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BELFAST

FOR : Andrew Patterson
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"Inside Politics", Radio Ulster - Interview with
Mr. John Hume, Leader of the SDLP,
Saturday, 10 July, 1993

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Introduction (Mr. Jim Dougal)

Good afternoon. This week's disagreement over the suggestion by the Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring that joint authority should be considered as an option for the future Government of Northern Ireland represents one of the most serious breaches in Anglo-Irish relations since Peter Brooke began his attempts to get comprehensive negotiations started here three years ago. Reaction was split along fairly predictable lines. For once the Secretary of State Sir Patrick Mayhew and the Unionist parties were united in their opposition to the Dublin suggestion. According to the SDLP Leader John Hume, Mr. Spring was talking common sense. While Sir Patrick is determined to bring the parties together in new negotiations the row will have made his task more difficult. And in the meantime those other talks between the SDLP Leader and the Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams are continuing in their attempts to find what they call an overall strategy for peace, a strategy which would remove IRA violence. Mr. Hume has said that he is hopeful for the outcome of those talks and when I spoke to him I asked him why.

Mr. Hume: well, I think there is no doubt about that and anybody with common sense would see that, because only two things can happen as I have said repeatedly as well. Either we fail in our objective of lasting peace which means a total cessation of all violence in our streets, and if we fail nothing has changed unfortunately, but if we succeed

everything has changed and that makes it an extremely important initiative and as we have made clear in our joint statement, what we are trying to do is get agreement, agreement among the people who live in the island of Ireland and we're discussing the means of reaching that agreement and I think, and I have to say this, and I am not going to go into the details because the talks are still proceeding, that I believe from my indepth discussions with Mr. Adams, that he is very very serious and that the people he is representing are very very serious about this initiative and I am prepared to go right down the road until we reach a conclusion in that which I believe to be an extremely important initiative. Because as everybody in our streets listening to me would know, if that initiative is successful the whole atmosphere will be completely transformed. And let me repeat what I have repeated often, that Unionist politicians don't seem to either listen or don't want to believe that what we are seeking, and what I am in particular seeking, is agreement among the people about our future. Nobody thinks, and I certainly don't think, that conquest of one section of a people by another is going to provide any basis for lasting peace.

Interviewer: You say you're hopeful. Now, in saying that you will, as I'm sure you understand, raise people's expectations for these talks, and if you are raising expectations which people have and the raising of those expectations is not realistic, surely it's dangerous.

Mr. Hume: Well, I don't see that it's dangerous. You asked me a question and I'm answering it truthfully and I already said to you, and I've said repeatedly to the public, if we fail nothing is changed. I don't see any danger in what I'm doing, the danger would appear to be all the criticism that I've been subjected to and the fact that certain loyalist magazines have put my photograph in their front and described me as a major obstacle to peace which means that they are setting me up as a target. I'm aware of all of that. We've

lived with that for the last twenty-five years and my home has been attacked on many many occasions by supporters of the Republican movement in fact, but I'm aware of the dangers but it's my responsibility and it is the responsibility of every single elected representative because what do we stand for election for if our method is not dialogue and if it's not our responsibility to enter into dialogue with everybody in our society. I mean I have also said that my invitation hasn't been taken up, that I am willing to talk directly to the loyalist paramilitaries and I note that the Unionist parties that have criticised me for talking to Mr. Adams had no problem about talking directly, as we have seen in the last week, with loyalist paramilitaries and have no problem also in going to funerals of such paramilitaries, a paramilitary who died trying to throw grenades at the police. Now suppose I appeared at such a funeral, or any member of the SDLP, you would still be hearing the outcry so there's a lot of hypocrisy around among Unionist politicians about this particular matter, but at the end of the day, I put my faith in the ordinary people on the ground on the Unionist side whom I believe and from the amount of correspondence and messages I have got from them, they have wished me well and I repeat my offer to talk to any section of the Unionist people directly at grassroots level. Not only about our politics but about our economics and about how we can work together to build hope for our young people.

Interviewer: Do you believe that Gerry Adams wants to see an end to violence?

Mr. Bume: I have said that I believe that Mr. Adams and the people he is representing are treating this dialogue very sincerely and very seriously. I also am very aware of the nature of their organisation and the origins of their organisation. There has been unfortunately in our country a sort of patriotism handed down which is being seen as very noble and there's people giving their lives for their country,

that was a virtue that was highly respected throughout the country for a long time. I have never been in favour of it because I have always argued that it's the people who matter in our country, not our territory, that our people are divided and that you can't unite people or get agreement among people by any form of coercion. But recognising the tradition from which they come I believe knowing what they have done and what they have been through that it will take, and I have said this in public statements as well, the most enormous moral courage that we have seen in the history of this country to lead the Provisional movement away from violence completely and into a strategy that is designed to reach lasting peace by agreement among our people. I have no doubt about the enormous difficulties that lie in the way of achieving that and particularly the internal difficulties that exist in such a movement but I am satisfied that the people that Mr. Adams represents are taking this dialogue very seriously and I want them to know that that's what I think and the fact that I'm saying it in public means that I want them to know and I want it to succeed and I hope it does succeed.

