

20/7/97
 Ken has requested that this paper be
 circulated widely - in particular to
 those who may be in T.V or Radio
 Studios.

JW.
 (The Scotsman)

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THIS?

Tony Blair promised us an open and honest administration. On that basis, and since Ulster Unionists were engaged in a Northern Ireland Talks Process with the Government, it seemed reasonable that they could expect to be kept informed about relationships between New Labour and Republican terrorists.

The question was asked often enough, especially after the IRA responded to the Government's 13 June Aide Memoire by shooting two community policemen in the head three days later. As a result, we were told, the Prime Minister had brought an end to the meetings between his officials and the IRA. When, on 30 June, I queried the veracity of this situation, Secretary of State Mo Mowlam affirmed that 'no relationships', meaning "no contact, no communication - nothing", was the state of play.

This, as it ultimately became apparent, was totally untrue. Facts now demonstrate that not only were contacts ongoing but that Government was actively removing every reasonable condition that might properly be required from a terrorist organisation wishing to undergo a metamorphosis from a strategy based on violence to one embracing democracy.

Now we have the obscenity of a terrorist organisation, uncommitted to implementing a permanent end to violence and refusing to accept that the consent of the people of Northern Ireland has to be a basic element in the democratic process, being invited to a place at the negotiating table. It all seems a long way from President Clinton's assertion, when he visited Belfast, "Men of violence, your time is past. Terrorism has no place at the table of Democracy".

It is little consolation that the IRA has unequivocally restored its (totally equivocal) ceasefire of August 1994. Then it was a tactical decision at a time when the rate of Security Force attrition was so great that the IRA needed time to regroup, redeploy, target, recruit and train. This time has entirely to do with political opportunism, where Government has offered free entry into the political process at the expense of those who have sustained democracy during 28 years of anarchy, when the cost has often been in innocent lives.

While the 1994 ceasefire was initially intended to be for a three month period, open-ended, depending on what concessions could be exacted and what propaganda victories won, this one is probably intended, on the same basis, to last for four months.

It makes sense! Beginning in mid-July, it will see the IRA into Talks in Mid-September and up to the first 2-month review in mid-November. What a chance to blackmail an irresolute and craven administration into continuing the IRA's membership of the Process even if no disarmament dividend is paid. "Not a single bullet", the absolute head of the IRA, Martin McGuinness, reiterated on television on Sunday.

Of course, when Ulster Unionists meet him later today, they will be seeking to persuade Mr Blair that he is wrong to forego his declared principles for some short-term gains which will inevitably blow up in his face with the force of a Canary Wharf bomb and with the same tragic outcome.

But the Prime Minister has allowed himself and his Government to be tied to an Irish Republican agenda which is underwritten by the Dublin Government. *"But I understood that they agreed with our requirement that terrorists disarm and disband during substantive talks"*, he will tell us. *"No, I'm sorry, but Dublin won't actually let us express it in those terms. You'll have to take our word on that (Like you did on the 'no contact' assurance)"*.

Does this mean that the much vaunted parallel process where substantive talks would be matched by parallel disarmament is no longer on offer? I'm convinced that that is the sad reality, and is the reason why Ulster Unionists will be obliged to vote against the joint Governments' disarmament paper on Wednesday!

It will be a similar story when we remind the Prime Minister that he endorsed his predecessor's and Mr Reynold's 1993 Downing Street Declaration which promised that the future of Northern Ireland would require the consent of its people. The IRA repudiated that concept. In fact, they maintained that stance in the Dublin Forum for Peace and Reconciliation when they again dissented from an otherwise unanimous conclusion by all Irish Nationalist parties that 'consent' is an essential element within the democratic process.

Tony Blair will tell us that it doesn't matter what the IRA says and that he is still committed to that principle. I will, under the circumstances, find the logic of his position somewhat difficult to follow.

It is impossible to know where the Political Talks Process can go from here. It's not just the fact that it is unlikely to proceed much farther in its present form following an Ulster Unionist vote of no confidence in its agenda, format and time-tabling on Wednesday. Failure is bad enough but it is much more painful to suffer deceit and betrayal.

Many of us recall the nightmare of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 and how difficult it was to convince our electorate that the treachery of Mrs Thatcher and Garrett Fitzgerald did not reflect a general lack of political integrity at both Westminster and Dublin. Since then, corruption in political circles within both jurisdictions has done little to restore the faith of the electorate in the democratic process.

Now all that Ulster Unionists have sought to effect against a background of terrorism has been destroyed in the eyes of the general public. "How", they ask, "can a Government chose to by-pass those of you who sit in a Parliament and a Forum and specially convened Political Talks, and make a behind-backs and secret deal with those who lie and cheat, kill and main, destroy and corrupt the lives of so many young people for 28 years"?

Then comes the inevitable realisation. "You, the politicians, don't have any guns! You haven't the means and the ability to frighten Ministers to capitulate".

What can one answer? Ulster Unionists will cite their record of commitment, of never having abdicated their responsibility. "And where has it got you?" the young will ask as they set of in search of a Godfather! And we are left alone to climb the mountain, once again.

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