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DUP madness!!

It is difficult to understand the thinking behind the latest action by the DUP leadership in Stormont. Jim Allister sets out the issue in an article/letter in the Newsletter which explains what is at stake. Here it is.

Jim Allister: The plan to unfetter powers of Stormont ministers must be delayed for crucial scrutiny

I well remember at the meetings held with the DUP grassroots in 2006, to sell the St Andrews' Agreement, how a tool of persuasion by the party leadership was to make much of the ending of Sinn Fein solo runs by the victory of everything controversial having to pass through the executive.

By Jim Allister, Monday, 27th July 2020, 6:30 am

Jim Allister says the implications of the bill needed to be teased out at the committee stage

No more unfettered Sinn Fein power — such as with the abolition of the 11 plus — was the promise!

This, along with the inaccurate promise that mandatory coalition need last only two terms (eight years), featured heavily in Peter Robinson's selective slide presentation, which persuaded the faithful to buy into St Andrews and enter government with IRA/Sinn Fein.

Now, bizarrely, the current DUP leadership is dismantling this same proclaimed bulwark against Sinn Fein power, through promotion of the Executive Functions Bill.

Letter to the editor

The fact that in the second stage debate the primary DUP speaker propagated a false assurance suggests a dearth of consideration by the lead party of unionism. He said, "the "three or more ministers" safeguard remains in place. If ministers are upset or concerned about the implications of a decision that is cross-cutting, three of them are required to ensure that the executive as a whole have a conversation about that decision."

As Richard Bullick (a man at the heart of drafting the St Andrews' 'protection') pointed out in his powerful article in the News Letter on Friday ('DUP is removing safeguards that we won for unionism,' July 25), this is simply not so.

There is no such existing power. Yes, when something gets to the executive three ministers can insist it requires cross-community support. But, there is no power for "three or more ministers" to call something in, despite what Mrs Foster told her committee on 1st July. It is of itself alarming that the first minister is so misinformed.

The right of three ministers to insist on a cross-community vote creates a veto for the DUP (or Sinn Fein), but the supply line to the veto power is cut off by this bill. That is the key point the DUP seems to be missing.

Now, any minister can decide matters without recourse to the executive unless it affects the statutory responsibilities of another department "more than incidentally".

So, what was so important at St Andrews to the DUP, is now of no moment. Why?

It is precisely because the ramifications of this bill needed to be teased out in a proper committee stage that I voted against accelerated passage of this legislation. Sadly, I was the only unionist do so. Now, the horse has bolted.

Particularly for believers in the absurd Stormont system these should be issues of concern, but seem-



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Doug Beattie's amendments seek to limit the change to planning matters. This is sensible.

What is not sensible is to use the need for change on planning, flowing from the Buick judgement, to unfetter ministers' powers across the board.

Another option to protect against what may be unintended, but significant, consequences would, at this late stage, be a petition of concern subjecting the final vote on the bill to cross-community support, that is if the DUP was now to realise what it is doing.

Jim Allister QC MLA, Stormont.

Here is a letter on the subject which I submitted to the Belfast Newsletter this morning.

Dear Editor,

DUP backbenchers have frequently been labelled as 'dummies'!

Never was that epithet more apt than at the present as the silence from the DUP back benches is deafening in the face of the treacherous attempt to force through a bill in Stormont that virtually gives Sinn Fein ministers unfettered powers to repeat the actions of Martin McGuinness in the first power-sharing assembly, when he, as education minister, decided to abolish the 11-Plus examinations without the least consultation with the rest of the Executive.

The DUP is now, in harness with Michelle O'Neill and her fellow Sinn Feiners, seeking to remove that one item of legislation which would hinder, to some degree, such an action taking place again.

Just what madness is it that has gained utter control of the DUP membership that it is prepared to surrender its intellectual thought processes (such as they are), their political convictions (such as they are), their consciences (if they have not suffered the 'hot iron searing' spoken of in God's Word, 1 Timothy 4:2) and abandon completely all semblance of honour and honesty in order to, 'lickspittle-like', surrender yet again to those who make no secret of their desire and unceasing designs to destroy Northern Ireland?

Neither does the DUP leadership utter a word to explain why it is proposing and pressing this matter nor is there a whimper from the rank and file, requiring some form of explanation!

Can it be that the DUP have adopted the tactic of their 'partners' Sinn Fein/IRA, and issued such threats that terrify their members from breaking ranks and speaking a word of protest against the duplicity and double-dealing of their own leadership?

If that is so, then we must add to the list of the moral deficiencies of the DUP MLAs, that of craven cowardice!

Rev Ivan Foster (Rtd)

Kilskeery, Co. Tyrone.

27th July 2020.