



VIEWPOINT

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'Yes' to talks

POLL RESULT: Both communities endorse Stormont dialogue

AN overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland want the political party they support — including both the UUP and the DUP — to participate in the Stormont talks. That is by far the most significant outcome of today's Belfast Telegraph poll.

No doubt this will be challenged in some quarters, but the results are so decisive — showing that 76% of DUP voters want to keep talking — that the parties who helped to formulate the questions must take them on board. Whatever reservations there are about negotiating directly with Sinn Fein, the Protestant community is strongly in favour of staying in the talks process, while Catholics are almost unanimous in their approval.

Clearly, this openness to debate is not related to their assessment of the chances of success. Protestants think the peace process is heavily biased in favour of Sinn Fein and the SDLP, while Catholics are less emphatic in their belief that unionists have the upper hand.

As for the decommissioning issue, the differences are more acute. Protestants have a strong preference — 46% — for talks only after decommissioning has been completed, while only 16% of Catholics would find this desirable. A high percentage of Protestants, 65%, would break off talks if the ceasefires were broken, while only 12% of Catholics would agree. Yet both are prepared to accept or tolerate talks continuing without total decommissioning.

The framework document, which is generally condemned by the unionist parties and approved by nationalists, has more acceptance or toleration among Protestants than expected. Only 40% find it unacceptable, while over the province as a whole 57% would disapprove of its rejection.

Overall, the survey shows much more preparedness to give and take, among Protestants and Catholics, than is generally perceived or represented by the political parties. The message is that people are more realistic, and pragmatic, than their political spokespersons, knowing the impossibility of getting 100% of their desires and being prepared to negotiate them, winning some and losing some.

The UUP executive, meeting on Saturday, should take this to heart and listen to the voice of the people, telling the party to stay at the table — even if it is at a distance from Sinn Fein, initially. Boycotts are never the answer, and the boycotters end up in a worse position than before.

Cash questions

RAY BURKE: Dail statement fails to allay concern

AS Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Republic, Ray Burke is a key player in the Northern Ireland peace process. Yet the affairs of the province are not his only political concern, as is evident from events in Dublin yesterday. Mr Burke is at the centre of a row over his decision to accept an unsolicited cash donation of IR£30,000 from a builder in 1989.

The Minister's inadequate statement to the Dail raised more questions than answers. He admitted having received the money in cash in two envelopes from a construction company, but failed to explain why he had omitted to ask why the gift had been made. Although the Minister accepts that he left himself open, he insists no favours were sought or given.

The Minister's lack of candour does nothing to elevate the status of politics in the Republic. The Irish Times accuses Mr Burke of "a barefaced bluff" and warns of public concern over "dubious political behaviour". The Minister arrogantly asserts that the book has been closed on the affair, but few are likely to share this assessment. The Opposition parties are already making clear they are not satisfied by his explanation.

North of the border, the obvious question which this matter raises is whether Mr Burke is an appropriate person to be playing such a central role in the affairs of Northern Ireland.

NOT EVEN THE IRON LADY CAN STOP CHANGE TO THE UNION

FROM the Antrim coast on a clear day, Scotland's physical closeness is a tangible sign of ancient church, political and trading ties.

The view across the narrow water, for some, provides a reassuring awareness of another constituent part of the Union.

UUP deputy leader John Taylor, for one, often has emphasised Ulster's historic identification with Scotland as important, if not more so, than anything that England offers.

The Ulster Unionists, too, have chosen to point out that, until now, they are the only party in the Commons with direct experience of a devolved parliament.

For many unionists, there is no contradiction between the exercise of transferred powers in Belfast and the fundamental requirement to safeguard the Union.

It is the argument being deployed by Labour as it seeks to achieve the historic step of giving the Scots their first national legislative and administrative body for nearly 300 years.

But, if the Conservatives are to be believed, today marks the start of the slippery slope down which Scotland's departure from that Union will be charted.

This week, William Hague, Michael Ancram and Margaret Thatcher (yes, she's still swinging that famous handbag without the merest hint of regret) all ploughed in to predict disaster.

If the vote is 'yes', will it trigger an inevitable drift to independence?

There is a rich irony in Baroness Thatcher's eleventh-hour foray into the arguments over Scotland's future.

Few would dispute that, given the experience of the hated poll tax, Thatcher has carved herself a reputation as the most deeply unpopular figure north of the border.

