

Sunday 4th June 2006

A Chara Martin,

It seems to me that the Republican Movement has got itself caught into attempting to convince the various Unionist parties that it is in the interest of all the people of Northern Ireland to share government.

As I see it, there is a fundamental flaw in this and this came vividly to mind when reading a new book by Carlo Gebler on the siege of Derry.

The first one hundred pages or so clearly shows the absolute power of England and its use of that power to impose its will on the people of Ireland who were consistently the weaker of the two nations both militarily and financially.

Over the centuries, whatever way you want to look at it, British Governments had no problem putting in the men, money, materials and other resources that were necessary to impose that will.

Tragically, the Unionist people, over the centuries were deluded into thinking that these actions were primarily in defence of their rights, their religion and their justice.

It was the needs of the English and not the Unionists that dominated British policies. It is easy in historical hindsight to see and understand this. But for the Unionist, Protestant people, this hindsight is so painful that it blocks out the reality of their present position.

For the first time since the Plantation of Ulster, there is a fundamental change. England no longer needs Ireland, North or South for its defence. If Ireland remains peaceful, then the squabbles between Irish Nationalism and Protestant Loyalism are irrelevant.

We have had fifteen Secretaries of State who have been no more than part-time referees, modern day Roman governors sent by the imperial parliament to contain the natives.

The struggle of the Republican Movement to arrive at this point in history after hundreds of years of domination may not be clearly recognised for another 20-30 years. Witness the endless attempts to discredit the leadership and hence the struggle.

The war is over.

Unionist people can't even contemplate that a war even existed; that there were thousands of British military, RUC personnel, UDR personnel and many other forces deployed and still they could not succeed in stopping the tide of history. Many tragically died on all sides.

But this paper is not about the past. It is about trying to look at the "present-future."

As I said in a previous paper, Unionism is leaderless and lost. There is absolutely no point in trying to rush Unionism to abandon four hundred years of power, control and history. They need time to adjust to this new dispensation.

No future British Government be it Labour, Conservative or whatever, will back-track from the present political position as laid out in the Good Friday Agreement.

Taking the above as my thinking, I reluctantly have to say that as a supporter of the Northern Ireland Assembly, I now cannot see it working in the short term.

Unionism is simply not ready for it. The pain of their loss- political and personal is so great that the hope is that by staying out of government with the republican, nationalist people, that somehow their mythical past might one day be recreated.

So, time after time, they refuse to move forward because at an unconscious level they recognise that they have been abandoned.

Staying separate appears genuinely to be their safest option.

For any community in their position, this is a traumatic experience. It paralyses the mind, the body and the soul. Fear of the future prevents working in the present.

Taking the bigger historic picture into account, in my mind the way forward is clear.

The elected representatives of the Republican Nationalist people have done more than enough to move this process forward. It's not happening. Their energy is being sapped as they plead with Unionist leaders to move forward and govern for the good of all.

If you take the historic perspective, doing nothing, agreeing to nothing, is rational, logical and even attractive for Unionism. It explains the inertia.

Irish Nationalism cannot accept this inertia because from their perspective it is time to move forward to undo the 400 years of British and latterly Unionist domination.

This is the core of the current impasse.

Step aside from this debate. Even if the Assembly were to succeed, it will be a very temporary arrangement until Unionism finds another stopping mechanism. Who needs it?

Everything has changed.

It is in the interest of Irish Nationalism to work in close co-operation with the government of the Republic of Ireland, (reluctant as that government may be, coming up to an election within a year) and with the British Government who want nothing more than a peaceful, forgettable Northern Ireland.

The Unionist people need time to find their way forward after 400 years. Give them that time. Give them that space, ***but do not waste any more of your own energy trying to persuade them.***

Drive the Peace Process forward as you have been doing over the last twenty years.

That is the leadership's destiny.

Brendan,