



VIEWpoint

Parades policy

LOWER ORMEAU: Easter Monday decision must be reciprocated

IN the absence of any local agreement about the Easter Monday parade on Ormeau Road, it was left to the Parades Commission to adjudicate. Inevitably, its decision to re-route the Apprentice Boys' march, but to suggest that the ground should be prepared for parades in the future, has failed to fully satisfy either side. In seeking to steer a middle course, the Parades Commission has run foul of march leaders and residents' spokesmen.

As successive stand-offs at Drumcree have demonstrated, the problem is that everyone sees the marching issue in black and white terms. Too often the loyal orders consider that they have an inalienable right to parade, even in contentious areas. In equal measure, residents' groups refuse to countenance any march in their district, even if restrictions are placed on the organisers. The spirit of live and let live is in short supply.

This Easter there are particular problems, given the sensitivity of the present political negotiations. As the talks at Stormont come ever closer to the wire, the last thing the parties need is the threat of an ugly street confrontation on the lower Ormeau Road. In taking a difficult decision, the Parades Commission had to bear in mind the impact its verdict would have on the wider community.

Ultimately, the Parades Commission has taken the least worst option. By suggesting that the ground should be prepared for one or more parades later this year, an attempt is being made to soften the blow for the Apprentice Boys.

There are no easy answers to the parades issue, but the call by the Parades Commission in its call for greater co-operation by both sides to resolve such issues is endorsed. The commission no longer has a role to play in mediation, something which helped defuse tension last summer. Now it is over to the RUC to enforce this order, and the hope throughout the community will be that a tense Easter weekend can pass off without incident.

'We can only make peace work together. We can only reach agreement together'

My vision for the future of Northern Ireland

By the Prime Minister, Tony Blair



LET'S start with a fact. The vast majority of people in Northern Ireland — 77% according to the latest Belfast Telegraph poll — want to see the parties reach agreement in these Talks and would support such an agreement.

All round the talks table should take heart and be inspired by that support.

As I have said repeatedly, nothing is going to be imposed on the people of Northern Ireland. Not by me, nor by the Taoiseach, nor by the two of us together.

There has to be agreement in the Talks between representatives of both traditions, and then we will ask the people what they think.

If a majority support that agreement, then Parliament will be asked to approve a new settlement for all the people in Northern Ireland. The principle of consent is at the heart of our approach.

It is up to your representatives and yourselves. The sort of agreement we envisage is balanced and fair.

It will enable the people of Northern Ireland to have far more say over the things that matter most in their daily lives.

New arrangements in Northern Ireland will need to take account of the divisions here to make it possible for politicians from all sides in the community to share responsibility in a real and meaningful way.

Commonsense co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic is not new. What will be new, if agreed, is a Ministerial Council bringing together representatives of north and south.

The aim will be to work together in specific areas, by agreement, for the mutual benefit of both.

There are big changes happening across the UK. People in Scotland and Wales have embraced the exciting new possibilities that devolution presents.

All of us, friends and neighbours within these Isles, will benefit from working closely together to enhance our place within Europe and within the world.

In the modern world, we need constitutional provisions, too, that reflect the reality of how we live today.

Both the United Kingdom and the Republic need to make balanced changes to our constitutional legislation to reflect the principle of consent in all its aspects. That is the modern reality that we both accept.

As a Government, we aim to make the UK a more fair, a more tolerant and a better place to live — a land of equal opportunity where no-one should feel that their religion or their colour or their sex will give them a worse chance in life than anyone else.

Such discrimination should be opposed by everyone today. In Northern Ireland, that is essential.

Fair and equal treatment, guaranteed human rights, equality of opportunity for all — these will all have to be enshrined in a new agreement for Northern Ireland and honoured by all the parties to that agreement, now and into the future.

Most of all, my hope for Northern Ireland is that it can become a peaceful and normal society like any other. An end to terrorist killing makes other steps possible.

