

Only commentators and unionist leaders can provide the relevant debate

News Letter - 14th August 2020

I agree with Owen Polley's article (*'Unionism needs a core set of guiding principles'*, August 11). It added, that "unionism is in a bit of a mess" and there "is a dearth of ideas among current unionist leaders."

With very much regret, I feel compelled to write this letter. As the written record in this paper will show, I have endeavoured to articulate over the years a coherent positive story, based on relevant guiding principles of international law that none could oppose if acted objectively.

The Council of Europe provides these guiding principles that are founded on stability, democratic security, and peace; within the rule of law, respecting the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of States.

What more does unionism require? Indeed, what more does any reasonable resident of Northern Ireland require?

The approach is based on human rights and needs to be articulated clearly, briefly and simply at every opportunity. The task is not easy, given the wide spectrum within unionism.

Some say politics is the art of the possible. I believe that politics is not so much the art of the possible but more about choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable. I know that some unionists may find aspects of human rights' arguments unpalatable, but the alternative is I believe disastrous.

A debate is needed but only leaders and media commentators can help provide the relevant debate.

I have questioned Steve Aiken (Ulster Unionist Party leader) about adopting this approach. For example, his answer in December 2018 *was* "Yes, as soon as I can." I still await any action!

Also, I contacted Alex Kane in October 2019. We subsequently met and I explained the human rights' perspective, with documents supplied. He assured me he would respond. I still await a response.

These are merely two examples.

The possible uncomfortable truth of the contents of a strategy must be spoken (and written) because silence on such matters is no basis for assisting the provision of an inclusive, stable and peaceful future within the Union. A debate is needed.

Unionism's leaders, together with respected Unionist commentators such as Alex Kane, need to commence consideration of the guiding principles advocated by the Council of Europe.

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