

# news from Labour

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY  
RT HON MO MOWLAM MP  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND  
AT THE LABOUR PARTY ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
WEDNESDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, BLACKPOOL

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MO MOWLAM

Thank you conference,

And thank you for yesterday on behalf of all the people  
who've made progress in Northern Ireland possible.

One group who've worked very hard to that end who I don't  
often get the chance to thank are the ministerial team - so  
here goes:

Paul Murphy

Adam Ingram

John McFall

Alf Dubs

And Tony Worthington for all the work he put in.

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I've often been asked here at Conference - how did we do it,  
how did we get an agreement

My answer is simple.

We didn't.

They did.

The people who sat through the days and months of hard  
negotiation.

David and Seamus.

Monica McWilliams from the Women's Coalition

Gerry Adams from Sinn Fein

John Alderdice from the Alliance Party,

Malachi Curran from the Labour group,

Gary McMichael from the Ulster Democratic Party

David Ervine from the Progressive Unionist Party.

And John Hume - who has given so much over the years.

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Each one, backed up by their parties.  
Engaging with each other, talking, debating, challenging  
each other's positions.

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Unionist, Nationalist, Loyalist and republican all in the  
same room.

That, for me, is what the process is all about.

The process of change.

The process of listening to others,

The process of accommodation.

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The Agreement would also not have been possible without the commitment of two other people.

Both elected to power only a year before.

Both determined to give Northern Ireland number one priority.

One had to leave the talks to go to his mum's funeral. But he came straight back.

The other put everything else on hold to be there,

Both of them 100% engaged, 100% committed.

We all owe a very special thank you to Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern and to Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

But politicians can only bring about change if they work with people.

Connect with people.

Referendums North and South on the island of Ireland showed that the people were with the politicians.

71% in Northern Ireland and 95% in the Irish Republic said Yes to the Agreement.

In June, there were elections to a new Northern Ireland Assembly.

Again, over 70% of voters backed parties supporting the Agreement.

The Parties, the People, and now Parliament.

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The Legislation now in Westminster is there to implement all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement.

And it is crucial that all aspects move forward together - in parallel.

No one agrees with one hundred percent of it but everyone has to give a bit to make it work.

To make it work takes confidence.

And it takes trust to get out of the old bunkers and move forward.

The next weeks and months are going to be crucial and they're going to be tough.

We need to keep on making constant progress, on all parts of the Agreement:

the Northern Ireland Assembly;

the North/South Ministerial Council;

the British-Irish Council;

the Civic Forum;

the commission on policing, the criminal justice review

and the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission.

Next week is the thirtieth anniversary of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland - a movement whose ideals many here today have supported.

Thanks to the Good Friday Agreement, we are within sight of fulfilling those ideals.

Within sight of a new Northern Ireland where the basic civil rights of all are truly upheld.

The new Equality Commission - which we are still consulting on - will monitor and enforce a legal duty on all public authorities to promote equality of opportunity - regardless of religion or race, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

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The New Human Rights Commission will be asked to consult on a full Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland - building on the

ECHR.

The Commission will advise and help people take human rights cases to court.

And be able to hold inquiries in its own right.

We are working with people to bring about change.

But that doesn't mean we forget those who have most difficulty with change.

We have not forgotten the 29% of people who voted No.

Many, let's be honest, because they couldn't support the difficult part in the Good Friday Agreement about prisoner releases.

It's difficult for me too. But it is part of the Agreement and there would have been no Agreement without all the parts.

Prisoner releases are especially hard for those who have been the victims.

We have announced over 2 million pounds worth of new initiatives to help the victims of violence and their families.

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And today we have launched a review of criminal injuries compensation.

This Review will give them a chance to have their say about how the compensation system works and could work in the future.

Making peace is also about addressing past grievances that live on into the present.

In January, the Prime Minister announced an independent inquiry into the Bloody Sunday killings.

Honouring our pre-election pledge.

We are honouring our pledges.

All other parties have to honour their pledges too - and that means implementing all parts of the Agreement.

Everyone from now on has to accept only peaceful methods as the way forward.

The Agreement makes this quite clear.

It's what the people want

You only have to look at the reaction to the horrific events at Omagh in August.

The message from all sides of the community was strong and clear - 'we will not tolerate paramilitary violence wherever it comes from' -

Neither will the government.

Together with the Irish Government, we are determined that anyone using violence to oppose the Agreement will have no shelter from the law - on either side of the border.

Our two governments have to work together - including on

anti-terrorist measures, as we did this Summer.

But the best way to fight terrorism is to make the Agreement a success.

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And there is no doubt that the threat from terrorism is getting less.

Today, the Chief Constable has announced further steps on the road to normalisation, including closure of vehicle check points and sangars in Belfast, Derry, Straban, Newry and Aughnacloy.

The less the threat of violence, the more we can respond.

I want to see the troops off the streets - permanently.

But I'm also determined to see that people in Northern Ireland feel as safe and secure as possible.

That means paramilitary weapons must be decommissioned too.

The independent Commission is there ready to oversee the process.

It has to happen. The sooner the better.

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Alongside stability and security in the new Northern Ireland, I want to see - to borrow one of ICTU's campaign phrases - 'a Better Life for All'.

A normal life - the sort most of us take for granted.

The issues you and I just assume are there on the political agenda - jobs, training, and skills, education, housing and health - are even more important in Northern Ireland because the last thirty years of violence has produced an unacceptable level of deprivation and exclusion.

So the Governments policies on new deal, welfare reform, more money for hospitals and schools are crucial to make sure the peace has stable roots to grow from.

Working together to bring about change.

That's how its being done.

Based on principles.

Decent, human principles of fairness, justice, equality and respect.

Based on peace and consent.

But most of all, on the people.

I won't hide from you - there are difficult days ahead, high hurdles still to climb over.

But we've come so far that I am confident there is no going back.

The people of Northern Ireland have the will to succeed - a desire so strong you can feel it.

They want their leaders to find a way through any difficulties.

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They have trod the path to peace and want no U turns, no dead-ends.

We in the Labour Party, with the people of Northern Ireland will walk shoulder to shoulder along that path of peace together.

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