

Reid between the lines

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John Reid has been worrying again about the growing alienation of loyalists. If his interview this week in the Belfast Telegraph is anything to go by he has maybe more to worry about, because his approach is also greatly alienating moderate unionists.

First is the arrogance and, one has to say, ignorance in some of his assumptions about life in Northern Ireland before his arrival as Secretary of State. He states in his interview that the Belfast Agreement “introduced equal opportunities”. Oh really? Does he really believe that opportunities were not every bit as equal before the Agreement as after it?

Yes, the Agreement has brought a new raft of equality procedures but I have one simple question for Dr. Reid. Given all the statistics produced by the Equality Commission and the NI Administration, where is his evidence?

To compound the problem he then goes on to say that Unionists should not regard the introduction of equality of opportunity and human rights as a concession to republicans. And then in a moment of pure insult from a Scotsman to unionism he implies we should look at the issue of rights from a British point of view.

I do look at rights from both a British and international point of view. I challenged him on this very issue some two months ago, and still await a reply. I have always supported full rights for all, as does UUP policy. To be lectured on this by the Secretary of State tests all tolerance.

Finally, as if all of this was not enough, he identifies a dividing line with democrats on one side and those who pursue violence on the other. On the democratic side he identifies Adams, McGuinness, Ervine, Paisley and Trimble – people with whom he has “bitter disagreements” but people who wish to settle the future by argument.

His list speaks volumes. Why is David Trimble bracketed with ‘reformed’ terrorists and the ideologue Ian Paisley? Is this how Dr Reid perceives David Trimble’s position? Why is the SDLP not on his list?

The answer is simple. Dr Reid sees moderate nationalism as the neutral centre ground. He implies that unionism is a brand of extremism attempting to reform itself. This will not do. Once again the Secretary of State is unjustifiably stirring up the opposition of moderate unionism. I ask Dr Reid publicly for the second time to think again.

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