

19 April 99

### Notes from the Far-side!

I don't know how much help I can be this week, Patrick as been in a car accident and is pretty shaken about, though no serious injury.

Re: decommissioning. I think things are getting pretty out of control and the idea of 'parking' should be avoided - for two reasons

- a. if it is parked over the summer, what will there be to 'return' to?
- b. if it is returned to, nothing will have occurred to help resolve the difficulties, so 'parking' is gratuitous and has no benefit attached.

If we assume that the Hillsborough Agreement changes the meaning of the decommissioning aspect of the Belfast Agreement, and I think we do (?), then we need to 'go back to basics'. Would Sinn Fein, PUP and UDP have signed up to the Agreement if decommissioning had been in the Agreement in the same terms as the H. Declaration? It seems obvious to me that they would not have signed up to it. It also seems to me that each of these parties, during the Stormont Talks exercised two 'walking' issues - Decommissioning and prisoner release. Other parties exercised other 'walking' issues both at the time of the Agreement (remember that we rejected the first draft for our own reasons) and during the Talks (Remember how many 'ultimatums' the UUs delivered to the rest of us during the two years. Remember also that SF's number one issue - a 'united Ireland' didn't even get onto the agenda!)

The origin of the debate is, not least the letter that Blair wrote to Trimble during the Referendum campaign. The Hillsborough Declaration is an 'outcome' of this and both show us that those least directly involved (the PMs) are least likely to be 'attuned' to the process, are unlikely to contribute positively and can quite possibly exercise a 'destabilising' input (as I believe they have - which makes me very concerned about what this week holds).

The UUs have, once again, established a scenario in which they are 'challenging' the SDLP to choose between support for SF and them. We should not forget that this is something they have constantly tried to do. However, the Agreement does not require such a choice and the mandate received in the Referendum should tell us that such behaviour is quite contrary to the Agreement, both in text and in spirit.

We have also lost sight of the - strong - argument, mainly from Seamus Mallon, that it may be difficult to see decommissioning happen in the context of the Agreement but it will DEFINITELY not happen outside of the Agreement - that goes for parking, rewriting or unravelling. We must stress that ALL parties are responsible for decommissioning to happen, and that's about working on the conditions and the political environment.

We might start to consider a whole gammet of 'ugly', 'wicked' issues that we would want to inject into any suggestion of a review - sharpen their minds and snake them up!!

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