

Introductory remarks by John Hume MP MEP
Tip O'Neill Chair of Peace Studies
Visit of Michel Rocard
Lecture on conflict resolution in Nouvelle Calédonie
University of Ulster, Magee, 09 May 2003

Ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted that someone of the international standing and reputation of Monsieur Rocard accepted my invitation to come to Derry and to make an address here at Magee. I stand here as the holder of the Tip O'Neill Chair of Peace Studies at the University of Ulster, a position I am honoured to hold given the instrumental role played by the former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives in the search for peace in Ireland. It is apt, given the efforts that Tip O'Neill and others made to bring an end to violence in this country, that we should gather here to listen to the story of a process of conflict resolution in another part of the world.

Michel Rocard has a long and distinguished record of public service, and is a graduate of ENA (the École Nationale d'Administration) and of the Institut d'Études Politiques. Initially active in student politics in France, he played a role in opposing the French war in Indo-China. As leader of the Unified Socialist party, he stood as a candidate in the 1969 Presidential election in France, the year in which he was first elected to the Assemblée Nationale.. That party then merged with the Parti Socialiste, then led by Francois Mitterand. M. Rocard held a number of Ministerial positions in Parti Socialiste governments until 1985, including in Planning and Regional Development and in

Agriculture. He has also served as a member of the European Parliament.

In 1988 he became French Prime Minister, during which time he engaged in a process of conflict resolution in the French Pacific Territory of Nouvelle Calédonie. This was a conflict which had been ongoing for over a century, the last twenty of which were of a particular violent intensity. His involvement in dialogue in Nouvelle Calédonie led to the signing of the Matignon Accords later that year, which granted the territory a new political status. These accords have been the basis of political, economic and social progress for Nouvelle Calédonie since that time, having provided a political framework for development that included a plebiscite on greater autonomy for the territory in 1998, ten years on from the signing of the Accords. That of course was the year in which we came to our own political accommodation, the Good Friday Agreement, which was endorsed by the vast majority of the people of Ireland, North and South, in referendum.

It is appropriate that we gather here today, which is of course Europe Day. The European Union remains the greatest example of conflict resolution and transformation in history. Working to enshrine the principle of unity through diversity, the people of Europe have created institutions through which they have worked together to address common problems. In that way, through the spilling of their sweat and not of their blood, they have broken down barriers and old hatreds in a way which would have been unimaginable just over half a century ago, when Europe was ravaged by a war which cost 40

million lives. Such a conflict is virtually unthinkable now, particularly for our young people.

The conflict in Nouvelle Calédonie has had certain parallels with our own. Both had a tragic pedigree that lasted generations. Both were reminiscent of the Afrikaner-Native confrontation. In this situation, one group feels to be under threat from another and so attempts to hold on to power to the exclusion of the others, while the other group holds to a doctrine which says 'this is our land, and you have no right to stop us from taking control of our land'.

Neither the latter policy of territorialism or the other of exclusionism can lead to peace. Land is nothing without people, even Ireland would be a jungle without people. Similarly, exclusion does not respect difference, and will inevitably fail. In a third way, both the conflict here and in Nouvelle Calédonie have another parallel. That is, both have seen all sides to the conflict come to an agreement on how to move forward, in a way that respects and reflects the aspirations of all sides.

I hope to bring a number of speakers of international standing, particularly those with expertise of and experience in conflict resolution and peace, to the University of Ulster. I believe we can play an important role in discussing and developing the practice of conflict resolution and the philosophy of peace. We should take the lessons of our own story, as we move towards and beyond completion of our conflict, and share them with the lessons of elsewhere. In that way, we can send out the philosophy of peace

from this city that has seen so much conflict in the past. That will be a fitting testament to the memory of Tip O'Neill, a man for whom peace meant so much.

I am delighted to see so many of you here this evening to the first in this series of lectures.

I would be delighted to now invite the former Prime Minister of France, Michel Rocard, to address us.