



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Dublin Journalist Speaks Up For Dr. Ian Paisley.

Suzanne Breen is a journalist with *The Irish Times*. This article appeared in her guest column in *The Belfast Newsletter* of 17th June.

The Rev Ian Paisley never minces his words and he was more vitriolic than ever after his European election victory. The media was singled out for special attention. Dr Paisley said he "despised" the Press whom he accused of anti-DUP bias. He said journalists had continually written his political obituary. Well, with 192,762 votes under his belt he had proved them all wrong. He had topped the poll in spite of the Press. There was considerable head shaking and sighing among journalists during this tirade. One reporter raised his eyebrows. "Here we go again," he said. I don't share the DUP's general political or world view but Dr Paisley was right. The Press, with few exceptions, is biased against his party.

It wishes so hard that the DUP will be defeated that it convinces itself this is about to happen. It's called believing one's own propaganda. Election campaign after election campaign journalists tell us the DUP Leader is out of touch with the dominant mood in Northern Ireland. They say he is living in the past and predict imminent punishment at the polls. They say he is diminishing physically as well as politically. He is looking old and tired. His health isn't what it used to be. He should retire to gentler pastures. Every time, Dr Paisley proves them wrong. In this election, the DUP vote increased by 30,000. Dr Paisley actually stretched his lead over John Hume - 2,000 votes compared to 1,200 in 1994. He is undoubtedly the most popular politician in Northern Ireland. It's the fifth successive time he has topped the European poll. That's quite remarkable.

If it were John Hume's achievement, the media would be leading the applause. But Dr Paisley's incredible resilience is never even noted in an objective fashion because he doesn't hold the view many in the media believe all "right thinking" politicians should hold. For the entire morning and well into the afternoon of the count, SDLP officials were confidently predicting to journalists that their man would top the poll.

They were wrong. Did the media go for the kill? Absolutely not. There is nothing wrong with that. It's only good manners, but if it had been the DUP which was proved mistaken, it would have been hammered.

The SDLP group looked deflated, their red roses drooping in their lapels, as the result was announced. If the roles had been reversed, would there not have been pictures of a down-hearted looking DUP team on the front page of at least several newspapers with snappy little captions? In his acceptance speech, John Hume rightly said that a majority of people still supported the Belfast Agreement. A total of 68.5 per cent voted for pro-Agreement candidates. Given the long history of this conflict, that's immense encouragement for supporters of the peace process. But the reality is that 60 per cent of Unionists voted against the Agreement. Tony Blair can claim many things over coming weeks but he can't claim the Agreement is supported by a majority of both communities here. On that point alone we should admit that Dr Paisley is right whether we agree with his politics or not.