With a lasting peace, we can all envisage a society without troops on the streets, where illegal arms are decommissioned, where the whole community works with and supports the police, and where those whose lives have been destroyed by conflict and terrorism — including those in prison — can begin to rebuild their shattered homes and families.

Of course, there are some who oppose all this. However hard to believe, there are people who thrive on hatred and chaos.

They don't want peace, and they are trying to destroy this process. We must not be cowed by them.

All the brave men and women sitting around the table at Stormont require everyone's loyalty and support as they search for agreement in these difficult last days.

They have all shown courage in getting this far. More courage will be required.

We can only make peace work together. We can only reach agreement together. That is, all of us as participants in the Talks.

Each and every person will have to compromise on something. We will have to risk criticism from others, and threats and intimidation from a belligerent few.

Against such things, sometimes a person's only guide is their faith and their conscience. In our heart of hearts, we know what is right and we must do it.

The judgment of history will be harsh if we fail.

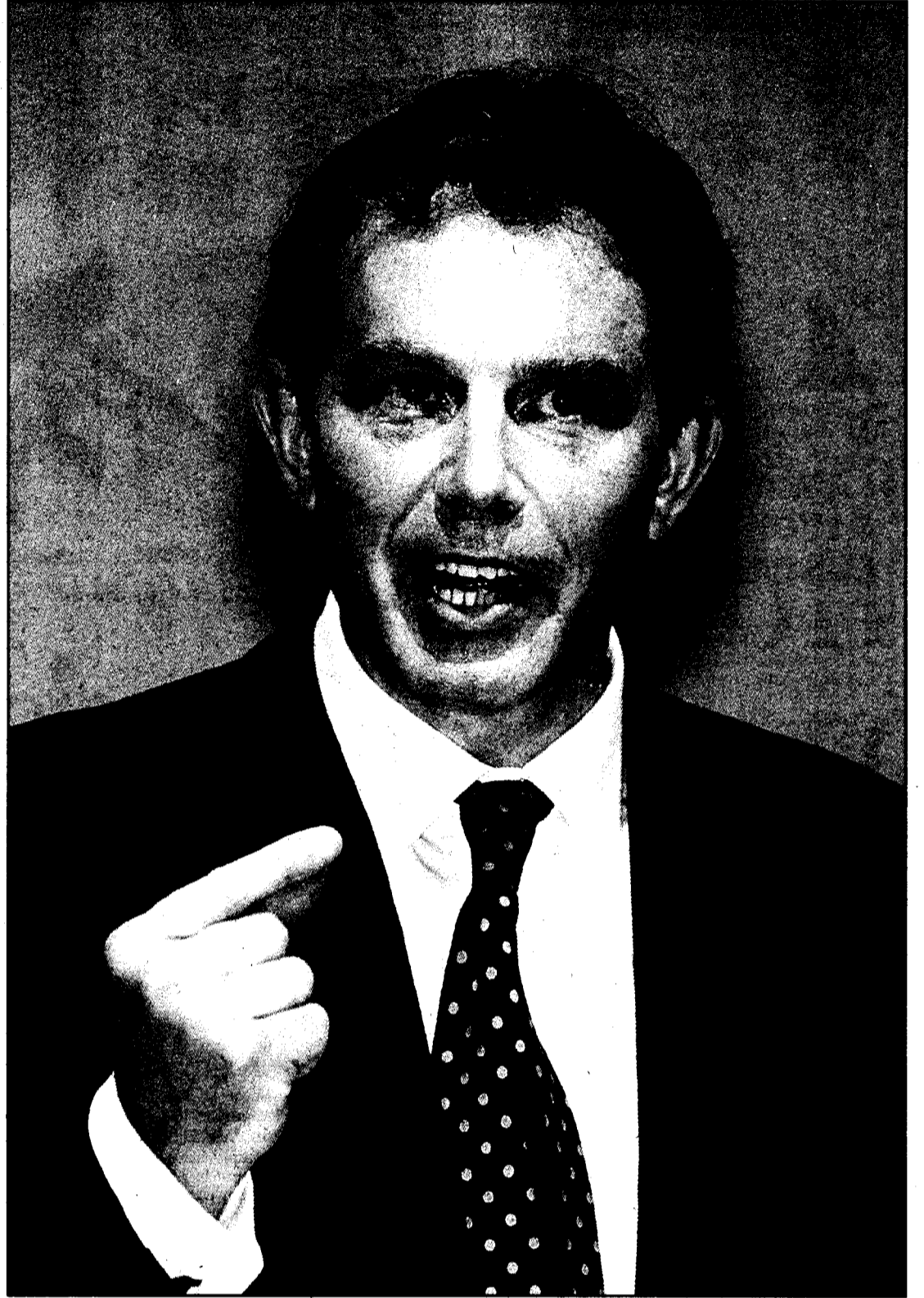
I have no illusions about how difficult this is for everyone concerned. If it could be done easily, it would have happened a long time ago.