With not a single Tory MP in Scotland, she might ask herself what part she has played in that sorry demise.

Taxing questions for Scots and the future



WINDOW ON WESTMINSTER

Michael Ancram, transferred from the Stormont beat to constitutional affairs, lambasts Labour's policy.

But we await a credible explanation of how this sits alongside his enthusiasm for devolved power to Northern Ireland while protesting the virtue of the Union.

Unionists recall that it was Thatcher, parading herself as a latter day Boadicea, whose attachment to the Union was uttered even as she endorsed the Hillsborough Accord.

The commonest defence runs along the lines of

"...well, Northern Ireland is different."

So, for that matter, is Scotland, with its own separate system of law, cultural traditions and language.

For years, the Scottish National Party has aspired to the status of an independent nation state within Europe.

Now Labour has been dragged into reviving Scottish home rule after the embarrassing failure of its proposals of two decades ago.

The question is: was the impact of the Thatcher era the main engine for a ground-swell of support

for a parliament in Edinburgh and, now that is over, is it still the best course to take?

With Labour installed at Downing Street, some argue that Scotland should be taking a different view of its future, especially at the hands of a more European-minded leader.

The signs are that this plebiscite will show clearly that the Scots want their own Parliament, irrespective of who is in Number 10.

More difficult to predict is whether they will answer 'yes' to the question about whether that Parliament should have tax-varying powers.

For that will be a truer test of the desire to run the show differently, if not separately.

Without the power to raise revenue, parliamentarians in Edinburgh will set on a collision course with Westminster's (English-dominated) lot.

If such power is granted, how long will it be before the desire for fully-fledged independence rises to the fore.

It has become apparent that, whatever the people decide, the Union — and, perhaps, the sense of a common British identity — is set for change. Not even the Iron Lady can stop it.

Desmond McCartan

WRITEBACK The page where YOU have YOUR say

Facing a no-win situation

How can anyone have confidence in Mowlam?

WHAT on earth does our Secretary of State mean when she said, after signing an agreement for an international commission to oversee the handover of terrorist weapons in parallel with the forthcoming talks, that "everybody knows that we cannot force people to hand in weapons, but what we have here is a structure to facilitate that from day one of the talks?"

She is actually stating that the Government, which she is a Minister, is unable to enforce the law of the land upon the so-called military wings of the terrorist organisations whose political and propaganda wings are to enter into talks on the future governance of this part of our United Kingdom, with normal constitutional parties, which have no similar illegal private armies with illegal arms.

How can anyone have any confidence whatever with such a Minister?

If the terrorists do not agree to consent to whatever may be the outcome of such talks what is to stop them from using their arms and explosives in new acts of terrorism?

What is the point of talks with people whose so-called military wings are a continual threat; especially when any confidence building seems to be confined to these law-breakers?

R. FINLAY McCANCE, Belfast 9.

TO THE POINT

POLITICAL FARSE: It is to be hoped that all those who call or believe themselves unionists will decline to take part in an inane political farse, and request that the British Government act like one, and not as a lucky to Irish dogma and republican intransigence.

It is they who should be under pressure to rid themselves of southern Irish dogma, the Ugly American syndrome, and to persuade the nationalists/republicans to cast aside the outmoded concept of Celtic bloodletting to step out of the shadow of antiquated Armalite and Semtex politics, into the true democratic light.

If they do this — and they certainly have the power to do so — then the unionists, and all who value democracy would, I believe, gladly join together to build a real future, which they, and the coming generations can support, honour and enjoy.

ONE OF THE SILENT MAJORITY, Groomsport, Co Down.

CHOICE MOVES: Maybe consent should mean: Let the people in Northern Ireland first of all vote on their own future, and if they should vote in favour of a united Ireland, then there should be a referendum in the Republic to decide whether they would have us. There are quite a few people who think they would not touch us with a barge pole.

O. E. RUDNITZKY, Comber, Co Down.

I FIND it increasingly alarming to read and hear the advice and comment being directed at unionists to take part in the talks in September.

After all this time have we not recognised that this so-called peace process is a means for unionists to be pressurised to accept the first stage of a united Ireland.

No self-respecting unionist should be anywhere near these talks. The Government has shown that it wants to avoid accepting its responsibilities for running this part of the Kingdom.

