

John Hume's address at the Merriman Summer School.

The subject that we are addressing this evening is a subject that I have addressed on many occasions in recent years. It is a subject with many aspects and one which for the benefit of all the people of Ireland is worthy of continual and detailed debate. This evening I wish to begin by addressing one particular aspect of the subject - the campaign of the Provisional IRA. My profound and total disagreement with that campaign and in particular with the methods used has been stated often and does not need restating. However I wish to address the leadership of that organisation directly this evening in the context of our discussion. They have been dismissed often as mindless, as criminals, as gangsters. I do not dismiss them as such. I believe, in spite of my profound disagreement with and unequivocal condemnation of their methods, that they actually believe in what they are doing. That is why I entertain the hope, though I admit that it is a frail hope, that sooner rather than later they will respond to the unanswerable case that exists against their campaign, a case that has been massively strengthened by the development within Europe and within the European Community in particular, and will accept that, leaving aside the arguments about the morality of their methods, then their campaign is not only out of date, it is futile, it is leading nowhere, its main victims are the people of this country North and South and accepting all of that, that they will transfer their considerable energies and organisation behind totally peaceful means of achieving their political objectives.

On 1st January this year I addressed them directly in a New Year's statement. I pointed out that as they entered 1990 they might reflect on the facts of their twenty year old campaign. They might reflect in particular, that their so called 'mistakes', their Enniskillens, were not in fact exceptions, they are direct consequences of the very nature of their campaign and because of that, irrespective of other arguments, render their campaign totally unjustifiable. I pointed out that up till 1st January 1990 55% of all people who had died in the so called troubles in the North were innocent civilians - people killed in so called accidents or mistakes or in tit for tat revenge killings by loyalist paramilitaries. It is clear therefore, I argued, that if their campaign continues in 1990 that at least one of every two people who die will be totally innocent civilians, because that is the pattern that derives from the very nature of their campaign and there would be no justification in 1990 in statements of regret or apology because they knew in advance that that is specifically what was going to happen.

What has happened in 1990? Up till the end of July 37

people had lost their lives. 22 people were civilians and fifteen were members of the security forces. The pattern continues and so do the expressions of regret. Ah but they say in defence, it is regrettable but accidents always happen in war. Leaving aside the fact that they have no right to declare war, if that were true then one might expect to witness equal numbers of 'mistakes' or accidents on all sides. What are the facts. 12½% of all civilians were killed by the security forces (the British Army, the RUC and the UDR put together) and 87½% by nationalist and loyalist paramilitaries. Look even at their own fatalities, their own members who have lost their lives. Of 279 nationalist paramilitaries who lost their lives, 117 were killed by the security forces, 20 by loyalists and 142 by themselves either in 'accidents' or 'executions'. Again more than one out of two nationalist paramilitaries who have lost their lives, have done so at their own hands. And I haven't even mentioned all of those hundreds of young people who are spending their best years of their lives in gaol.

By any standards, by military standards even, how can any such campaign be justified, particularly in the name of patriotism or of an Ireland whose people overwhelmingly disapprove of such a campaign? Is there a single injustice in N. Ireland today that justifies the taking of a single life. My view is of course that these thoughts must strike the leaders of this campaign but they immediately cast them aside because it would appear that they are lacking in one essential quality - moral courage. The leadership required, given the nature of the IRA, to admit that they should abandon what they call 'armed struggle', would require enormous moral courage and real leadership which appears to be non-existent. If there are any in their ranks who have that moral courage and they need republican precedents for their actions, they should remember a man called Pearse, who once issued a statement calling on his followers to lay down their arms lest they bring too much suffering on their own people. Are there any such people in to-day's Provisional IRA? If there are and they have the moral courage to change to totally peaceful methods, then no single act in this century would do more to transform the atmosphere on this island and to begin the process of breaking down the barriers between our people which are the real problem on this island to-day and which are the real legacy of our past and which are in fact intensified by the IRA campaign.

Turning to the political reasons given by the provisional IRA for their campaign - reasons which they declare to be their sole driving force and therefore reasons which should be examined seriously in any discussion of their campaign - any such examination reveals that while there is no doubt that their reasons were fundamental to British - Irish relationships and to the British - Irish problem in the past and has left us with our bitter legacy today, those

reasons no longer exist and are in fact out of date. The fact that they no longer exist and that they are out of date removes the fundamental reason given by the IRA themselves for the use of force and if they are serious about their political objectives they will abandon the use of force.

