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Ulster Unionist Party
for all of us

10th February 2009

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Eames-Bradley 2

Eames-Bradley 2: February 2nd, 2000

The Eames-Bradley press conference was a very uncomfortable experience: a stark reminder of just how close to the surface some harsh realities still remain. What angered me from the outset, however, was the predictable, orchestrated and almost theatrical aspect of some of the pre-conference protests. I know that people like Willie Frazer and Michelle Williamson have suffered (as have many thousands of others). I'm just not convinced that it is necessary to turn everything into a photo-opportunity. And the same applies to Jim Allister and Cedric Wilson. I understand the scale of their anger against Sinn Fein/IRA. But when Jim belonged to the DUP it was at a time when his colleagues were in private conduit negotiations with Sinn Fein (even though he may not have been aware of it): and Cedric, when he was an MLA, sat in the same chamber as Sinn Fein. When protests are anticipated, as these were, and involve the usual suspects over and over again, they lose their potency and effectiveness. It becomes a spectator sport for journalists and cameramen looking for the footage for their programmes, but I'm not sure that it actually helps the case against the report.

What unsettled me even more, however, was the silent, stern-faced anger of many of the hundreds of people in that room. They weren't there to appear on the evening news or seek confrontation with those from "the other side." They were there, in many cases, just to get a copy of the report itself. A man and his wife came over and introduced themselves and thanked me for last week's column. Another man pressed a document into my hand and asked me to read it. Halfway through the conference I left the room to answer a phone-call. On my way back in, a clearly distressed woman stopped me, hugged me and whispered into my ear: "Mr Kane, people like you have to stop this. I don't care about Sinn Fein in government--but my son is not the same as the IRA men who shot him dead."

Almost forty-five minutes behind schedule, Lord Eames and Denis Bradley arrived on stage and treated us to a double act which combined patronising homily, heavily scripted platitude and a holier-than-thou-we-know-better-than-you indifference to the tidal wave of complaint that had already greeted the leaked parts of their report.

I'm not getting into the semantics of the blame game on where, precisely the definition of victim first appeared. All I will say is that the definition of "victim" used by Eames-Bradley is both profoundly inaccurate and deeply offensive. And it isn't simply one of those shrug your shoulders moments in which you register your disgust then move on. It is that definition, above and beyond all else, which makes the entire report unacceptable in my eyes.

Now, call me overly cynical, but I can't help feeling that the £12,000 proposal was a deliberate red rag, leaked to the media almost a week in advance of the formal launch and intended as a focal point for public discontent. Why? Because it can be offered as a sacrifice in a few weeks time: a goodwill gesture to those who have complained. "We'll take out the offer of £12,000, as recognition of our willingness to listen, and then press on with implementing the rest of the recommendations."

But it isn't the £12,000 which is the real danger. It is the definition of "victim," the consequences of which trickle down into every other aspect of the document. Once you concede the principle that a dead terrorist is entitled to be regarded as a "victim" it becomes very difficult to argue that a still-living, unpunished, un-convicted terrorist isn't, also, entitled to be regarded as a "victim." That, in turn, becomes the basis on which the reconciliation forum and legacy commission will regard and treat those who have been involved in republican or loyalist terrorism. And, as I said last week (the first person, by the way, to make the point) that sort of process will, inevitably, lead to the granting of amnesties at some stage soon.

All of these flaws---the payment, the definition, the equivalency--- make this report unacceptable. Yet if you look closely at the report you will find a paragraph which is even more spectacularly offensive. Read this carefully: ""Victims and survivors are not an unfortunate side-effect of the conflict. They exist because, as a society, we failed to develop a context in which human beings could grow and flourish together rather than sow divisions and inflict injury on one another. Victims and survivors are, therefore, a painful reminder of society's failure. This pain should not be shirked or curtailed for it bears no comparison to the ongoing pain of the bereaved and injured. It should, rather, spur society on to build a shared and reconciled future."

That is humbug! The IRA didn't wage a terrorist campaign because Protestants and Roman Catholics couldn't live together: they waged that campaign because they didn't want Protestants and Roman Catholics to live together. The IRA wants a united Ireland rather than a "shared and reconciled future." Similarly, loyalists didn't run their brothels, bars, money-laundering rings and drug scams because Protestants and Roman Catholics couldn't "grow and flourish together." They ran them because they are a bunch of particularly nasty criminals.

And that's where the real problem with this report lies. Not only has it given us a definition of "victim" which is inaccurate, it has given us a definition of The Troubles which bears no comparison to the reality. Again.

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once you accept their definition of "victim" and their definition of the source of The Troubles, you are forced into accepting their definition of a "solution," complete with the paint-it-by-numbers whitewash approach to peace, harmony and mutual forgiveness.

And if you're a republican and you're a republican, you're a republican. It's not a matter of degree. It's not a matter of how many times you've been shot. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in jail. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in court. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the news. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the headlines. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the papers. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the TV. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the radio. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the internet. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the social media. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the news. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the headlines. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the papers. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the TV. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the radio. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the internet. It's not a matter of how many times you've been in the social media. I'm not the same as a republican terrorist. I'm not the same as a loyalist terrorist.

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