But this time, the will is there, the ideas are there and the support of the people is there. Those are powerful forces. The election last year proved it throughout the UK, and real change has come: to our economy, our schools, our hospitals.

Step by step, we are delivering on the promises we made to make our country better.

But I always said that peace in Northern Ireland would be a priority for me. It will continue to be so.

We have put a lot of time and effort into this process. But the prize can be great and the effort worthwhile. We have come a very long way in a short time. We can not — must not — fail now.



Tony Blair: The prize can be great and the effort worthwhile.

WRITEback LETTERS EDITOR, BELFAST TELEGRAPH 124 ROYAL AVENUE, BELFAST, BT1 1EB web site address http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk. e-mail address is editor@belfasttelegraph.co.uk.

Why ignore Opus Dei? Pinning hopes on lottery sinful

AN article (Belfast Telegraph, March 18) wrongfully described Freemasonry as the largest secret society in the world.

The little known, most secret society in the world, is Opus Dei — an organisation of Roman Catholic laymen and priests, the sole aim of which is to promote and pursue the principles of the Roman Catholic Church.

Founded by a Spanish priest in 1928, it is so secret that its membership is completely unknown to the public and it has long been suspected of having immense influence in

the corridors of political power in defence of Roman Catholic interests.

What little is known about Opus Dei suggests that its membership consists of the more affluent members of Roman Catholic Church, in particular those within the political and legal circles.

Unlike Freemasonry, Opus Dei is a political and sectarian organisation and it seems strange that the Home Secretary Jack Straw should single out Freemasonry to reveal its membership while Opus Dei remains unchallenged.

FREEMASON, Larne, Co Antrim.

THE Belfast Telegraph's report (March 28) concerning the new BBC lottery show "The Big Ticker" is indicative of a nation in a state of moral decadence and bankruptcy with mass multitudes caught in the net of gambling regularly on the National Lottery.

It is particularly sad because the sin of covetousness

(Exodus 20, v 15-17) is espoused by the nation as a hole and the God-honouring, Puritan "work ethic" is largely forgotten.

There may be plenty of "glitz and glamour" associated with the Ulster involvement in the new lottery show but God's word declares it to be sinful.

Christ declared in Luke 12

v 14-21 that "man's life does not consist of the abundance of things which he possess". That is why this is fundamentally a religious issue.

It is about what makes us tick, what values drive us, where we look for ultimate satisfaction and what god we really trust in.

The comments of the Rev Jim Rea are very welcome.

Furthermore, it is time for the pulpits of our land to be calling the breaking of God's law "sin" and thereby stop making any excuse for participation in the National Lottery.

As a group representing Christians throughout our island, it is our prayer that the hope of the multitudes would not be based on the lottery

jackpot but on Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Participation in the National Lottery, we are convinced, will bring sorrow, whereas it is "the blessing of the Lord which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10, v 22).

