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# news from Labour

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TUESDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 1997

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGO: 10.00AM TUESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 1997

TEXT OF SPEECH BY RT HON MARJORIE MOWLAM MP,  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, AT THE  
LABOUR PARTY ANNUAL CONFERENCE 1997

*25*  
*[scribble]*  
*[scribble]*

ENDS

PSM, PSMS, PSS,  
S/S Gallagher, Counsellors  
A-I, Mr Teahon, Mr Dalton,  
Dr Mansergh, Ambassadors  
London & Washington, Joint  
Secretary, Section, Box

new Labour  
new Britain

Many, many people have worked hard over the last five months to make progress - especially the Northern Ireland Parties, the Irish Government and as the Composite acknowledges, the talks chairs - George Mitchell, John De Chastelain and Hari Holkeri - people who have given years of their lives to help us.

And I am proud to be part of a strong government team too. It includes:

Paul Murphy, MP for Torfaen who is at the talks now, working away,

Adam Ingram MP, for East Kilbride;

Tony Worthington, MP for Clydebank and Milngavie;

and Lord Dubs.

A great deal has been accomplished since last May.

The IRA cease-fire has been restored;

And the Loyalists' cease-fire maintained;

A peaceful July 12th weekend, during the marching season - despite the failure to reach accommodation at Drumcree.

And now, most important of all, the launch of talks designed to bring a new agreement among the parties for all the people of Northern Ireland.

Not only that, but unionists and nationalists, loyalists and republicans have agreed to meet under the same roof at the same time

When I took this job, being in Belfast for half the week, I thought I might lose contact, support and advice from some cabinet colleagues.

But one colleague in particular has phoned and faxed, supported, advised and visited. Much more than could have been hoped for.

I know we are expected to be nice about him - but his time, his attention to detail, but above all his commitment, has made a real difference to the peace process.

Thank you Tony Blair.

His speech of May 16th in Belfast - his first major one as Prime Minister - set the tone for all that has followed.

He made it clear then that he wanted to see a fair political settlement for Northern Ireland - one that both communities can support.

Achieved by an inclusive process of negotiations.

He said that our approach would be - and it has been since - based on clear principles, with the principle of consent at its heart.

This means there will be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the clear consent of a majority of the people who live there.

Whether Northern Ireland is to remain part of the UK or be part of a united Ireland is for the people of Northern Ireland to decide

Anything decided at the talks launched in Belfast will require the support of parties representing a majority in both communities.

And then, they'll require the consent of the people, and of parliament at Westminster.

Negotiations will take place in three key areas:

firstly, a fair and balanced devolution package for Northern Ireland;

secondly, new arrangements for co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic;

and thirdly, a new relationship between the British and Irish governments.

We have to reach agreement on each of these elements to achieve the goal of the talks.

We now have the key parties together pursuing that goal.

Yes, that is a breakthrough.

Things are moving forward.

But there are still times in Northern Ireland when the sheer rawness of the sectarian hatred and bigotry surprises me.

It comes from a very few people, but it serves to fuel fear and distrust across the whole community.

Like meeting halls and churches being burnt down...

or people standing outside churches, picketing others at their place of worship...

or being kicked to death if you are in the wrong bar at the wrong time.

Our principles guiding us in dealing with this are the same principles that guide the government overall.

The basic principles of fairness, justice and equality of opportunity.

Listening to people from both communities I hear example after example of where those principles have been silent.

Whether in the last 30, 75, or 500 years.

A legacy of unfairness and injustice haunts both communities.

That is why it is necessary to introduce legislation to begin to change this.

In this session of Parliament we will fulfil the commitments we made at the election to introduce:

a Bill on changes in policing - to increase support across the whole community;

a Bill, as composite 37 recommends, to promote "local mediation and conciliation over marches and parades";

and a bill, a new emergency provisions bill, with significant changes - a temporary bill until new UK-wide legislation is available to tackle the changing nature of terrorism world-wide.

The people of Northern Ireland will also benefit greatly from the changes to be introduced in the rest of the UK, like:

incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into our law;  
Freedom of Information;

our welfare to work proposals;

improved education standards;

and better patient care on the NHS.

We mustn't lose sight of how important these issues are to people's day to day lives in Northern Ireland as well.

Chatting to people in Newtonabbey shopping centre last Friday, the vast majority of people talked of their desire for peace. After that it was jobs, jobs, jobs.

Our strategy has to be based on the creation of new jobs.

Which is why we are forming a new economic development strategy based on Northern Ireland's strengths - on education and training, investment and innovation.

It is indefensible that unemployment is still twice as high among Catholics as Protestants in Northern Ireland.

This imbalance must be addressed, it is unacceptable in any civilised society.

Our welfare to work proposals for young people and the long-term unemployed will be central to tackling these problems.

And we will clarify the law for employers who wish to take on directly people who have been out of work for a long time

These and other measures are crucial to combat discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.

When you have fundamental injustices in any society, it is very difficult to build accommodation and trust.

We now have the report on Employment Equality from the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights.

We are looking at and consulting on all 160 of their recommendations and will publish a full paper in the winter.

But we've already launched an audit in every Northern Ireland Department to measure their success in achieving greater equality.

And we are looking to resolve complaints quicker and to strengthen action against persistent discrimination.

We want to help build trust and confidence.

But building up confidence in one community just by knocking it down in the other is the wrong approach.

We have been straight in dealing with the people of Northern Ireland.

As we must be.

There are no hidden agendas.

Yes, I want to see an end to direct rule from Westminster.

But it has to be by agreement in the talks and supported by the people of Northern Ireland.

That agreement will be the springboard for a new future.

Many people have shown a lot of political courage in recent days and months to get to where we are now.

It will take more strength and courage from all of us, working together, to overcome the many hurdles ahead.

The really hard work is only now beginning.

It won't be easy.

It is much harder to compromise than to hold on to old certainties.

Composite 37 is positive, determined and clear about the future. I hope conference, you will give it your full support.

Just as our party approached the election and is dealing with government, we, in the peace process in Northern Ireland, won't avoid tough decisions.

We will listen, consult and respond to change.

I don't want to contemplate failure as an option.

I want a Northern Ireland at peace with itself.

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