



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

Surely the DUP have crossed a line!!

As we feared, the DUP went ahead with its sellout of the legislative safeguard that it had previously, repeatedly, claimed was the rock-solid assurance that power-sharing with Sinn Fein/IRA was a safe step some 13 years ago (13 - the number of rebellion in the Bible!).

It was sad to see the rank and file of the DUP following its leaders, sheep-like, in support of this denial of what it once affirmed most vehemently to the Protestants of Ulster. Last night's debate spot-lighted upon the stage at Stormont a clear 'presentation' which underscores the course the DUP is on, in union with Sinn Fein and the lesser pro-nationalist parties in Stormont!

It seems that the DUP is determined to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of Northern Ireland in 1921, by destroying the very foundations laid by the courage and sacrifice of our forefathers!

Some time ago I was struck in my reading of Jeremiah, of his twin, apparently contradictory, attitudes toward the people to whom the Lord had sent him, his own nation of Judah.

In chapter 9:1-3, he declares his heart-broken compassion for his foolish people.

"Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD."

In contrast, he shares with us his vexation and anger at their wickedness in chapter 18:19-23.

"Give heed to me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be compensated for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; let their young men be slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet. Yet, LORD, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me: forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight, but let them be overthrown before thee; deal thus with them in the time of thine anger."

Only the Lord is unchanging in His compassion and love for His people yet even He becomes vexed with the folly of those who profess to love Him and He acts toward them accordingly.

"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them," Isaiah 63:9-10.

Amongst the DUP membership and the Stormont MLAs are those who are genuine believers but for one reason or another they have foolishly continued to ally themselves with a party that has long ago departed from its founding principles. For them we ought to pray and show compassion, the compassion of Jeremiah as expressed in the words I have quoted, 9:1-3.

I genuinely feel for them, despite what might appear from my words of condemnation of compromise and failure to act in defence of God's truth. Many of them have little by way of true Biblical counsel offered to them, for the pulpits are largely silent on this particular battle. Such silence has but encouraged those to whom we are referring to continue on in compromise and disobedience.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

The voice of protest that the likes of myself have raised is dismissed by many as mere 'dinosauric crankiness'!!

The wisdom of Paul was dismissed, on even more slender grounds, by his opponents in a similar fashion. "For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible," 2 Corinthians 10:10.

Be that as it may, let those believers be alert to what is taking place, pray for those caught up in the confusion and deceit that they may be delivered from it all and take a stand for the Lord.

Here is a report from today's 'Belfast Newsletter' of the debate in Stormont last night in which, what I believe will be a fateful decision, was taken.

I have also attached the somewhat edited form of my letter which also appeared

No explanation from DUP leadership for forcing through bill and not even a whimper from the party's rank and file

"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. He, as education minister, decided to abolish the 11-Plus examinations without the least consultation with the rest of the executive.

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 all honour and honesty in order to 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 pressing this matter nor is there a whimper from the rank and file."

Rev Ivan Foster,
Kilskeery, Co Tyrone.

Today's "Belfast Newsletter" report on last night's debate.

MLAs overwhelmingly vote through controversial bill to give ministers more power

The Assembly has overwhelmingly rejected an attempt to amend a bill which would give more powers to Stormont ministers, paving the way for it to become law within days.

The Executive Committee (Functions) Bill, which Mrs Foster and Michelle O'Neill are ramming through the Assembly at speed and with minimal scrutiny, is now likely to be nodded through its final stage by MLAs tomorrow, leaving it to only require Royal Assent before becoming law.

Mrs Foster has faced withering criticism on the issue from her former senior special adviser Richard Bullick, who has warned that the bill is constitutionally "dangerous" and goes against long-standing DUP policy de-



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

signed to curtail the unilateral power of Sinn Féin ministers.

Neither the First Minister nor deputy First Minister – who proposed the legislation – even showed up for the debate in the Assembly today.

Instead, junior ministers Gordon Lyons and Declan Kearney represented them for the debate on further consideration stage – the final point at which the far-reaching change could have been amended.

Amendments tabled by UUP MLA Doug Beattie would have significantly curtailed the bill, meaning that it would have only conferred unlimited power on the Infrastructure Minister to take planning decisions without recourse to the Executive – and not given additional powers to every other minister.

But, after a forthright debate lasting two and a half hours, the votes of four Executive parties – the DUP, Sinn Féin, the SDLP and Alliance – comfortably defeated the attempt to alter the bill, voting it down by 73 votes to 10.

Doug Beattie

Mr Beattie, an Upper Bann MLA and former soldier, appealed to MLAs to have “moral courage” in thinking for themselves, telling them: “Physical courage is easy; moral courage is something that is extremely difficult”.

Mr Beattie said that the bill was “in conflict with the Belfast Agreement”, undermining what the framers of that 1998 deal had envisioned about ministers bringing issues to the Executive as a whole rather than simply doing as they pleased within their departments.

But he also said that another aspect of the bill was in conflict with the St Andrews Agreement. Referring to Mr Bullock’s repeated warnings about the bill, he told MLAs: “If we’re an Assembly where we cannot stop and reassess...we’re lame ducks”.

Urging MLAs to back his amendments so they could take more time to consider the issue, he said: “It’s the right thing to do, it’s the morally courageous thing to do”.

