conciliated the Irish Protestant? Is it not quite clear that violence only drives Catholic and Protestant further apart and that it is in fact an expression of a total lack of self confidence by those who perpetrated it? Is Provisional Sinn Féin prepared to join us in taking up the peaceful challenge implicit in the British declaration on Irish unity? Do they not agree that declaration removes all justification for the use of violence?

Are constitutional nationalists prepared to take up the challenge? Is it not fair to say that no party in this century has taken up the challenge of peaceful persuasion and of setting out and working patiently through the long term process that is necessary to break down the barriers that divide the peace of this island. We are being challenged by this Agreement and rightly so, to cut out the rhetoric, to stop talking about Irish unity and to start working for it and to set out our strategy for achieving it.

For our part in this 16 year old party we have set out our three stage strategy on many occasions. Let me do it again. We must begin where we are, not where we would like to be. We cannot wish our problem away. We are in Northern Ireland an entity whose very existence is a symbol of past failures to resolve the conflicting relationships of these islands, and whose

differently agree on the evils of Apartheid. They should be asked what they would do if they were black South Africans faced with this evil when they can not even exercise the most minimum of democratic rights to achieve change — the casting of a vote. Those opponents of sanctions are prepared to impose them elsewhere in territorial disputes of much less consequence or as ideological reprimands but not as a means of ending what is a monumental mockery of civilization. If powerful nations can say to Gadaffi "You have had it pal, you are in isolation", why is it wrong to say precisely the same thing to Botha?

Ordinary people all over the world are stumbling toward the challenge posed by the awful contradictions of world hunger and nuclear weaponry and the presence of deep injustices like Apartheid on which powerful nations remain inactive if not silent.

Nowhere has that public consciousness been stronger than in Ireland as witnessed by the Irish response to famine appeals. In their support for human rights campaigns, in their contributions against world hunger and in their calls for nuclear disarmament they are developing a new political consciousness and, hopefully, new political currency.

Those causes which we cherish lost a great champion this year — Olaf Palme — whose qualities as a human being and as a statesman give us such great inspiration in the international socialist fraternity. His work should reassure us in the SDLP that even a small party in the world can play a positive role in winning change. It should provide a lesson for Ireland about the special and positive role which a small nation at peace with itself can play in the world — free from military attachments, upholding human rights, seeking disarmament and striving for justice in international economic affairs. Our own history gives us a special moral force in these issues which we can use properly only when we heal our own wounds.

On the economic front we in Ireland, North and South, must realise that many of the problems which we face in our everyday life are problems which are also faced by our European partners, be they Spanish or Dutch, and which can only be solved if we act together. We will not create employment if our factories lose out to American and Japanese trade and technology. We will not eliminate our stocks of agricultural surpluses and bring prosperity to the rural areas until we can find an international solution to the problems of food markets and of third world hunger. We will not live in a stable and peaceful world unless Europeans act together, speak with one voice and contribute effectively to the resolution of international problems.

We have learned much from our political experience on the narrow ground of Northern Ireland, to seek a broader framework, to build on what we have in common with other people and traditions, to see the danger and divisiveness of narrow defensive views of our own nationality and culture.

We have also learned from our political experience outside Northern Ireland and in the European institutions, to have confidence in ourselves and our own ideas, in our ability as Irishmen to participate and negotiate in wider groupings, without betraying our essential interests or identity.

The European Agenda of the SDLP over the coming year will be concentrated on five main priorities.

1. to translate the support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which has been clearly expressed by the European Parliament and the European Commission, into a practical programme for economic and social development;
2. to participate fully in the discussions and decisions about the future of the Common Agricultural Policy so as to promote the common interests of our rural areas, north and south, and to contribute to the fight against world hunger;
3. to press for an increased emphasis on regional development and to involve local and regional bodies more directly in the development of their own areas and in their access to European funds;
4. to increase the priority given to creating employment opportunities for young people and for the long-term unemployed;
5. to have implemented our proposal, approved by the European Parliament, for an Integrated Rural Development Programme.

