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21 November 2015

Speech by Deputy Leader Rt Hon Nigel Dodds MP to the 2015 DUP Annual Conference

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Nigel Dodds MP

DUP Deputy Leader, Leader of the DUP Parliamentary Party, Spokesman on Reform and Constitutional issues and Foreign Affairs

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We are approaching the centenary of Northern Ireland.
Look where we’ve come.
Look where Northern Ireland is today.
Look at my friend Peter Robinson and see where he has taken us to.

Today our Province is a place where if you want to work, you can secure your own future; where if you can’t, you’ll be looked after; and where, day in, day out, we’re working to put the scourge of terrorism forever behind us.

2015 and Northern Ireland is a vital part of the United Kingdom.
We're staying there....and it's more popular with all of our people than ever.
That's leadership that's working.
That's what the DUP has done.
A better Northern Ireland for all her people, and a better future yet to come.

This has not been an easy place to get to.
None of us – none of us – can do anything but look with admiration at Peter for the burden he has borne in getting us here.
But he and the Party have stood strong.
Where others would have wilted, or chased cheap headlines, or sat on the side-lines and helplessly sniped, we’ve done what had to be done.
We weren’t distracted by wreckers, we weren’t deluded by fantasies.
And we have delivered an agreement that works for Northern Ireland and shows that Northern Ireland works.

And do we ever work! Can there be anywhere our size that equals us? Jonathan Rea, Carl Frampton, Rory McIlroy, Darren Clarke, Graeme McDowell, Champions all and champions made here.

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From sports to science to culture, we're a small place that can do big things.

Only this week we saw the University of Ulster is leading the world in the fight against cancer.

And yes, our cultural appeal reaches far and wide too.

I don't watch Game of Thrones, a programme apparently devoted to how ambitious men or women clamber to the top of the heap.

But it's watched by millions throughout the world.

That's a Northern Ireland that delivers – creative, modern, successful.

And when the Green and White Army go to France next year, we'll be cheering them on.

We'll all of us in Northern Ireland, I trust, be cheering them on.

Indeed, I'll be wishing all the teams present from the British Isles well . . . though not quite as well as us.

But France is much in our minds at the moment.

I don't know about you, but few things have moved me more this last terrible week than the anthem of the French Republique.

The Marseillaise was sung with passion by every politician in France. They're standing up to terrorists, they're not apologising to them, least of all for singing their anthem with pride.

I'll never apologise for our anthem to anyone.

God Save the Queen, long to reign over us here indeed.

In Parliament, I had the honour of congratulating Her Majesty for her record breaking reign earlier this year.

But I've also had less happy tasks to do.

For one, I've had to hold Jeremy Corbyn and his shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, to account.

We won't forget their praise for terrorists.

We won't let them pretend they didn't think gunmen were honourable.

And we'll go on making sure that everyone across the entire country knows what they're dealing with when it comes to that pair.

They were wrong then and unbelievable now.

We deserve a better opposition than that, and I hope that the Labour Party soon comes to its senses and delivers us one.

Just like there'll be no amnesty for terrorists, there'll be no forgetting of the facts or rewriting of them either.

This Party stands for telling the truth about the past every bit as much as we do for telling you the truth about the future we can all share together.

At Parliament, whatever the issue, we have put the national interest first. Whether it's been making sure no more shoddy work is done to the constitution, or keeping the government as honest as we can on the European Referendum, our votes have been critical, and will go on being so. We're determined to use that influence wisely and well.

Serious decisions await us at Westminster about war and tackling terror worldwide.

Our experience here gives us a unique insight.

We will do the right thing for our nation's security, whatever that might entail.



We are approaching 2016.

A year of profoundly significant centenaries.

A year when we will remember again the sacrifice on the Somme.

Ulster has always played its full part in defending freedom.

And our respect and gratitude for today's brave servicemen and women, our security and law enforcement services, knows no bounds.

On living standards you'll have seen what a Fresh Start does for working families.
How it works to make welfare fair, affordable and how it fights fraud in the benefits system.
Well at Westminster our work has been entirely consistent: we've sought to gain Northern Ireland the most humane welfare package in the country.
And – and no offence to our Southern friends - the best country to have it in: British numbers add up.
You can't run a welfare state if you can't afford it.

We have in Parliament at every stage sought to protect working families from needless harm being done to them through misguided changes, not least to Tax Credits.
Where others have sought to play games or cut shabby deals, we've stood firm.
I expect that the Chancellor will very soon listen to the advice we have consistently given him and adjust his policies.
He would be very prudent to do so.

And just like George Osborne needs to be sensible when he thinks about where he wants to get to, we need to be clear sighted and realistic too.
We've endured a lot of criticism and, let's be frank, unease, recently about the state of the Province.
I hear you, but you've seen what we've done.
We have a strategy, we're sticking to it and it's working.



***I want to take you back thirty years to when we faced the threat of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
We were against it, we were right to be so; it was wrong, and it didn't deliver even on its own misguided terms.***

Unionism was excluded from a say in our own country.
Instead Direct Rule with republican input was the order of the day.

There was a better way.
It wasn't the Belfast Agreement, which led directly to so many of the problems we're still sorting out today.....
Problems which we said at the time were inevitable if that form of Agreement was proceeded with and which would one day have to be dealt with.

The architects of the Belfast Agreement laughed us off and carried on regardless.
Indeed, they're shameless about it to this day.
Well those men got the lesson they richly deserved from the electorate.

We heard what you said, and the DUP is delivering a better way – a Northern Ireland that works.



***You'll hear from the side-lines lots of noise in the next few months, but you'll hear no solutions.
You'll see lots of claims being made, but none that will stand up under scrutiny.
Remember this... if they had their way they would drag us back to the days of 1985.
Shouting from the side lines. Powerless and impotent.***

So the choice is clear.
Either we keep Northern Ireland working, keep Northern Ireland moving forwards....
Or we are swept back into a wasteland of despair and stalemate.

The DUP will make Northern Ireland work and won't run away from the fight whenever there are hard challenges to face or easy headlines to chase.
We're better than that, and we're much, much more serious than that.

When you look at your Leader and First Minister, what you see is the embodiment of seriousness. There is grown-up, level-headed, realistic Ulster in all its granite form. He has endured, he has delivered. Allow me to be personal for a moment about a man who is a true friend to me – and to so many of you. I admire his strength of character: he has stood strong in the gale of what the last forty years has thrown at us all. I have seen at close quarters and come to admire more than I can say the sheer talent he has brought to making things work, however impossible the odds have sometimes seemed. He fights every inch of the way, and always in the best interests of Northern Ireland. We were fortunate to have him as Leader. He has done us proud.

We were in the wilderness thirty years ago. Wronged and risking defeat. Now we're in the heart of government, with our fate in our own hands. That's wasn't an easy thing to achieve, it wasn't a certain thing. It took guts and brains and determination. And it meant being prepared to stand up to naysayers from whatever side they chanted.

From Europe to Westminster to Stormont to City and Town Halls this Party stands strong and resolute. Thank you Peter for all that you have done for us: the work goes on, and thanks to you are party is well placed to do it.

Ulster works and this party works for Ulster, now and forever.

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