Highlighting that he is not a lawyer and left school at 16, Mr Beattie said that the bill was “so complex, so far-reaching” that it needs more scrutiny and said he accepted he had been wrong when three weeks ago he voted for the bill to be sped through the legislature by accelerated passage.

DUP MLAs Christopher Stalford and Mervyn Storey pressed Mr Beattie to say whether UUP minister Robin Swann had agreed to the amendments. Mr Beattie said that Mr Swann did support the party’s amendments to the bill.

Referring to the concerns of Mr Bullock, a barrister, Mr Storey said there was “a dilemma that not for the first time among lawyers...now we have a litany of legislation that has been pored over by legal counsel and I think lay people, like most of us in this house, are wondering on what side of the legal argument is the practical outworkings of this piece of legislation”.

He added: “It’s not a moral dilemma for me; it’s more an issue of what is the legal advice that gives me and the members of my party protection that no minister is going to run rogue and do things that none of us want.”

Former DUP MLA Jim Wells interjected to say that it was right to say that there were conflicting legal opinions on the bill, but that “the crucial legal advice comes from one of the architects of the St Andrews Agreement, Richard Bullock”.

He said that the obvious solution was to postpone consideration of the bill to allow for that conflict to be resolved and went on to say: “I know that there’s deep concern on the DUP back benches about this legislation...but I’m also aware of how the system works...they will be frogmarched or stamped to vote in the



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

lobbies for something they know in their heart of hearts they can't support".

But – despite the scrutiny committee on which he sits just considering the bill for 11 minutes before nodding it through – Mr Stalford said it was "frankly insulting to other MLAs" to "suggest we just ignored this or let it slip".

Mr Stalford insisted that a decision such as the abolition of the Eleven Plus by Martin McGuinness in 2002 would not be made possible again after the passage of the bill.

He said: "Any suggestion this bill would diminish this [Executive constraint on ministers] is a fundamental misunderstanding...it is inaccurate of those who have tried to suggest otherwise".

Alluding to Mr Bullick's article in this newspaper last week in which he dissected the flaws in the bill, Mr Stalford said there had been "confusion on social media and in newspapers".

He said that initially there had been no controversy about the bill but "then an article appears in a newspaper and then suddenly this has grave constitutional implications and we should all be concerned about it".

Referring to his former colleagues in the DUP, Mr Wells said: "The reason why backbenchers are rolling their eyes is not because they can't understand your speech or don't agree with it but because they've been whipped to within an inch of their lives to vote for something that many of them are extremely unhappy with - but they have been told to vote for it."

He asked Mr Stalford if he accepted that Mr Bullick was central to the DUP and "one of the finest legal minds in Northern Ireland".

The DUP MLA said Mr Bullick was "a dear friend" but that Stormont Castle had received legal advice from several lawyers including former Attorney General John Larkin in support of its position.

The South Belfast MLA insisted that the bill "enhances the concept of collective responsibility". But Mr Wells claimed that Mr Stalford was reading a speech which "he had been given to read by one of the special advisers", something which the DUP MLA did not deny.

Sinn Féin's Pat Sheehan – whose party has always sought to have more power for individual ministers – said that it was a "sensible" bill which his party fully supported.

SDLP MLA Colin McGrath, the chairman of the Assembly committee charged with scrutinising the bill, said he was comfortable that it had been sufficiently interrogated.

He said that the bill would help the smaller parties by clarifying what had to go to the Executive, which is dominated by the DUP and Sinn Féin.

He said the bill would "unlock key planning decisions that will get the economy moving again".

Mr Wells interjected to say that nothing in Mr Beattie's amendments would impact on the part of the bill which gives more powers to the planning minister.

Alliance's Andrew Muir said that claims the amendments were necessary to avoid ministerial solo runs "are in my opinion over-played" and his party endorsed the bill as it stood.

He said that in the absence of the bill there would be a significant lack of clarity on what decisions could be taken by ministers, making it urgent to resolve.

Speaking on behalf of the Executive, Mr Lyons said he could assure MLAs that they had been "rigorous" in their consideration of the issue.

He said that the test for cross-cutting was being given a statutory definition to clarify it and insisted it would



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

"not open the flood gates" in allowing ministers to go on solo runs.

The junior minister said that passing Mr Beattie's amendment would mean that almost every health decision would have to come to the Executive.

The East Antrim MLA said it was "never common practice" for issues such as planning decisions to be brought to the Assembly and would make for an "unsustainable" situation with the Executive.

However, Mr Bullock has argued this misses the point and just because each decision did not come to the Executive did not mean that the DUP did not value having the power to pull in any significant decision.

Stupity on show - again!!

Extraordinarily, during the debate Mr Storey repeated the First Minister's erroneous claim that any three ministers can call any ministerial decision into the Executive where it could be blocked – something which has been debunked by Mr Bullock over the last fortnight.

Mr Beattie pointed out that no such power exists – something which Mr Storey then did not challenge.

Green MLA Rachel Woods, whose party has consistently opposed the bill, said that it appeared to be a far more significant piece of legislation than the Assembly had been told by ministers who presented it as a technical bill to regularise the rules in response to a court judgment.

People Before Profit MLA Gerry Carroll, who similarly has consistently opposed the bill, said that the Executive was acting in a "cavalier" way and simply brushed off concerns.