Here at home the past year has been, to put it mildly, eventful. It has been a year of outstanding electoral success for the party. The Westminster bye-elections in the four constituencies that we contested revealed an enthusiasm, a spirit, and a strength reflected in a dramatic increase in the party vote of 19% overall in the four constituencies that I have not seen in this party since its foundation. Congratulations are due to everyone involved and in particular to our candidates Eddie McGrady, Adrian Colton, Austin Currie and Seamus Mallon. The victory of Seamus Mallon in Newry/Armagh was a landmark in the history of this party and, indeed, in the history of that constituency. I would like to place on record on behalf of the party our appreciation of the outstanding leadership contribution that he has since made on both the floor of Westminster and on the ground here in the North of Ireland. I do not hear any voices which talk of the two wings of the SDLP. Now they know.

That victory has demonstrated the value of a presence in Westminster, a value that is all the greater because of the Anglo-Irish Conference. That will be a powerful argument in the coming year as we bring more voices to the

have brought us where we are and have nothing to offer our future. In the words of Strabane's Paul Brady we are:

“still tryin’ to reach the future
through the past,

still tryin’ to carve tomorrow from
a tombstone”.

How much longer are we going to “sacrifice our children, to feed the worn out dreams of yesterday”.

Paul Brady's song is a powerful condemnation of past attitudes in this “island”; it is the real voice of Ireland's young people, expressing their hope and their need to work for the future rather than war about the past!

Have the slogans of “No Surrender”, “Not an Inch”, “What we have we Hold” brought the Unionist people any closer to the peace and stability for which they yearn? Is the perpetual use of the negative as their political banner a fitting expression for a people whose talent and genius gave eleven presidents to the United States of America? Where is the innovation and constitutional genius and passion for the basic elements of democracy that led their forbears, men like John Dunlop, Thomas McKean, and George Taylor to be among the authors of the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution, documents whose wisdom are only being fully appreciated in the second half of the twentieth century as we look at divided societies in conflict in many parts of the world? The essential pillar of democracy in any society, and in particular in divided ones, is the acceptance of diversity. It is not hard to believe that their wisdom was born of the experiences that had driven them from Ireland. Are there none among that people today with similar vision? Does anyone really believe that our society or indeed any society can survive in peace and stability if one section of it, whether its common bond is religion or colour, decides that it must live apart in order to protect itself; that it must seek to concentrate decision making in its own hands; that it must follow leaders who thinly disguise their hatred for the religious beliefs of their fellow citizens? Is their real problem that they do not have the self confidence or the vision of a John Dunlop or a Thomas McKean to sit down as equals with the rest of us and begin to build structures which seek to accommodate our differences rather than to dominate? Are they aware of the rate at which their sons and daughters, and particularly those of greatest talent, have answered their slogans with their feet and left this land? In a world that gets increasingly smaller, where old enmities have long gone, do they think that there is something wrong with healing divisions on a small island in a manner acceptable to them?

Quite a lot of progress, contrary to the perception being promoted by opponents of the Agreement, has been made. Ending a serious hunger strike earlier this year was one of the first acts of the Conference. Progress has been made on a number of other issues which, although not major, have been sources of irritation throughout years of Unionist rule and pressure for changed was consistently resisted e.g. street names in Irish, registration of "I" Voters and reform of Flags and Emblems legislation. On a more meaningful note, the decision to demolish both Divis and Rossville Flats has been taken. Major proposals for Police complaints procedures similar to those obtaining elsewhere have been tabled by the British Government for discussion and the SDLP has put its own proposals. Movement is clearly under way. Similarly on the Fair Employment front as I have already outlined. The same commitment has been expressed in relation to Human Rights. The Irish Government has submitted a far reaching proposal for a Bill of Rights and the British Government has responded with proposals for a Declaration of Rights.

Again clear movement is under way. On the economic front a substantial International Fund has been set up to help areas of high unemployment and the Newry - Dundalk area has been benefited with improved road proposals.

