

WRONG QUESTIONS - WRONG ANSWERS!

by Ken Maginnis, MP.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive". Secretary of State Mo Mowlam, *"takes the view that Sinn Fein and the IRA are inextricably linked"* (16 July, 1997), the Prime Minister agrees, and President Bill Clinton once instructed us, *"You must stand fast against terror. You must say to those who still would use violence for political objectives - You are the past; your day is over. Violence has no place at the table of democracy; and no role in the future of this land"*.

Yet the IRA in the guise of Godfathers Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams, among others, has been admitted to the 'table of democracy' with virtually no strings attached.

It was supposed to get there as a result of six weeks of non-violence *augmented by words and deeds* appropriate to any organisation wishing to participate in the democratic process. But only the 'six weeks' condition held. Words were never analysed by Secretary of State Mowlam and no deeds (activities) heralded any conditioning of IRA rank and file for a long-term commitment to the ballot box.

Experienced listeners have heard Martin McGuinness's uncompromising "NO" to consent (the verdict of the Ballot Box); "NO" to disarmament; "NO" to local administrative participation in our own affairs, even through a Responsibility-sharing Assembly". Basically "NO" to any democratic process!

Mo Mowlam's NIO team adopted the attitude that her Government's conditions were irrelevant insofar as everything would fall into place **after** the IRA was admitted to Talks and had signed up to the Mitchell Principles.

But, as anyone with a modicum of understanding of terrorism could have anticipated, it didn't work out like that. Sinn Fein (IRA minus Balaclavas) assented to the Mitchell Principles on September 16 but, two days later, the IRA had rescinded that commitment through the columns of 'An Phoblacht'....Sinn Fein's own propaganda publication.

Mo Mowlam compounded that fraud by accepting Sinn Fein's argument that it neither was, nor did it speak for, the IRA. Had she forgotten Sinn Fein's election slogan, "A Vote for Sinn Fein is a Vote for Peace", clearly intended to imply that a electoral mandate for the McGuinness-Adams strategy would facilitate a metamorphosis from reliance on the 'Armalite and Ballot Box' to a commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic methods?

Perhaps she forgot her own assertion of 16 July....recently repeated by Prime Minister Tony Blair!

What then should Ulster Unionists make of events since 1 May? As Northern Ireland's largest party we accept our responsibility to sustain the democratic system in the face of constant assault and to provide leadership for society here.

Increasingly, over the past 18 years since Jim Molyneaux became party leader and now under David Trimble's guidance, Ulster Unionists have sought to establish such even-handedness as will assuage the fears and suspicions of both traditions in our community.

That was why, in the 1992 Talks Process, we tabled a Bill of Rights, sought to agree the basis for a responsibility-sharing assembly comprising a European parliamentary-style committee system which would at every level have membership pro-rata to electoral strengths of the parties and other checks and balances, and proposed a workable formula for promoting a confidence-building Inter-Irish relationship.

John Hume's SDLP banked our proposals while he went off to establish a pan-Nationalist front which would marginalise the entire Unionist tradition. Dublin willingly acquiesced. It was a lesson well noted by the IRA who are now embarked on the same tactic of banking any political concessions or offers but without reciprocation.

While Ulster Unionists may have felt obliged to accord other 'constitutional' parties the benefit of the doubt and to take risks in the hope of generating reciprocal generosity, there is certainly neither obligation nor justification for them to be charitable with those who insist on retaining the right to use violence for political advantage and who defiantly hold on to their vast armoury.

The perception that the IRA may be willing to accept less than a United Ireland as an outcome to the current process derives from a myopic view of reality. If, as is admitted by the IRA, any 'agreement' is to be deemed interim and the organisation insists on retaining both its structure, objectives and, vitally, its armaments, then the need for aggressive confrontation of those who pose such a threat is surely evident.

Ulster Unionism, constrained by its democratic commitment, must strain every sinew in defence of constitutional proprieties. Failure would be to abandon the stage to inevitably more violent elements.

Perhaps, as committed Europeans, it would be well for New Labour to be reminded that no other western democracy brings its terrorists to the 'table of democracy' nor pays them a regular 'Danegeld' to remain there.

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