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STATEMENT BY MR JOHN HUME
SDLP LEADER WHEN INTRODUCING
THE PARTY'S POLICY PROPOSALS
TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S
CONFERENCE TUESDAY, JANUARY 8, 1980

In introducing the SDLP Paper to the conference, SDLP Leader, John Hume, noted that the purpose of the conference was to provide the British Cabinet with a report on the state of political opinion in Northern Ireland and pointed out that the SDLP had already made clear that the original thoughts of the British Government, as represented in their White Paper, were totally inadequate in scope to deal with the real roots of the Northern Ireland problem. "The Northern Ireland problem", said Mr. Hume, "can only be solved in a much wider context. That was a view of a substantial section of opinion in Northern Ireland and it is the role of the SDLP, at this conference, to put that opinion on the record, on the table, and to put that context, that wider context, to the conference.

"Referring to the violence of the last decade, the worst that Ireland had ever seen, one thing emerges clearly. It is that traditional political attitudes will not provide a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland. If the death and destruction of the last decade meant anything it meant a clear challenge to traditional points of view and demanded, if nothing else did, a complete reappraisal of attitudes by all parties to the conflict.

"The reappraisal must begin with the British Government itself. As the Government which retained sovereignty and which exercised all authority and responsibility over Northern Ireland, it had

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The major responsibility for the situation here and, therefore, a serious responsibility rested on that Government to, while asking all other parties in Northern Ireland to re-examine their approach, to re-examine their own approach.

"The British Government's approach to the Northern Ireland problem has been totally consistent since 1920 in that the whole basis of its' policy was to underline and guarantee one identity in a situation where the problem resulted from a clash of identities. It is legitimate for me to ask at this conference whether this has been a successful basis of policy. Has it produced stability? What has it produced? Has it even satisfied those Loyalists that it was designed to satisfy? Has it even produced from those Loyalists acceptance of the other terms laid down by the British Government and Parliament for the government of Northern Ireland? A situation, unique in the world, in which the constitutional basis of a community is enshrined only in an act of Parliament, is a recipe for instability since, in effect, as long as the constitutional basis for the government of Northern Ireland is enshrined in an act of the British Parliament, it will always be the subject of Party political bargaining and there will always, therefore be insecurity among the people of Northern Ireland. This has been revealed on countless occasions every time a Unionist leader meets a British political leader he demands reassurance on the constitutional position, underlining that he has got no assurance at all. The first step towards moving towards a solution must be a complete re-examination by the British Government itself of its approach to a resolution of the conflict.

As for the Loyalist population and the Loyalist politicians the Protestant tradition in Ireland has always sought, and rightly so, to protect its separate identity. Ireland would be a much poorer place without them. Diversity enriches our country and we should see to it that it is always preserved. What I would ask them to question, however, has been their method of preserving their separate identity because to date they have consistently done so by the exclusive use of power; by holding all power in their own hands; by basically 'an ourselves alone' attitude. This attitude has inherent in it seeds of conflict because by its exclusive nature it is bound, in the end, to lead to conflict. The real security of the Loyalist people rests in their own numbers and on their own strength. My appeal to them would be to stand up and negotiate with the rest of the people of Ireland an agreed way in which the peoples of this island can come together in peace and harmony.

"As for the Nationalist tradition it, too, has had a fairly consistent approach down the years and in many ways has presented a narrow and sectional vision of Ireland; one which has tended to exclude any understanding of the rights and aspirations of the Protestant population. In its extreme form this tradition has given birth to paramilitary organisations who think it not only right to die but to kill for this tradition. Here again the exclusivist nature of this approach has inherent in it seeds of conflict and it, too, must examine its whole role and what sort of Ireland it was offering. Not a conquest of the North to the South but an agreement on a New Ireland.

"These two exclusivist approaches, of their very nature, are bound to lead to conflict. There is bound to be another way in which each can pursue their legitimate objectives without leading to conflict.

"Indeed as we looked at our prisons today filled by so many of our young people from both sections of our community there is little value in political leaders taking a holier than thou attitude to them. They in a sense are a product of the political situation and are the victims of the traditional political approaches which taken to their logical conclusion can only lead and have led to conflict. Our responsibility is to find an alternative way.

"The alternative role to conflict is partnership. Partnership between the two Irish traditions is a necessary means whereby we can reduce prejudice and misunderstandings between us and replace them with trust and confidence. Partnership is not an end itself; It is an artificial form of government but we have a totally artificial situation which require, in the short term, artificial means. Partnership is not, as I say, an end in itself. It is a means whereby the people can grow together and can replace distrust and hatred with confidence and trust.

"Similarly, it is foolish to suggest partnership should be confined to only one part of Ireland. It is also necessary that a similar trust be built between both parts of Ireland. The events of the past twelve months have underlined even more clearly than ever before the fact that the British Government alone can resolve the crisis in Northern Ireland but that it is a joint responsibility of both the British and Irish Governments. They should take that joint responsibility now and declare themselves committed to eradicating violence in Ireland forever. They should announce that there are no longer any unconditional guarantees for anyone in this situation, only an objective which would achieve guarantees for everyone and that their objective would be produced by achieving agreed means of living together. The first step in such an agreed means might be a partnership administration in Northern Ireland, agreed among the representatives of Northern Ireland. A further step would then be the creation^{of}/machinery, established in friendship, which would examine the differences between the people of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain and create the process which would eliminate, in time, these differences and allow the people to grow together in harmony and peace.

"The SDLP emphasise, yet again, that we do not advocate the taking over of the North by the South;

we advocate the coming together in agreement of both parts of Ireland. The people of the North must negotiate with the people of the Republic, through their representatives, arrangements whereby the peoples of Ireland can live together in harmony and peace. The policy of the British Government should be to encourage should a process, a process which, in the end, would lead to peace

and stability for all the people of Ireland and where there could be a role for all the people in which the rights of all people and traditions would be protected.

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