



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

DUP is further strengthened



Jeffrey Donaldson — reluctant to speak his mind on Ian Paisley

Dr. Ian Paisley, leader of the victorious DUP, described his mid-December meeting with Tony Blair as “extremely useful” but made clear that he had offered the prime minister no concessions regarding power sharing with Sinn Féin. “There will never be any conditions when we will sit in government with any body of people, loyalist or nationalist, who have an army, and that army is being used against democracy,” he insisted, adding that Sinn Féin is “inextricably tied up” with paramilitarism.

The anti-Good Friday Agreement Democratic Unionist party won 30 seats in last month’s assembly elections, replacing David Trimble’s pro-Agreement Ulster Unionists as Northern Ireland’s largest unionist party.

Despite Mr Paisley’s “no surrender” stance, he insisted that there was no issue which he was unwilling to discuss in the search for peace and the restoration of democracy in Northern Ireland.

And he promised to provide the Northern Ireland secretary, Paul Murphy - who was also present at the meeting - with a complete record of all the issues he wanted to be addressed. The prime minister’s official spokesman described the meeting - the first between Mr Paisley and Mr Blair for a year - as “beginning a conversation” in which the government would “explore” how willing the DUP is to be positive.

“We all know what the DUP position is in broad outline,” he said. “What today was about was beginning a conversation in more detail about what their assessment is post-election and how they see the way forward. They have said in public they want to be positive. We want to explore what that means in detail. We should give it time. We will talk to the other parties and get their assessment along with the Dublin Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, and then we will be in a better position to assess where we are going.”

Resignation

Also in mid-December, Ulster Unionist Jeffrey Donaldson quit the UUP along with two newly-elected assembly members. The Lagan Valley MP said he was leaving the UUP with Arlene Foster and Norah Beare. The three MLAs have stated that their mandate to work for a new and better agreement for Northern Ireland cannot be achieved from within the confines of the UUP Mr Donaldson has been a thorn in the side of Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble, since the moment he walked away from Castle Buildings just before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

“I have been a member of the UUP for over 20 years, but it is not the party I joined. It’s a party that has abandoned its principles. It is a party which can no longer command the support of a clear majority of unionists. I do not see the Ulster Unionist Party ever again being the largest party in Northern Ireland.”



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Offer

It is understood he is considering taking up a long-standing offer to join the rival Democratic Unionist Party. DUP leader Ian Paisley said he warmly welcomed the resignations. "This is without doubt a momentous decision that will deal a hammer blow to the Ulster Unionist Party leaving them little more than a rump of Unionists badly out of touch with the views and aspirations of the majority of the unionist community."

Prevarication

In many interviews following his resignation, Mr. Donaldson was repeatedly asked about his plans and whether he would join the DUP and how he would feel under Dr. Paisley's leadership. It was disappointing to note Mr. Donaldson's prevarication on the subject of Dr. Paisley's leadership. He kept speaking of the DUP "changing" and "moving" but just what that meant was not made clear. What it certainly implied was that he observed shifts in the basic policies and principles that had been the bedrock of the DUP's opposition to the ecumenical politics of the UUP. Mr. Donaldson worships at a Presbyterian Church in Ireland congregation. The PCI is an active participant in ecumenism and openly fellowships with Rome. Dr. Paisley is the Moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, an unrelenting opponent of modern theology and ecumenism.

Strange

It is strange that men should see the failures of ecumenical politics, the destruction that such have wrought in our Province over the years and feel the need to seek a new political home, and yet seek out a political party which they perceive is moving in the direction of the philosophy of that party they have just left, because they deemed it a failure!

Lesson

Mr. Donaldson is a professing Christian and he ought to know that it is a sad fact that God's people, after they have enjoyed deliverance from their enemies, in response to their humbling of themselves before the Lord Whose displeasure their backslidings have incurred, very quickly, in the midst of their victories, go back to the sins which had brought their miseries.

Is that what he is looking for? Will he consider joining the DUP only after he sees signs of it forsaking the principles which have brought it success and becoming more "broad church", just like the party he has been forced to leave.

If that is his thinking, then may Jeffrey Donaldson never find the DUP measuring up to his desires.