The reasons that they give are that Britain is in Ireland defending her own interests by force, those interests being economic and military. Leaving aside for a moment the more fundamental reasons why those reasons no longer exist and are out of date is there anyone today who seriously believes that Britain is in Northern Ireland defending economic interests? Secondly does anyone in modern nuclear Europe really believe that Britain has a strategic interest in a military presence in Ireland. Those reasons no longer exist. They are out of date. The fundamental nature of British - Irish relationships has changed in today's new Europe. But there does remain a serious and bitter legacy from that past. We have a deeply divided people. That is the problem we should be addressing and it cannot be addressed by force. The fact that the reasons which gave rise to that legacy no longer exist have clear implications for the strategy that should be pursued in ending that bitter legacy and in healing the deep divisions among our people. In particular it is evident that the problem would be better addressed if addressed with the co-operative assistance and good will of British Governments. It is also evident that the problem will not be solved by any instant action or declaration but will require a healing progress of generations.

The removal of the traditional reasons for the British - Irish quarrel are due entirely to the developments within Europe and the European Community in particular. The British - Irish quarrel is European in its origins. It is often forgotten that Ireland's close links with Europe over the centuries were the fundamental reason for England's involvement in Ireland. The Plantation of Ulster was England's response to O'Neill and O'Donnell's links with Spain. The Act of Union was England's response to the French invasion of Ireland and Wolfe Tone. Even the Royal College of St. Patrick at Maynooth was set up in 1795 because of England's fear of the influences of the Irish colleges in Rome, Paris, Salamanca and Louvain. In short England saw Ireland as the back door for her European enemies and moved into Ireland to defend her own interests with all the serious consequences for the Irish people. All that has now changed. Both Ireland and Britain are members of the European Community and both its peoples have voted in referenda for such membership. Ireland is free to rebuild and is rebuilding her links with other European countries and indeed is well placed to become part of the European majority. In that context it is quite clear that no one could argue that Britain is in Ireland today defending either military or economic interests. Issues like independence and sovereignty,

issues at the heart of the British /Irish quarrel have changed their meaning in the new Europe because we now have interdependence and shared sovereignty.

But the legacy remains. We have a very deeply divided people on this island and that is the major problem facing us today and it is clear that the healing of these divisions would be much more easily achieved with the co-operation, assistance and good will of Britain. It is also clear that membership of the European Community and the lessons of that Community are also major factors to assist in the healing process.

If both parts of Ireland can enter into new relationships with Greeks, Italians, French, Germans etc., it is surely long past time when they should be forging new relationships with one another. If bitter enemies like France and Germany can build new relationships can we not do the same? And can we not learn from the experience of Europe?

If someone had stood up fifty years ago today, when the Second World War was at its height, when tens of millions of people, not for the first time in this century, were being slaughtered and cities devastated, and said that in fifty years time we would have a united Europe and the French would still be French and the Germans would still be German that person would have been described as a fool or a dreamer. Thank God we did have people of vision and surely we can apply exactly the same lessons and methods to our problem in Ireland. How?

Let the British and Irish Governments together follow the example of the European Community. Let them make a joint declaration that the divisions among the people of Ireland and the prejudices that are at their root are the regrettable consequences of our history and are not in the best interests of the people of Ireland or of the European Community. That the two Governments had decided to leave the past aside; that they have decided to build institutions in Ireland North and South which will respect difference but which will allow the People in both parts of Ireland to work their common ground together and through doing so over generations, spilling our sweat and not our blood, to grow together, like the Europeans, at our own speed. That common ground, largely economic, is already considerable and will become even more considerable as we approach 1992. Indeed with the removal of commercial borders and the creation of the channel tunnel that common ground and economic interest will intensify as we become the offshore island of the united Europe.

Out of that process in time, will emerge a new Ireland built by agreement and solidly founded on respect for difference. It is an approach that need not be feared by any section of the people on the island of Ireland for it can

only happen with the agreement and involvement of all.

If the peoples of Western Europe, who for centuries slaughtered one another and their legacy of history, far more bitter than ours, can build common institutions which preserve their differences, which allow them to work their common economic ground together and to grow together at their own speed towards a unity whose form is agreed by all and whose essence is the acceptance of diversity, can we not do the same on this small island?

Indeed could someone please tell me if there is any other way?