R. STEWART, Reformation Ireland Newtownabbey, Co Antrim.

Hunt-ban Bill is still on the books

MANY newspapers have been reporting that the Bill to ban hunting with dogs has failed. This is not true.

To put the record straight, Michael Foster, MP, has simply adjourned the next stage of the Bill to make sure other Private Member legislation is given sufficient parliamentary time.

The Bill will return to the House of Commons within this session of Parliament for a further vote by MPs, many of whom are actively supporting its progress.

With Government support this Bill could become law. But without Government backing to push it through its final legislative stages and counteract the undemocratic spoiling tactics being deployed by a small group of pro-hunting MPs, this popular legislation is destined to fail.

GRAHAM SIRL, Chief Officer, League Against Cruel Sports, London.

GET IN TOUCH

Searching for father's history

I AM trying to trace whether my late father had any relatives in Belfast and whether anyone is able to help identify his early childhood history.

My father was Victor Stewart (born March 3, 1919). He left Northern Ireland in his teens, joined the Forces and met and married my mother. They subsequently lived in her home town of Durham.

He spoke very rarely of his background and my sisters and I feel we only know half of our heritage. I suspect his childhood was difficult. The

only formal documentation we have of his childhood is his birth certificate which has no entry regarding his father.

An illegitimate child in 1919 would certainly have meant his mother and grandmother, whom I assume reared him, were determined women.

His certificate indicates he was born in 5 Rochester Street, Belfast, and his mother was Maud McHarry.

PETER M STEWART, The Forge, 29 Ashwick Road, Pott Row, King's Lynn, PE32 1BZ.

Hoping to meet footballing brothers

I WILL be returning to Belfast on holiday on May 8 and I would like to meet up with some old friends, particularly the McGreevy brothers, Harry, Dessie and Jim.

They came from North Queen Street and all played competitive football at senior and intermediate level for teams such as Glentoran, Newry, Bangor and Queen's Island.

If anyone knows their addresses, I would appreciate a note.

94 Heathcliffe Square, Brampton, Ontario, Canada, L6S 5R2. TOM MCNEILL.

Company celebrating anniversary

THE 44th Northern Ireland (formerly 23rd) Girls' Brigade Company (Carryduff Presbyterian) celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. We are holding an anniversary dinner on May 9 and I would be grateful if members who would like to attend would contact me on (01232) 813456 (after 6.00pm).

KAYE TELFORD, Treasurer, Carryduff, Co Down.

Keep green jersey as an ad-free zone

THE green jersey of Ireland, like the white of Trinity College or the black of Ballymena, is a sacred place.

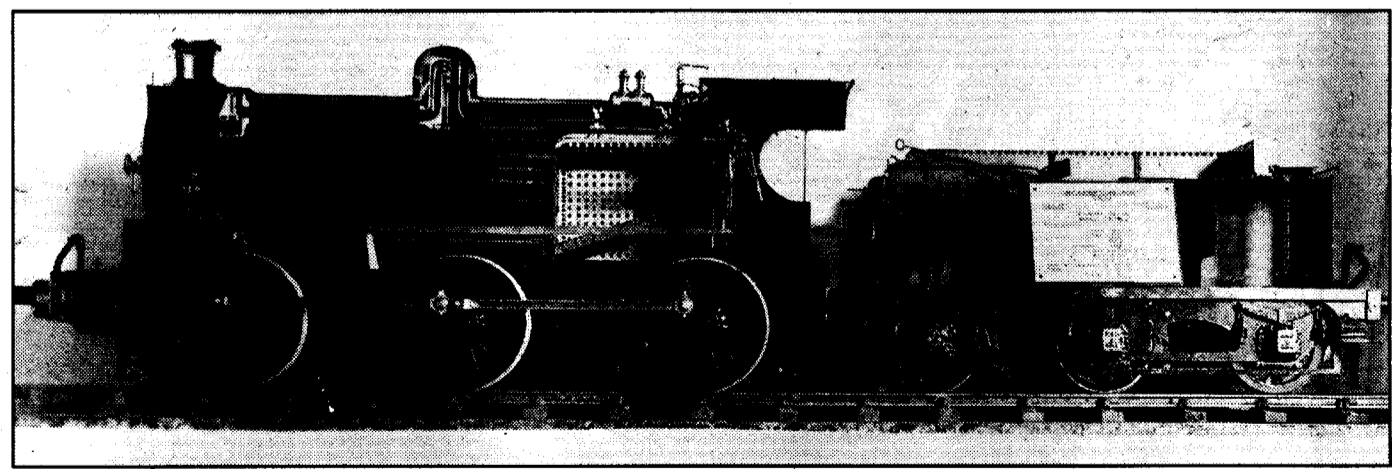
It belongs to present and past generations of Irish people and, above all, to those great players who have adorned it with their courage and sportmanship on the field of play.