There has been some disappointment about lack of movement in the crucial area of administration of justice and in particular the Diplock Courts. The British Government has rejected Irish Government proposals for a three judge court but since the Agreement recognises that there is a problem in this area the British Government has a responsibility to now bring forward its own proposals and to come to agreement with the Irish Government. In the same area it is clear that progress is being made towards bringing the Supergrass system to an end and proposals for legislation to amend the Emergency Provisions Act in relation to arrest, bail and length of remand are on the table for the present session of the House of Commons. Not bad for one year, I would argue, particularly when compared to the total lack of movement on many of these issues over many years. In short, politics and the political process set up by the Agreement is actively working and the result is a much fairer decision making process for the population at large.

However, as I said to the Conference last year, Agreements do not of themselves make progress or solve problems. No matter what the way ahead, I said, we in the SDLP would still face major challenges and major risks. There is no road to peace and stability that does not contain risks. It is the challenge that the Agreement throws down to all the elements involved in the long standing problem that confronts us, that is the major potential in that significant event. Implicit in that innovative accord is its challenge to our past attitudes, all of us, its implicit acceptance that past attitudes

floor of Westminster to speak for those constituencies that have been misrepresented there for so long. We challenge the double standards and partitionist mentality of those who would insist on absenteeism only in the North where representation is so sorely needed and when its value is now so obvious and when the only effect is to deny representation and a voice to those areas of the North which need it most. We will cure all that at the coming election and we will return a strong team to Westminster, the strongest since 1920, and we will continue to build on our achievements.

The drive and energy, the enthusiasm, generated by the January victory in Newry/Armagh has permeated and energised this entire party, has led to a substantial influx of new and young members, all of which is reflected in the agenda of this conference, in the wide range of policy documents for discussion and of course in the self-confidence that is evident at all levels of this party today. A particular tribute is due to all our front line spokesmen. At a time when cynicism about politics and politicians is at its height, I know of no group of more self-sacrificing or dedicated individuals than the men and women who sit behind me on this platform, who receive no rewards whatsoever for their dedicated toil other than the satisfaction of giving really principled leadership and service to all of our people. Their work is reflected on the wide range of topics vital to this community that are on our agenda this weekend.

Last year our main debate was on the proposed changes to the Social Security System. With your mandate we opposed the government's attack on the welfare state at every stage in the Commons. Thankfully the level of opposition did force some concessions by the government on issues such as treatment of the low-waged under the Family Credit Scheme and some of the proposals which would impact upon pensioners. Even though the Act has been passed we are still making strong representations for special consideration to be given to Northern Ireland's particular needs in its operation. We have already received some positive indications from government but we will keep on pressing for more measures to mitigate some of the worst potential effects of the changes particularly in the area of the Social Fund.

However, such concessions as we might win will not be able to offset the calculated deprivation of the overall changes. During the summer we saw many benefit rights abolished in the area of single payments. We have seen the recent government announcement of derisory one and two percent increases in pension and benefit levels from April. Mr. Fowler patronisingly billed this as "a helping hand". It is, if anything, a two fingered salute to the deprived.

The fears which we expressed last year about the planning of Health and Social Services have been reinforced by the five year strategic plans published by the Area Boards acting under the Department's guidelines. While others prepare to leave these boards, we must renew our resolve to protect and improve health and social services.

Every presence or influence which the SDLP has on these boards must be used against the "rolling privatisation" of the health service to protect levels of care for patients and conditions of service for workers. The trend of centralisation stripping small towns and rural communities of many of their hospital facilities has been, and must continue to be, resisted by us.

We support the concept of community care but we are concerned to see that it means proper and comprehensive provision in the community and is not simply a euphemism for dumping people out of residential or hospital care.

In education as well we must use what influence we have to win proper funding for facilities and development at all levels. At this Conference, through a further policy document, we have committed ourselves to working for nursery, primary and secondary provision which will fully sustain our children's development in a fair and sensible manner. We again restate the need for a full and proper system of student support at third level and reject proposals for a loans scheme which can only amount to young people mortgaging an already uncertain future.

