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# SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY

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## PRESS RELEASE

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EMBARGO: 7.00 P.M., FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1977.

STATEMENT BY SDLP CHAIRMAN DENIS HAUGHEY AT OPENING OF  
PARTY'S SEVENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4,  
IN THE SLIEVE DONARD HOTEL, NEWCASTLE.

"In this year gone past politics have come to a standstill. Direct Rule has removed from the hands of local politicians, the power to solve the most important problem facing the people of Northern Ireland - the divisions in our society. Power has been transferred into the hands of people who have neither the will nor the knowledge to solve it. It is clear to most people that Direct Rule is inadequate to our needs, that it does not offer any hope of an acceptable settlement, and that it does not offer any hope of a cessation of violence. In this much, at least, there is general agreement on both sides of the political divide. We need a strong <sup>Central</sup> government here in Northern Ireland to deal with the problem of our society.

"It would appear that this message has finally got through to the Secretary of State and that the kiss of life is to be given to the political process in Northern Ireland. If that is so, then we must make it clear that we are not interested in participating in a charade to save Mr. Mason's face. If

there are to be talks then no party could be more anxious than the SDLP that such talks should proceed to successful negotiations. But this will only be the case if other parties approach talks on a realistic basis.

"Firstly, there must be a realistic acceptance that the past is dead. We are all to blame for mistakes and misunderstandings of the past; the future can only be built on a spirit of forgiveness and a willingness to forget.

"Secondly, there must be a realistic effort on both sides to grasp the fears and misgivings of "the other side" in a spirit of generosity and tolerance.

"For our part we understand the genuine fears and misgivings of the "Ulster-Scots" community. We regard them as our fellow-Irishmen, entitled to the same respect, the same rights and the same regard as any other section of the Irish people. However, we recognise and respect the fact that most of them see themselves in a different light; that is their right and it is one we have never sought to deny them. We realise their great fear of becoming an isolated minority on this island with the consequent loss of their culture, religious and civil rights and their separate identity. We realise their great fear, above all, that they may lose the right to seek their own destinies as a people. Therefore we accept that as an essential part of any settlement there would have to be guarantees of the rights, traditions and culture of the Unionist people of Northern Ireland.

"We are prepared to consider a framework of guarantees, which the Unionist people may feel necessary so that their way of life will not be subverted. We know that such assurances would be endorsed in London and Dublin. However, no rights are exclusive. Unionists cannot have the sole right to shape the future of this community. We, for our part, will be seeking assurances and guarantees that all citizens and all sections of our community will have the right to participate in government without prejudice to their beliefs and aspirations.

"Unless there is a realistic acceptance of these various provisos further talks are pointless. We are as anxious as anyone to reach a settlement and we have worked harder than most to devise acceptable formulae. However, Northern Ireland does not need another round of failed negotiations. If this Party is to participate in a fresh government initiative, then the final shape of the settlement which the Government envisages must be explicit, at least in broad outlines, from the very beginning. Everyone participating in such an initiative must be aware from the beginning of the direction we are all expected to go. That is the only possible way to avoid a breakdown of talks and the further disillusionment of the people of the North with the whole process of politics. All our efforts must be directed towards a permanent settlement, so that we may avoid a recurrence in five or ten years time of the present agonies this community is going through."

(ENNS)