It has a value that goes well beyond anything that money can buy. It follows, therefore, that it should not be disguised by marks of sponsors or manufacturers.

I hope that Ireland will go to Twickenham in the green of Ireland and its "dear little shamrock", and play for the people of Ireland and not merely their sponsors.

GERALD MORGAN, Trinity College, Dublin.

Need help with your plumbing?



Station attraction: A pony set the wheels in motion.

'Skeleton' engine is taking shape

AFTER extensive detective work, I have rediscovered a photograph (above) of the Great Victoria Street Station 'skeleton' engine, including the tender, in original condition.

I understand that the tender was badly damaged by a bomb in York Street Station where it was later housed.

BRIAN Waddell Productions is currently working on a new DIY series for BBC Television. The series is presented by Sean Rafferty and Russell Harris and will be transmitted on both network and regional television.

We are looking for people who have DIY dilemmas to solve — perhaps they need some help with their plumbing, fancy replacing the carpet with a wooden floor or need

Another photograph (not available for publication) shows repair work in progress.

The location of the restoration work, progress to date and the identity of those involved in the repairs have not been disclosed to me.

DUDLEY FARRAR, 386 Comber Road, Dundonald, Belfast, BT16 0XB.

homes, as well as those who, because of the exterior or interior design, live in homes which may be considered unusual.

As a result I ask any readers who fit the bill for what we are looking for to contact me on 01232 427646.

TRACIE O'NEILL, Assistant Producer, Strand Studios, 5/7 Shore Road, Hollywood, BT18 9HX.

CHARITIES SAY THANKS

THE following charities thank those who supported the collections listed:

● NSPCC: Antrim, £200.15; Ballymena, £1.105; Hollywood £422.91; Londonderry, £1,781.91; Newcastle, £459.95; Newry, £936.59; Portadown, £1,038.

P. GILMORE, ● NICOD: Ballymena, March 12, £247.72.

L REID, ● Challenge: Belfast, December 9, £1,278.57; Newry, February 13, £416.46; Ballymena, February 20, £671.73; Downpatrick, March 6, £189.48; Dungannon, March 13, £352.27; Larne, March 20, £474.60.

J. NIXON, ● Northern Ireland Agoraphobia and Anxiety Society: Ballyclare/Glengormley, February 20, £480.55; Dungannon, February

21, £400.53; Newtownards, March 14, £700.81; Antrim, March 20, £527.02; Cookstown, March 21, £578.60; Portadown, March 7, £635.55.

C. GRAHAM, ● Praxis: Larne, February 28, £319.92; Newtownards, March 6, £408.22; Ballymena, March 13, £872.43.

M. NEILL, ● Respond: Downpatrick, February 14, £354.39; Carrickfergus, February 21, £348.91; Antrim, February 28, £286.77; Enniskillen/Irvinestown March 3, £252.31; Magherafelt/Maghera, March 14, £569.87.

T. GILL, ● Ligoniel Roman Relief Fund: Belfast, March 18, £192.03; Bedpish from Belfast, March 28, £667.35.

P. McCUE.