Unemployment, with its attendant evils, continues its offensive upward trend, eating away at the morale of our society. It depresses the prospects of families and individuals, it deprives them of dignity, it robs the young of hope. A comprehensive economic policy document will give Conference an opportunity to discuss the subject in detail.

A couple of weeks ago the Chancellor of the Exchequer proclaimed that regions of higher unemployment should have lower wage levels as a means of reducing unemployment. Government strategy is now out in the open. Low wages will solve our problems; poverty is the answer to unemployment, exploitation the answer to depression. If Mr. Lawson wants to test his low wage thesis let him examine an existing pilot area — Northern Ireland. We have lower wages than anywhere in England, Scotland and Wales. It is not producing jobs. Our unemployment is much higher and steadily increasing. We reject the Government lie about "real jobs". They suggest that keeping a hospital hygienic, building homes, caring for the elderly or feeding school children are not "real jobs" while making money out of money by pressing a computer key on the shift of an exchange rate apparently is a "real job".

confidence to face the rest of us on an equal footing and building structures for the future, structures that are fairly rooted in equality and which respect our differences.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement with its permanent conference table provides us with the framework within which we can do just that without victory or defeat for anyone, since victories or defeats are certainly no solutions. It can also enable us to tackle on an ongoing basis the outdated but bitter division between our people. That is the cancer that produces the murderous symptoms of which we all complain and which is such an affront to our common Christian roots.

Its further strength is that it is a process that proceeds with the consensus of the 59 million people of both islands rather than the veto of 1½% of them. The framework is intended to outlive existing governments so that future governments can make their contribution to the building process until final stability is reached. Some governments may, and indeed will, move slowly. Others will move more quickly. All will have the opportunity to act rather than talk or wring their hands. What a contrast to the barren inactivity and neglect underlined by the total lack of either achievement or progress on the North since 1920! Will looking back after a generation of steady and constructive building not be more productive than a generation of whingeing? Or have the begrudgers got a short cut about which they have not yet told us? Ours is not a "Tiocfaidh ár lá" approach. We do not wait for the day to come. We work for it. We now have the peaceful means, as has everyone, that we didn't have before. And let me stress that the day for which we work is a day that will be applauded by all sections of our people, not alone a day that will give expression to our essential unity, but just as important, a day that will give expression to our equally essential diversity.

In the meantime and in the short term the Anglo-Irish Conference has been dealing with the internal grievances within Northern Ireland that it promised to address in the communiqué accompanying the Agreement one year ago. We have said repeatedly that those grievances, important in themselves, are but symptoms of the deeper disease of division. If they were all resolved tomorrow they would recur in one form or another if we do not address the underlying problem. Did we not get rid of the Special Powers Act only to find it replaced by the Emergency Provisions Act? The permanent structures set up by the Anglo-Irish Agreement are, as I have indicated already, the means of dealing with the long term disease. The immediate grievances have to be tackled and indeed most of the judgements being passed on the Agreement are based on people's perceptions of the progress being made in dealing with them.

Forum behind us we fought the 1983 Westminster election and promised to put the Irish problem at the centre of the Westminster stage. We did. The Forum Report set out in detail, and for the first time, the realities and requirements necessary to solve our problem. In a significant passage, the Forum Report went on to say: "The British Government have a duty to join in developing the necessary process that will recognise these realities and give effect to those requirements and thus promote reconciliation between the two major traditions in Ireland and to make the required investment of political will and resources. The British and Irish Governments should enter into discussions to create the framework and atmosphere necessary for this purpose". It is clear from that that the Forum parties did not see an instant solution to their problems but a process of reconciliation that would take place within a framework created by the two governments. That is precisely what has happened.

