Only by an end to abstentionism and a complete abandonm violence can Sinn Fein hope for an electoral pact with the SDLP, says John Hume

constitute the basis for a viable political strategy. Despite the mayhem and disappointment of recent days, the SDLP has stood firm. As a party we have always known the scale of our daunted by it. We stood the test of bigotry, discrimination and State violence and yet have never been and yet have never been the stood the test of bigotry.

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have kept faith in our non-violence. We have and will always face the electorate on misrepresented and hampered by the violence of others but we have kept faith in our never been tempted by revenge.
We have been hurt, our record, underlined by these

Westminster. In fact, whole decades have gone by in the past in which not a single nationalist voice was heard in have speculated about the possibility of electoral pacts or arrangements between the SDLP and Sinn Fein in the coming Westminster elections have missed the main point at unfairness of the British electoral system. Since the noundation of the Northern Ireland State, the nationalist community in Northern Ireland has been consistently values.
All of the commentators who the main point consistent

The single member constituency, with a 'first past the post' voting system, is completely unsuited to the circumstances of Northern Ireland. Every British Government in recent times has seed PR for local government elections assembly style elections. Yet they have offer the propan adamantly refused to change the voting system for Westmaster elections in Northern Ireland because of their fear of the PR lobby in Great Britian.

This refusal to correct a gross injustice to the nationalist community makes a moskery of the commitment, which they The single m

made in the Frameworks
Document, to administer the
affairs of Northern Ireland
with rigorous impartially. It
is also a grave disservice to
democracy in a society with
such deep divisions and so
many political parties.
Time after time, the British
electoral system has resulted in
a number of consiltuencies, with

large nationalist majorities, being represented at Westminster by Unionist MPs, sometimes of the most extreme views, who represent only a minority of the voters.

at Westminster all down the years has distorted the approach of the Westminster parliament to Northern Ireland, Indeed the over-representation of Unionists at Westminster has frequently distorted the whole policy of the The fact that the nationalist case has been under-represented

administration even entered mio a parliamentary pact with the Uster Unionist Party in the fate sevenites. And there is a grave suspicion that the strange behaviour of the present government in respect of the peace process is a consequence of Mr Major's desire to maintain ULP support.

The distortion of British policy towards Northern Ireland, because of the gross over-representation of unionsm at Westminster, is the most compelling argument for constituents, and leading the struggle for economic The four SDLP MPs have shown what can be done in compelling argument for achieving the fullest possible s of representing the nalist case, representing interests of their

were represented by nationalists
MPs, then Mr Trimble's party
would be reduced to seven or
eight seats, and there would be
no advantage for a future
Labour government, in a tight There are seven seats which could be won by nationalist candidates. Consider what could be done by seven MPs in advancing the nationalist cause and countering the Unionst blackmail of the British government. If those seven seats were represented by nationalist. pact with the UUP. parliamentary Callaghan-style

cxactly, is the motivation of those who insist on fighting for seats in a parliament they do not recognise — seats which they would refuse to take it they won them? How does a pokey constituencies represented by abstentionists, or by "agreed candidates" of no clear polinical views or commitment, What, question the motivation of those HE transparent reality and importance of these considerations call into seek to

Ruth Dudley

Dick Spring





SDLP LEADER JOHN HUME: Sinding firm against violence and bigotry Photo: Brian Farrell

of neutralising representation la rather than maximising it, fit into a strategy of seeking a negotiated settlement through the democratic political process?

win parisan advantage within the nationalist community by frustration? In other words, in it the SDLP—and if it is the their concern really to

have done everyting possible to facilitate the transition to a purely political strategy, and to ensure their full managration in the political press. We have done this without thought of our own partisan interests or latter, how does that fit into their expressed desire for a consensus among Irish There is a very strong feeling ithin the SDLP that we have chaved honourably towards be Republican movement. We

considerations vis-a-vis Sinn'
Fein as political rivals.
For the last quarter century,
the SDLP has single-handedly
carried the burden of
representing the nationalist
case. We have, therefore, had a
heavy responsibility to keep in
mind not only the internal
Northern Ireland context, but
also the wider Irish context, the
British context and the
British context and the
sonsidering our notified when considering our political

Others who have not had to carry that burden of responsibility have had much greater freedom to pursue their greater freedom to pursue their greater freedom to pursue their own partisan interests. I believe, therefore, that we are entitled to expect Sinn Fein to deal expect Sinn Fein to deal expect Sinn Fein to greater this issue in light of the greater hational interest. I believe that the same entitled to ask them to we are entitled to ask them to consider carefully the questions If they cannot jettison the

of the OUP vote as Westminster, and yet following a policy which would fail to counteract it? Does it really advance the nationalist case if it to a parliament they do not recognise, and in which they would not sit if elected? Is there any logic in railing against the British Government's courting of the UUP vote at the UUP water and the side of the UUP water and the side of the UUP water and the side of the UUP water at the side of the UUP water at the side of the UUP water and the side of th policy of parliamentary abstention, is not the real logic of that position that they should abstain totally from an election Westminster, or if the nationalist community are at each others' throats over this not even heard

believe that we can discuss all these issues reasonably and logically and work to end the misrepresentation of In circumstances of a complete end to violence, I misrepresentation of constituencies by Unionist MPs, while at the same time

optimising representation of the nationalist community.

These two valid objectives cannot be addressed above, or in isolation from all other considerations. As a party which has always been responsible and responsive, the SDLP has to have regard not just to the reliability of any renewed republican cessation or nosella remission or the state of the stat possible ramifications in terms of loyalist violence but the prospects for wider communal and political relations.

The degree of speculation and calculation now going on in relation to elections is understandable. While parties have their preparations to make

John Hume is the leader of the SDLP.

electoral strategy.

however, we all have deeper, and however, we all have deeper, and with the wider and more immediate in wider and more immediate in responsibilities. Pending responsibilities pending responsibilities and absolve of elections do not absolve of excuse any of us from the duty to promote an advance in our collective situation or, at the collective situa least,

deterioration.

Vote for a oice or a vacuu

can bring a shared and direct apportunity cost in the longer at term in terms of setting back the avital process of peace and treconciliation. or control themselves just because parties are allowing themselves to be preoccupied by thort-term opportunism in the short-term which we face will not contain The difficulties and dangers

concluding that no progress can use made on anything this side of me an election contributes to an election contributes to an election contributes to an election contribute of political vacuum. It also offers an excuse for a leadership deficit in the meantime risking regression rather than preserving the possibility of progress in the contribute. politicians and

Tory and Unionist politicians are essentially arguing for a suspension of the Talks process. Those who missisted that they could not go into multi-party negotiations without an election are now without an election are now. saying that they cannot go on in them with an election.

the date of the election we have on oreason to disengage from of cloris to achieve progress and though talks. Is that not the mandate we have from the election that was held only election that was held only seven months ago? It is not the seven months ago. Given that we do not know

Equally we cannot see the wall logic of suspending efforts to make create circumstances in which the IRA ceasefire would be unequivocally restored. However slim anyone might consider the prospects for progress on either front this side of the election, we make no apology for applying ourselves to those tasks. Difficulty should not be sented mit for the sented mit for not be equated with futility.