Interviewer: What do you mean in terms of difficulties, can you explain that?

Mr. Bume: No, I have already explained it in the sense that given the nature of the organisation and given what they have done, I mean, I am talking about the IRA now for example, they have killed a lot of people, a lot of their own members have been killed, a lot of them spent a lot of their lives in prison and I accept that they believe in what they are doing. I mean a lot of people dismiss them as criminals and gangsters. If they were, they'd be cleaned up in a fortnight. It's because they believe in what they are doing now, I disagree profoundly with what they are doing and with their beliefs and their particular methods, but given that and given all of that, then in their own minds they have to justify what has happened and to end and agree that they are going to

change their methods completely will require enormous moral courage. I mean any common sense person would see that anyway, and I shouldn't have to say it.

Interviewer: OK, but do you believe that there are people in this movement who at present support the methods of the IRA who have the moral courage to see that violence stops?

Mr. Hume: Well, I wouldn't be engaged in this dialogue if I didn't think that there was a real opportunity of agreeing what we have described as an overall strategy, not what some critics misrepresent as a joint strategy just between me and them, an overall strategy because an overall strategy must involve everyone who is involved in this problem, an overall strategy for lasting peace.

Interviewer: And you're convinced that Mr. Adams wants to see an end of violence?

Mr. Hume: I have made very clear that I am convinced of that and that I am convinced of his sincerity and seriousness in this dialogue. Naturally, my immediate message to everybody is lay down your guns immediately because as has been my consistent message for twenty years, my belief is that all that guns do is deepen our problem which is a divided people, not a divided piece of earth and deepen the divisions and deepen the antagonisms which makes the problem worse and make it more difficult to solve and the healing process that will be required to solve our differences will take a lot longer because of violence and its affects.

Interviewer: These talks have been going on now as far as we know for a couple of months, how far have you got?

Mr. Hume: Well I have already told you all I am going to tell you about them. We have been honest enough to put out a statement saying what our objectives are and what I am saying

about them is that I will continue them until we reach a final conclusion which I hope will be success, but again if it's failure I will be deeply disappointed.

Interviewer: Tell me what success is?

Mr. Hume: Success is lasting peace and a total end to all violence on our streets.

Interviewer: People have a right to ask you how long this is going to take, if it's going to be successful?

Mr. Hume: And I have a right to tell them that this is such an important initiative that I am not going to put timetables on it and make false promises that I can't uphold. What I am promising is that we're engaged in a serious dialogue which I hope we will both bring to a successful conclusion.

Interviewer: What is an overall strategy to peace?

Mr. Hume: Well, if we reach agreement on such a strategy you will hear about it because at the end of the day, no agreement of any description has any force unless the people at the end of the day will support it and as our statement also made clear, and I ask the Unionist people to listen to this, we have both agreed that no agreement will work unless it has the loyalty of all our traditions.

Interviewer: OK, can I ask you about something else and it's this. It's the joint authority which Dick Spring said during the week should be considered as an option for settlement of the problems of Northern Ireland. Isn't joint authority something which your party would like?

Mr. Hume: Well, in the first place what Dick Spring was saying, and of course his interview was distorted beyond everything, is that what we have always understood from the

British government is that everything is on the table, that we have relationships to sort out so everybody is free to put on the table anything that they feel can sort out our relationships. What we're trying to do is accommodate what is clearly two identities in our situation, attempt joint authority. Some people interpret it to suit themselves, I mean let me say this, here's another interpretation of joint authority, we're already living under joint authority. For example every single decision taken about agriculture or farming community, rural development and therefore the prosperity of our rural towns is taken by joint authority, not just a joint authority of Britain and Ireland but the joint authority of ten countries. Every single decision that has been taken about Warrenpoint Harbour, Larne Harbour, Belfast Harbour, Derry Harbour, the Harbour in North Antrim, have all been taken by joint authority. Every decision, every assistance that we can give to new industry, to create jobs in Northern Ireland, we can give better assistance than anywhere else in Europe because of the joint authority proposals that we have and every young person who is in a training programme in Northern Ireland is there because of the joint authority that is providing all of that, so you can interpret. What I'm really saying is this. We are in a post-nationalist world today. John Hume is saying, and everybody describes him as a nationalist, we are in a post-nationalist world today because the barriers between peoples, 19th century nationalism was about territory and territory caused two world wars and imperialism. We have now gone into a smaller world where those barriers are breaking down, where humanity, where the world recognises that humanity is more important than nationality. But what we have to do in our little piece of earth is reach agreement amongst ourselves on how we share that piece of earth and I underline the word agreement and so did Dick Spring in his interview this week.

Interviewer: SDLP Leader, John Hume. And that's all from Inside Politics for today.