I refer to past statements and quotations and I could refer to many more, but I do so simply to underline the fact that the SDLP are a serious and committed party, and that when we set out an approach or a strategy we do not do so lightly. We pursue it with dedication. One year ago this week that framework was set up. It was a significant advance by the British Government in terms of Anglo-Irish relations and the approach to the Irish problem. As I have said before, if Britain and Argentina were to do precisely the same thing and set up a permanent Anglo-Argentinian conference to deal with the problems of the Falkland Islands would the whole world not think it a significant advance? And is that not precisely what has happened in relation to the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

Of all the critics only the Unionists have recognised the real significance of this Agreement. They recognise that they have lost their unconditional veto on change, a veto that has served neither themselves nor the people of Northern Ireland well if we are to judge by the results. While they are assured yet again that Irish unity cannot take place without consent, something which is also a matter of fact, they can no longer veto British Government policy or attitudes nor can they any longer rely on British Governments unequivocally or unquestioningly supporting the Unionist view. By declaring that they will respect the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland, whatever those wishes are, whether union or unity, the British Government have declared themselves neutral in the basic quarrel between us. That, by any political standards and in terms of a political approach to resolving the relationships that go to make up the Irish problem, is a significant advance. Unionists now find themselves politically without their previously built-in advantages. Such advantages or privileges have never served as a source of peace, justice or stability. In the end, privilege has been a liability to the Unionist people. They now find themselves no worse off than the rest of us for we have never had such advantages. The question for them now, is whether they have the self

We have no illusions about "peoples' capitalism", which is simply a means of flogging public assets for private gain to meet Government spending needs. It is like selling the furniture to pay for the food. Whatever the hype of the ad man I do not think we will see any bowler hats in our dole queues. Giros are not the currency for buying share certificates.

But here in Northern Ireland, government policies are not solely to blame. Whatever the fallout from the new technological sophistication of London's Stock Exchange our economy has suffered from many "big bangs" which blew up jobs as, believe it or not, economic targets. The Provo bombing campaign lost the North 39,000 jobs between 1970 and 1980 alone. Those who set out to wreck the already feeble economic fabric of places like West Belfast, Derry, Newry, Strabane in particular now weep crocodile tears about unemployment. Their kidnaps, their assassinations and their bombs have conspired to destroy and prevent investment in communities starved of work. They see no contradiction in the fact that in their Ireland the young will be working in London or as illegal immigrants in New York, "driven out by their liberators." These people have never bothered to explain to anyone how shops and factories are barriers to Irish unity or how bombing the real wealth of our country — our young people — into emigration is a spur to independence! We now have the spectacle of a Sinn Fein Councillor in Armagh talking about the need for the town to be opened up to allow easier shopping. And he does not even blush. And his colleague down the road in Newry tells us that his party are "all for shoppers having as wide a choice as possible." So he supports a proposal for development on the outskirts of the town that his military wing — to which he gives unequivocal support — tried to blow to bits.

Workers or unemployed of course are not permitted to have as wide a choice as possible. They risk being classified as legitimate targets. In the name of freedom people are being told to make their choice between their living and their life. What a sorry vision of Ireland is the Provo vision if it is threatened by cleaning women and clerks, contractors or bricklayers. Death or dole is the widest choice offered by these champions of the oppressed. "We will take power in Ireland", said Danny Morrison, "with an armalite in one hand and a ballot paper in the other". Not Irish Unity, not freedom but power. The Provo "kill-a-worker" campaign, their administration of 'justice' through kangaroo courts, beatings, kneecappings and executions might give some people an inkling as to how that power might be used. It is also a measure of their credibility when they complain about the administration of justice or pose as defenders of human rights.

Unemployment is also a legacy of previous Unionist rule. The pattern of unemployment, at its worst in Catholic areas of the North, bears the fingerprints of discrimination in past industrial allocation. They did their job well for their handiwork still pollutes our economic life today.

The task of ensuring fair employment in normal economic times is difficult enough but we should have no illusions about its difficulty in circumstances of continuing job losses and rising unemployment. That is why we are so strongly opposed to any effort to promote fair employment by promoting disinvestment. Disinvestment is an attack on jobs, it is a means of ensuring that jobs do not come; it considerably weakens the struggle for fair employment. Unemployment is no answer to discrimination. Rather do we call on all people of good will, particularly those abroad who wish to help, to use instead their considerable influence to encourage investment and job creation in areas of high unemployment. Job creation is vital to the struggle for fair employment and an essential part of that struggle, but it is one side of the equation. Ensuring fairness is the other.