Whether the Government likes it or not, it is its job to ensure peace, justice and equality and to provide the normal security of a democratic society which is the right of everybody who lives in this province.

However, the Government over

the years has managed to avoid doing this — in fact as far as the ordinary person is concerned, Dublin seems to run the country.

By a combination of clever politics and a lack of perception by unionists, all the blame, all the problems, all the difficulties have landed upon unionist shoulders.

It is time for unionists to refuse to play any part in a process which is tantamount to signing our own "death warrant".

Of course the cry goes up about unionists not accepting their responsibilities, about not being able to influence the debate, of running away.

Well what about not accepting these responsibilities? It is certainly not our responsibility to debate with our enemies terms of surrender.

What about influencing the de-

bate? Get real! Since when did anyone really listen to the voice of unionism?

The stark fact is with such a biased process, being outnumbered, and with a Government no longer interested in fulfilling its responsibilities and facing the very people who want to obliterate us, what chance would unionist have?

Instead of running away, we would be standing back from a situation that history will record as being the most diabolical, disgraceful and undemocratic incident in the history of British politics.

It would also give the unionists breathing space to get their act together and to put forward a united unionist voice.

J. BELL, Dundonald, Belfast.

Not asked to negotiate on Union

IT never ceases to amaze me how adept unionist politicians are at shooting themselves in the foot. They say they will not sit down at the same table as Sinn Fein because they are not prepared to negotiate the Union.

As far as I am concerned they are not being asked to negotiate the Union nor, indeed, would they have a mandate to do so.

No doubt Martin McGuinness et al will be on their best behaviour at the table, being conciliatory and reasonable, saying that all they want is a peaceful solution and their wish is to live in peace and harmony with the unionist people in their per-

ceived utopia of a United Ireland. Under the present unionist plans there will be met with deafening silence. There will be nobody present from the unionist parties to tell the world why a united Ireland is a non-runner, and why the Union with Great Britain is in the best interests of Northern Ireland.

We all know that the IRA has no intention of handing in their weapons and explosives (if they did they would have nothing left to offer republicans) but this must not be allowed to deter the unionists from talking.

The IRA, otherwise, will claim they were prepared to use the

democratic path but this was rebuffed by the unionist parties, so they are left with no alternative but to return to violence, leaving unionists to shoulder the blame, once again, in the eyes of the world.

The world's media must be allowed to see that the only reason the IRA returns to violence is that they didn't get their own way and not because of unionist intransigence.

Unionist parties must not allow themselves to be led into this kind of trap.

J. L., Belfast 5.

How 'real' is Kelly democracy?

GERRY KELLY (Belfast Telegraph, August 21) sets himself up as an exponent of what he calls real democracy which he equates with equality and justice and with national self-determination.

But these high-sounding clichés do not obscure the combination of mendacity and self-delusion that characterise the mindset of the Irish nationalism to which Mr Kelly is committed.

For example, Mr Kelly claims that in Northern Ireland "nationalists have never enjoyed... respect, dignity, justice, civil rights, political rights, cultural rights, democratic rights".

The truth of the matter is that nationalists in Northern Ireland have the same rights and duties as other citizens in the United Kingdom.

In the area of employment nationalists have in effect, legal protection against the possibility of discrimination more rigorous than in any other region of the European Union to the extent that on the basis of Fair Employment Commission statistics there is prima facie evidence that the current "anti-discrimination" legislation in Northern Ireland is inequity affecting Protestant employment opportunities.

Mr Kelly's self-delusion is apparent in his claim that unionism is a denial of a right of national self-determination. The simple fact of the matter is that there is not a single nation on the island of Ireland and that means that the maintenance of Northern Ireland within the Union cannot be understood to be the denial of a national right of self-determination.

Put simply, it is not possible to attribute a right of national self-determination (or any other sort of right) to what does not in fact exist.

The nationalism that Mr Kelly

appears to have espoused is sustained by nothing more commendable than the hatred to which the psychology of terrorism ultimately reduces and without which no normal human being could perform the concrete terrorist deeds.

The hatred and self-delusion that have influenced Mr Kelly and his associates, ill-equip him for the task of lecturing the decent law-abiding citizens of Northern Ireland on what he calls real democracy.

DECENT CITIZEN, Co. Down.

No more than muted squeak

HAVING read Mo Mowlam's article in the Belfast Telegraph of August 28, I fail to understand the concern that unionists should attend talks on September 15.

