

# A TALE OF TWO WALLS

by JOHN HUME

Speaking in Berlin to a Congress of European Socialist Parties, the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party of Northern Ireland had this to say:

Some 45 years ago the nightmare that was to have lasted a thousand years was brought to an end not far from where we meet, but it left in its wake a continent in ruins with millions dead, millions homeless, millions hungry. Once again the people of Europe knew the terrible price to be paid for conflict and for dreams of conquest, this time on a scale unprecedented in their history.

In the years following that cataclysmic war there were men who vowed that such slaughter should never be repeated, men of vision who saw the need to bury forever ancient enmities and create a new order of relationships within Europe, men of differing cultures and backgrounds who recognised that what unites the people of Europe is far greater than what divides them.

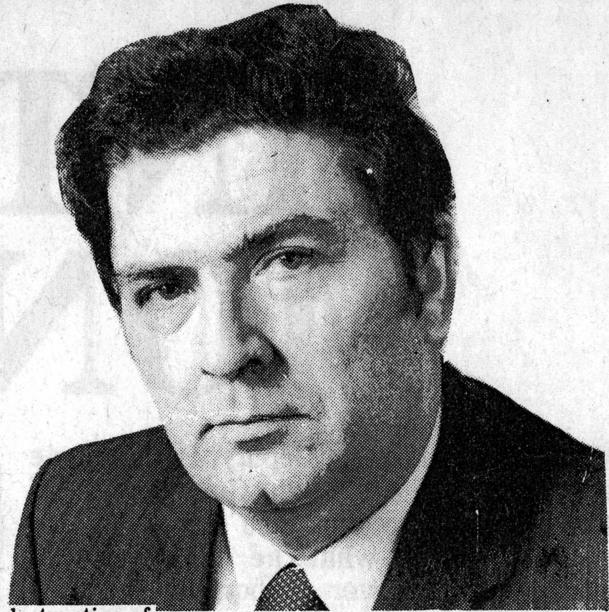
From their vision of a new Europe

popular will. We have seen the powerful cast down and those who had been outcasts chosen to lead free peoples.

To an Irishman who, in his lifetime, has led people in the streets in mass non-violent protest against the denial of basic civil rights, who with my party steadfastly upholds the democratic process in a society where the taking of human life is seen by some as the only means of change and by others as the means of upholding the status quo, where the doctrine of an eye for an eye leaves blindness in its wake, such scenes cannot fail to be deeply moving. The silent dignity of masses of people gathered in non-violence will bring about more change and will expose in minutes more repression than years of gunfire and bloodshed. Those who use the methods of the oppressor tend to end up worse than the oppressor.

representing for some the destruction of liberty while, for others, the securing of their freedom. It is seen by many in Ireland as the beginning of our present problems.

But even if there are in Ireland those who would rehearse ancient rights and wrongs, when respect for the past paralyses their attitude to the future, I am not despondent about the future and my hope is based on the powerful example which Europe provides. If the most bitter of enemies who fought each other twice this century can compose their differences and contemplate even closer forms of political and economic union, I am certain that we in Ireland can find a way to live together in peace and mutual respect. The fact that both parts of Ireland are partners in the Community immediately places in a new context old questions of sovereignty



## Third World

In recent times we have taken pride in the fact that Willy Brandt has been a distinguished symbol and a distinguished leader in his efforts to heal wounds in Europe and to bring about a common inheritance of freedom, democracy and peace in a new Europe. But let us not forget that the challenges of East and West are not the only ones posed to us by the vision of Willy Brandt. To the people of the Third World he is a symbol not of a new Europe, but of a new world economic order, of the need to address the underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, literacy and disease suffered by so many as a result of an unjust and inefficient world order and, indeed, as a result of the price in nuclear and military waste of the

From their vision of a new Europe was to for the European Community of today, a Community in which twelve European peoples have irrevocably linked their destinies and, by sharing their sovereignty, have sought to achieve a greater freedom in an interdependent world. Together they have now embarked on a process which will lead them even closer and aims at nothing less than the total removal of the barriers that exist between them, not from any thirst for power, or desire for prestige, but in order to create the conditions in which best to protect common values and to promote shared aims. Above all, in seeking unity we do not seek any spurious uniformity, for we are convinced that one of the most precious elements of our common European cultures lies in its diversity, and we have recognised a fundamental truth which too often eluded our forefathers; that in our differences lies our strength rather than our weakness. The essence of unity is the acceptance of diversity — *E pluribus unum*.

## Ancient wrongs

I believe the Community stands as a model for the conduct of relations between states in Europe and offers a powerful example of how ancient wrongs and animosities can be overcome by new forms of co-operation and trust. Moreover, at this time, when old certainties are crumbling, the Community can be a powerful source of stability and continuity in a changing Europe.