Our economic policies, our proposals on housing, education, health, rural development and social services, all promote employment. Once again our Conference will tomorrow consider ways and means of ensuring fair employment.

Our consistent commitment on this issue has already led to government proposals for action in this field. The recently published discussion paper indicates a shift in Government attitudes, including a willingness to deploy more effective mechanism in tackling the problem. We are responding to that paper with our own proposals which are before this Conference including firm sanctions, realistic powers and procedures of investigation and vigilant monitoring practices, all designed to meet the requirements of a character for fair employment. We are not interested in simply having principles. We want them enforced.

This discussion and the British proposals of course are one of the major fruits of the Anglo-Irish Agreement which was signed one week after last year's Annual Conference. It is worth recalling what we said then, one week before the Agreement. "We do not expect a final settlement or an immediate solution. Our yardstick for measuring this outcome will be simple. Will the proposals which emerge from an Agreement, if there is an Agreement, help us to make progress with the healing process"? That the Agreement is not a solution or a settlement, nor was never intended to be, has not deterred the critics who, with the exception of the Unionists, have all criticised it for failing to be what it never pretended to be — a settlement. Those critics fall into two sections — the Provos and the begrudgers.

Provo criticism has no credibility whatsoever. An organisation which has indulged in a campaign of violence for 17 years with not one inch of progress to show for the desperate suffering that they have inflicted on their own people cannot expect to be taken seriously. In addition to the 2,500 dead, the 20,000 maimed, the population of three new prisons, the even lengthening dole queues, there is also the fact that Provo list of complaints

about Diplock Courts, harassment, strip searches, house searches, troops on the streets are all direct consequences of their own campaign and they could make an enormous contribution to relieving the suffering inflicted by these measures on our community by ceasing their campaign of violence now and opening the door to bringing all these practices to an end. Did they not tell us that had the Brighton bomb been "successful" in killing half the British Cabinet they expected widespread repression including internment against the Catholic Community? The truth is that their politics need repression, so they provoke repression (authorities, please take note!). The victims, as with unemployment, are the people of deprived areas.

Then there are the begrudgers or, as I prefer to call them, the whingers. Ireland seems to be particularly cursed with such people. Their hallmark is perpetual complaint, never a solution to the complaint. They never recognise what has been achieved. They condemn what has not been achieved. The 60% of advance is never mentioned. The absence of the other 40% is a sell out. They do not understand, or wish to understand, the process of politics which is a steady process of narrowing the gap between what is and what ought to be, steady advances building steadily towards an answer. The truth is, of course, that they suffer from a fairly massive inferiority complex which they consistently attempt to cover by talking tough about the need to stand up to the British. What they of course need is the self confidence to sit down with the British, for that is the political way forward. One of Ireland's tragedies is that we have so many begrudgers and whingers. They are, in fact, part of the problem.

Sitting down with the British Government on a permanent basis around a permanent conference table is what is happening under the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Is there any better political way of dealing with this problem?

To measure the change that has taken place we do not have to go back very far. In 1981, when I addressed this Conference, the political landscape was very black indeed. In that year attack after attack on the SDLP described us paralysed, moribund, finished. It was the year of the hunger strike. Morale was very low. Politics was on the sidelines. Unionism was triumphant yet again and hope and faith in the political process were scarce commodities. Yet we knew that there was no other process, and we set out upon it. We declared the twin pillars of our approach — a harmonising of the strength of the democratic parties in both parts of this island with the objective of achieving a joint initiative involving both governments, a consistent theme of this Party. The strength of a common approach was as self evident then as it is today. Why should the British take nationalist Ireland seriously if we are going in different directions? We said that the strength of such an approach would be bound to produce a response from the British Government. We fought the 1982 Assembly election on that platform. The result was the New Ireland Forum. With the strength of the