

'Renewed challenge to the Unionist Community'

Dear Sir:

In the pamphlet, 'New Ireland: sell out or opportunity', the northern Protestant Unionist people were urged to seize the initiative by establishing themselves as co-founding fathers of a truly New Ireland. At that time, it was argued that this would have vested them with enduring purpose and earned them the admiration of their fellow Irishmen and women. Much has happened in the intervening years to weaken the position from which they could have operated all those years ago. It is sad to conclude that a woeful lack of vision, combined with a lamentable lack of imaginative leadership, has kept the Unionist people forever on the defensive.

Rather than waiting to be slowly spurned by the people of a changing Britain, it was suggested that they should instead pursue a vision of Ireland in which sectarianism would no longer dominate and undertake the creation of a new progressive social order.

At that time it was acknowledged, that in the minds of a significant number of people, a 'United Ireland' implied absorption of the northern six counties as merely an extension of the southern twenty-six, so it was necessary to emphasize that, on the contrary, a New Ireland implied sitting down with fellow Irishwomen and men in order to draft for ratification a completely New Constitution which would reflect in its articles, the degree of consensus required to underpin any claim to unity.

In restating the obvious that six into twenty-six would not go, that a New Ireland could not be the old Ireland in disguise, that implicit in the ending of partition is the dissolution of the present Irish constitution and twenty-six county state, a challenge was being put not only to leaders of Unionism, but also to political leaders in the Republic of Ireland as well. We know that thus far most members of the northern Protestant community have looked elsewhere for their salvation and we still wait for a convincing statement for the Republic concerning the fundamental constitutional changes which must be anticipated if there is to be successful negotiation leading to the end of partition.

Signed: Dr. John Robb