

Round Table/Bi-Lateral Questions from the Women's Coalition

A Personal Response

1. Irrespective of any definition of decommissioning, it is a politically unpopular fact that the Agreement places no decommissioning preconditions on any of the signatories to it. While it is possible to debate endlessly on the exact definition of decommissioning (remember the Red Queen in 'Alice through the Looking Glass' "Words mean what I want them to mean"), this is merely to collude with those who seek to elevate this single issue to a position of pre-eminence. Do not lose sight of what is right and what is wrong in this whole quagmire. Popular ain't always right.

2. Bearing in mind the answer at 1. above, the short answer is obvious. **Nothing** will satisfy the backwoods men (**and women**). Is Sinn Fein to receive no credit for accepting a return to Stormont? Is there no perception that this may have been a difficult step to take and make popular with its own backwoodspersons?

3. Policing matters are by assent to the Agreement being left to the Patten Commission.

4. Whatever the views of democratically elected politicians, let us not try to differentiate between those who deserve to be in power and those who do not. While accepting the attractiveness of this line of thought, let us not be seduced by false logic. The answer to the first part of the question is that access can only ~~be~~ denied by failure to comply with the terms set out in the Agreement.

5. My point exactly.

6. I may be wrong (but I'm not) but I am almost certain that every party in the Assembly, with the exception of the Ulster Unionists, accepts that there are no pre-conditions to membership of the Executive. Why are the other parties giving the Ulster Unionist position credibility? Obviously the reasons for this stance are varied and not without hidden agendas but why are the Coalition not making more of this precise point.

7. Yes.

8. Right question, wrong tack. The Agreement itself provided for three areas to be left to independent commissions; policing (Patten), decommissioning (De Chastelain) and prisoner releases (Early Release Body). Why is De Chastelain not speaking more about his progress or lack of it if lack there be. Chris Patten seems to be talking publicly about his commission's task and the associated difficulties. Why not the General?

9. Poor analogy by Senator Mitchell.

10. There is virtually no community left in this benighted society. People voted for this Agreement. What more is required of them.

11. If the people of Northern Ireland are denied the settlement they voted for in overwhelming numbers then there is no encouragement for them to consider any other form of political accommodation within the 'state' of NI for the foreseeable future (generations). If the Coalition are not the moral guardians of the Agreement, and therefore arbiters of disputes, then who? Why is the Coalition not taking a more pro-active role in this arbitration process?

12. Is this a unilateral renegotiation of the Agreement? It looks very like it.