Concession after concession has been granted to the IRA/Sinn Fein to the extent that there is no point in further discussion.

It is clear that the issue of Northern Ireland has already been decided by the Irish Government and the IRA, with the acquiescence of a weak British Government.

The so-called triple lock guarantee will soon go the same way as

previous guarantees and promises given.

To now ask Unionists to attend talks is for no purpose other than to lend a degree of respectability to an already irrelevant process.

Unionist input to any discussions will be nothing more than a muted squeak from the corner of the room.

Violence and terror have paid off and will be a continued threat to us all. The only real beneficiary is the Irish Government who must be laughing all the way to the bank.

DAVID LOBB, Killyleagh, Co Down.

Form of joint rule a reality

SINN Fein/IRA will enter the talks and put forward their proposals for a nationalist gaelic solution. The 32-county approach will be supported by the SDLP and Dublin while London shuffles around moving between a neutral and "new Ireland" position.

If the unionists go they will operate in a minority context and branded bigots if they rock the Irish boat.

Sinn Fein/IRA did not use three decades of terror in order to reach a point where the Union was safe. Any intelligent person will tell say that the Anglo-Eire diket of 1985 placed Ulster on the edge of the Union and since that time Dublin

has increased interference in our affairs.

A form of joint rule is reality now and the peace process will further erode the separateness of Ulster.

A "nationalist Ireland" by instalments is enough to convince the Provos that London wants out even though no exact time for total withdrawal is given.

The NIO, churches and business leaders all told unionists and loyalists to enter the peace talks. Now we will see what can be achieved by sitting in a room with Sinn Fein/IRA discussing our future.

LOYALIST, North Belfast.



Diana, Princess of Wales 1961 - 1997

Infuriated by the hypocrisy of Press

THE entire nation joined in a chorus of disgust when the Queen did not return to London and did not release a public statement.

Despite her being the Head of State, I don't think anyone has the right to tell her how to behave or how to react.

True, she may have been brought up with a stiff-upper-lip attitude but she surely felt the loss of the Princess as much as anyone. It was awful to say she was aloof and uncaring.

I'm quite sure she was needed more as a grandmother at this time rather than as a public speaker who was asked to quench the bitter and cynical thirst of dedicated royal followers.

The hypocrisy of the Press this last week has really infuriated me.

It has really only dawned on me how quickly kind Princess Diana was. Her subtle, caring touches and her complete humility are totally astonishing.

But if we are totally honest, how many times did these stories make the headlines? Too often she was on the front page for being photographed with a new "friend" or being made fun of because of her ideas. Never did we hear of the kind gestures.

After she claimed she wanted to be "Queen of Hearts", she was treated with nothing but derision and contempt. That very same phrase has now been rightly used in tributes to her all over the world.

Another issue which incensed me was that regarding the flag at Buckingham Palace. People were in uproar because the Palace would not fly a flag, despite the fact that tradition states that a flag is not flown unless the Queen is in residence.

A STUDENT, Donaghadee, Co Down.

Excellent coverage

MY congratulations on the issue of the Belfast Telegraph of September 6 covering the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales. The photographs were fantastic.

If only the rest of the British Press had given the great lady the respect the Belfast Telegraph did, maybe things would be so different today.

As a 50 year old, sadly my life-long respect for the Royals has gone. Earl Spencer said all that needed to be said at Westminster Abbey. The Queen and the Royal Family should call it a day.

L. HUTCHINS, Steeple, Antrim.

Hit where it hurts

I HAVE never been a royalist, but the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales, has left me saddened and grieving in a way I have not experienced since the death of my sister 16 years ago.

The scale of the sense of loss and grief across Britain and the world is something I doubt any of us have known before.

Although the part played by the photographers in Paris is debatable, their actions after the crash were utterly inexcusable, displaying a callous disregard for anything but their greedy profit.

I would implore anyone who cares — and to judge by the public outcry there are many of us — not to waste time and energy condemning the actions of these people and their paymasters, the tabloids.

If they care nothing for someone as decent and warm as Diana, they will care not a jot for our anger. But one can show disgust in a way guaranteed to hurt them: resolve, as I and several friends have, to never again buy any offending tabloid or magazine.

MICHAEL YOUNG, Newtownards, Co Down.

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