The post war years bequeathed a legacy of bitterness to Europe with a divided Germany and a sundered continent. East and West faced each other in ideological conflict. Now, change has been wrought by the frustration and anger of peoples who for too long had been denied what was theirs by right, whose dignity had too long been trampled, whose spirit had too long been crushed. We have been privileged to witness extraordinary and inspiring scenes; men and women gathering in the ancient cities of Eastern

methods of the oppressor tend to end up worse than the oppressor.

I bring with me today a symbol of past divisions and present realities. I have it here. Yes, it is a piece of a wall, but it is not from the wall on which the people of Berlin danced and which they helped to tear down. It is a piece of the 'Belfast Wall,' taken from one of the many walls that have been built to separate divided communities throughout the city. While barriers between peoples are crumbling across a continent, even as we speak another such wall is being built in Belfast and has been given by some the grotesque name of 'peace-line,' as if the bleak desolation created in parts of that city after twenty years of violence could be described as peace.

This lump of concrete reminds us that while walls may separate people, the real barriers cannot be seen because they exist in the hearts and minds of the people themselves and are built of hate and violence and fear. They are barriers which can only be overcome when we overcome our fears and have the courage to trust one another and to learn to accept and respect our differences. They are also a challenge for in reality they were built by past attitudes and the challenge is if those walls and what they represent are to fall, to re-examine those past attitudes, all of them.

## Political change

Twenty years of civil unrest in Northern Ireland have also served to strengthen my belief that political change is not served by violence. Violence is a catalyst of hate, not reform, and as this stone bears eloquent testimony, violence only creates new divisions among a divided people.

Last year in Ireland we marked the 300th anniversary of a battle which involved the armies of Europe and took place by the River Boyne in 1690. For a brief moment the rulers of Europe turned their attention to Ireland as James II and William of Orange met in a fateful encounter. In the encounter were Danes, Dutch, Germans, English, French on both

in the Community immediately places in a new context old questions of sovereignty and identity which were themselves European in origin, and provides the basis for a common future.

Recent events in Eastern Europe also show that new ideas can sweep away obstacles which had seemed immovable, and just as the darkest hour comes before the dawn, new beginnings can emerge just when we face despair. But I do not despair, as someone who has devoted my life to politics and the democratic process, I say with complete and utter conviction that there is no political problem which cannot be solved by men and women who choose to put aside former animosities and work together to find solutions, and who are prepared to act in a spirit of good will and trust. I say too that the time has come for us to tear down the walls which separate us and find a new liberty in freedom from hate and freedom from fear.

As the euphoria fades, it is evident that the countries of Eastern Europe face difficult and urgent choices. The outcome is uncertain but the prize is great: we have finally been offered a window of opportunity to make the historic adjustment in the relations between the nations of Europe and the chance to create democratic and stable societies in a reintegrated and peaceful continent.

Of one thing, I am certain: in the challenges which lie ahead for all of us in Europe, history will not judge us kindly if those in political life fail to make a generous and imaginative response to the demands of the moment. Already we hear siren voices, some urging caution, saying that there is nothing we in the West can do to make or mend the situation, others lamenting the passing of old certainties and the grim stability of the past, others still rejoicing in the difficulties of former adversaries. What madness! We in the West cannot hope to prosper with half a continent in turmoil. A tide of change is sweeping through Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals and it will take all our skill and nerve to ride the crest of the

world order and, indeed, as a result of the price in nuclear and military costs of the Cold War.

Let there be no doubt that there is deep concern and fear in the developing countries that our pre-occupation with the Single Market and with Eastern Europe will yet again put their problems on the back burner. Let us reassure them. If we accept, as we do, that one of the travesties of the arms race and Cold War was that it maintains such dreadful injustice and misery, then we must make a new global co-operation and meaningful North/South dialogue one of the prizes to be won from the changing East/West relationship. We seek a new European order, yes, but within a new world order.

We, as Social Democrats, already face other more direct challenges. Just as in the 1980s new trends in economics were used by our critics to deny the public sector practically any valid role in society, so too now they are using the collapse of the regimes in the East to predict the death of socialism. We must be quick to defend our proud record in the creation of truly democratic and humanistic societies in Europe. We must assert that while we always were concerned about the creation of wealth, the focus of our agenda was ever on how best to use that wealth. That is a question which today more than ever demands the most urgent moral and intellectual consideration. We hear much in these days of free markets, of the free flow of capital, of the free movement of goods and services, but we must insist — and remind our critics — that these are useful only to the extent that they serve a more important freedom, that is the freedom of the individual, and the freedom that is afforded all our citizens, and not just a privileged few, to exploit the potential of the human condition. That is our agenda; it calls for no apology; it is one of which we can be proud.

We are the heirs to two thousand years of history and today we stand on the threshold of a new millennium. At the end