

HUME ANALYSIS FUNDAMENTALLY FLAWED ALDERDICE

Alliance Leader, Dr John Alderdice, speaking at Portstewart Town Hall to the Annual General Meeting of Coleraine and District Alliance Association, on Wednesday 24 January 1990, delivered a clear critique of the position adopted by SDLP Leader, Mr John Hume.

Dr Alderdice said:

"Mr Hume has frequently maintained that the problems in this community are problems of human relations, and that, rather than people talking about their pet solutions, we should be getting down to talking about the problem. This apparently indisputable position is then followed by an explication of 'the three sets of relations' which need to be resolved. Of these three, he says, the crucial relation is that between the unionists and the rest of the people of the island. Finally, he states that these relations must first be resolved at a round table conference, which may take a very long time, and then suitable institutions can be established to reflect the healed relationships.

This analysis while it is superficially plausible, is in fact, fundamentally flawed. One might be tempted to address the more obvious flaws of the later part of the analysis and to point out that any long-standing conference will hand the initiative to the terrorists who will ensure that the level of violence is increased to a point where the conference will break down in disputes over the handling of security policy. One might also question the 'three sets of relations' idea, and especially the assertion that the crucial relationship is between the unionists and the rest of the people of this island.

There is however a much more fundamental flaw in his argument, and it goes right to the heart of our understanding of resolving problems in human relations. His analysis suggests that it is possible to resolve difficulties in relationships prior to the establishment of a structure and context for these relationships. All our experience of dealing with problems in human relations, whether of individuals, families or groups, demonstrates without question that this is putting the cart before the horse. Human relations are disrupted by two main problems. Firstly, an absence of suitable, stable structures. Secondly they are adversely affected by the history and background of the relations. The second problem cannot be resolved in the absence of suitable structures.

What is astonishing about Mr Hume's strategy is its inconsistency. It flies in the face of his own previous position.

In the late 1960's it was appreciated by reform-minded people, including Mr Hume, that the old Stormont structures would have to be changed before better relations could develop.

In the 1980's it was similarly widely understood that if British-Irish relations were to develop in a constructive fashion, an Anglo-Irish framework would first have to be established. This view was of course shared by Mr Hume. It is inconsistent that having appreciated and

indeed promoted and sustained a policy of 'structures first' he is now promoting a view that is at odds with what he has said before.

The reality is that relations within our community cannot really begin to improve on a dependable basis, unless and until, fair and firm institutions and political structures are put in place. There are now now opportunities for real political progress, but future generations will find it hard to understand and justify this changed strategy on the part of Mr Hume, particularly if it is held with such a 'not an inch' determination as to become an obstacle to political progress.

The Secretary of State, Rt Hon Peter Brooke, recognised in his celebrated Bangor Speech, that in recent years only ALLIANCE had put forward detailed and considered proposals, as published in our 'Governing with Consent' document. He also looked towards a fuller and more developed view from the SDLP. When Mr Hume established his devolution study group, of Mr McGrady, Mr Currie and Mr Farren, some years ago in the wake of the Unionist Task Force, we too had looked forward to such a publication. As far as I am aware that Group has yet to report."