

## The Editor's Journal



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## Brexit money an electoral distraction

The DUP's financial windfall for its Brexit campaign was the focus of political attack, speculation and press comment. Until the time of revelation of its source it was totally uninformed and wide of the mark, with the sole exception of the Herald newspaper in Scotland.

That newspaper may well have had an inside track because a Scottish Conservative politician emerged as being closely involved with the source of the much questioned funds.

It was perfectly legal and acceptable for the DUP as a UK based political party which is pro-union to accept money to promote Brexit. It was also perfectly acceptable to use that money where it could hit hardest and with greatest effect in Great Britain and in London in particular with its greater population base. The Referendum was first and foremost a UK wide referendum. There was nothing illegal about the DUP's strategy or expenditure.

Unmentioned by the media and other critics was the vast amount of expenditure by the UK government in promoting the Remain cause and in a manner which so misread the electorate.

In Northern Ireland because of violence and threats of the same, donations to political parties are confidential amid fears of reprisals if donors are identified. Campaigners have called for a change in the law to force Northern Irish parties to follow the same rules as those in the rest of the UK, amid accusations of "donor tourism".

Be that as it may, there has been by comparison little comment on Sinn Fein's approach to fiscal probity and public finances. Does this party that has lectured the DUP about Brexit funding not have its own lavish and, as some have said, shady financial sources and practice?

In one of many capitulations to Sinn Fein by UK governments it was given special dispensation to get Westminster allowances despite not taking its seats.

It has been funded from the USA and elsewhere by questionable sources. And as for political interference, did not its allies in the USA lobby and pressurise politicians and sought to influence electoral outcomes in primaries.

Sinn Fein has used, and again some have said abused, UK government funding with for example dubious 'in house' research companies staffed by party members being the recipients of public money.

There are DUP stances and behaviour which I do have misgivings about. However, I recognise, and as a democrat I respect the fact that the DUP makes no apology for its British identity and

that it is perfectly within its rights to seek to influence British public opinion in nation-wide issues.

The concentration of press, political and to a lesser degree public attention on this issue was manna from heaven for the RHI problem which has been besieging the DUP. They and the electorate managed to get a 48 hour period where RHI and wood pellet burning boilers were hardly mentioned. The DUP's ability to attract and employ the funding for their Brexit strategy pointed to a competence in a manner which will appeal to their electoral support, and indeed may increase the same. I conclude by suggesting one reason why.

The one aspect of politics in Ireland which is my major irritant is the self-righteous Sinn Fein lecturing others on morality and ethics.

### **The basic political and spiritual challenge**

A BBC TV programme "The View" ably presented by Mark Carruthers on Thursday night last week on the unnecessary upcoming election was excellent and challenging to watch.

The venue was the Belfast Campus of the University of Ulster and the audience was students drawn from a number of higher level institutions in the city. The panel included the usual sort of tribal pol reps... (Nommie Redhead of the Balloon Debating Society, a suited Sham Feign guy, and Paul Gurner of the Definitely Uptosomething Party... etc.)

In comparison to the audience on many other pseudo-political comment media shows, the students were superb. They were informed, articulate and courteous regardless of whatever the political viewpoints a few of them indicated. They were the best advert for Northern Ireland one has seen in many a day.

The saddest aspect in the programme was that in a show of hands over fifty per cent indicated that they fully intended to leave N Ireland after graduation. Never mind hand-wringing about the Brexit result, think about who is the politician and the party you could vote for who could best create a climate, both economic and social, which would persuade those young adults intending to leave, to remain in Northern Ireland.

God did not give Northern Ireland much in terms of natural resources to exploit. It is basalt in the Antrim Hills and granite in the Mourne, not gold or iron ore. But God gave us our young people, and our best asset was on display on BBC TV last week. No amount of the generous financial subventions to Northern Ireland from London or elsewhere can balance what we lose when they go from our midst.

## **A real bishop**

Quite rightly there have been many tributes paid to the late Bishop Sam Poyntz, I was readily in empathy with that paid by The Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Reverend Dr Michael Jackson. He recalled, "The first time I met Bishop Poyntz was when I was a student in Trinity College. On Sunday evenings I attended Evensong in St Ann's, Dawson Street where he was the Vicar. His combination of personal friendliness and commitment to God and Gospel have proved to be a lasting inspiration to me personally and to countless other people with whom I have spoken since his recent death."

My initial contact with Bishop Poyntz was when my close friend the late Des Harman and myself

were 'set up' by Kevin Dalton to assist with the publicity for the committee of the Bishops' Appeal for world development and response to disasters. This Appeal pioneering and essential aspect of the Church of Ireland's witness was a brain child of Sam who was then Vicar of St Ann's, and he remained closely associated with its endeavours and growth. That was the focus and cause where our friendship was formed and matured.

In time he came to my home diocese of Connor as our bishop. By then I was out of parish ministry and serving as the Secretary to the General Synod's Board of Education. Such non-parochial clerical post holders by the very nature of their ministry can be adrift from episcopal concern or diocesan involvement, and at that in one of the largest dioceses which can present a conscientious and sensitive bishop with enough work and particularly in really knowing and supporting his parish clergy. However, neither I nor my family were neglected by our pastor pastorum during Bishop Poyntz's watch. Furthermore, his wife and his home were welcoming and hospitable.

There was no problem I could not share with him in the certainty that if I sought his advice it would

be well-considered, informed and spiritual. I recall a steady paced dander with him round Portrush during a break from a clergy conference where his response to a situation I was assessing regarding my future ministry enabled me to determine my direction with a sense of relief and a better degree of practical and spiritual confidence.

As a bishop he never asked from his clergy that which he would not do himself. He never gave less than 100 per cent. His time in Connor included times of violence and heartbreak. He was there for those clergy and parishes under pressure. He knew that the church had to be in the public place to fulfil its witness and mission. And always he had a considered word in season.

Dr Poyntz was well informed theologically and was abreast of current affairs both nationally and internationally. He certainly was far removed from the CEO model of bishop which has emerged in the Church of England and seems to be a too ready temptation to some closer to home.

Since his retirement I have missed my encounters with him, but I have the warmth of a host of memories of a man with vocation and



vision. I thank God for his friendship, guidance and leadership.

Houston McKelvey

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