**SALAMANCA PLAN COULD HELP US MOVE ON**

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**News Letter**

**23 November 2010**

**By LIAM CLARKE**

IT is worth paying attention to what Owen Paterson proposes because, unlike our local politicians, he calls the shots in his areas of responsibility – and what he says may actually come to pass. Exactly a week ago, his proposals on dealing with the past were barely reported, never mind analysed – they seemed to slip by under the radar as attention focused on the grim economic news.   
  
People need to engage with his ideas now before they become a fait accompli and it is too late to modify them. Paterson is a brisk and decisive sort of chap who may well take silence for assent.   
  
The secretary of state made his remarks in London at the Leonard Steinberg Memorial Lecture. The talk, hosted by the Tory leaning Policy Exchange Think Tank, is named after the Jewish unionist businessman who was forced out of the province after refusing to pay protection money on his chain of bookies. **[Actually he was first shot by the Provisional IRA in their anti-business, anti-Jewish campaign of 1977 – see ‘Discussion’ section of Wikipedia article for details and evidence of the Republican edit war on the subject.]**  
  
Paterson also seemed unwilling to pay up for more public inquiries, whether they cost £200 million like Bloody Sunday or were the cut-down £30 million type we saw into the death of Billy Wright.   
  
This approach, he suggested, involved "a hierarchy of investigations", in which a few high profile deaths were privileged over the vast majority of killings. He also ruled out "a full blown truth and reconciliation commission" of the sort demanded by Sinn Fein as too   
long and expensive.  
  
Instead he came up with the suggestion that a document repository should be founded containing information on the Troubles from a variety of sources.   
  
Paterson drew his inspiration from the Historical Memory Documentary Centre which was established by the Spanish government in the city of Salamanca to deal with the legacy of the country's civil war in the 1930s.  
  
He envisages the public having access to the repository which would be managed by a team of historians who would "interpret all the available material with a view to producing the authoritative history of the Troubles".  
  
The secretary of state has been working on this one for some time.   
  
He has already discussed the project with historians in Cambridge and in Boston College, which hold important archives on the Troubles, including the testimony of paramilitaries which can only be released after their death.  
  
There is some merit in this scheme but there are also shortcomings.   
  
The Salamanca archive follows an "act of oblivion" in which crimes committed during the civil war were set aside.   
  
Besides, the archive was established under 2007 legislation, passed well after most of those involved in the Spanish conflict were dead.  
  
Our Troubles are far more recent. Many of the perpetrators are still around, some of them holding high office or living respectable lives.   
  
We all know that the chances of convictions are generally slim and, anyway, the maximum sentence available under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement is two years. Yet many victims and bereaved relatives still hope for prosecutions.  
  
The release of official documents to a public archive would have the potential to prejudice criminal proceedings. Most of the raw data is already held by the Historical Enquiries Team which is patiently sifting through it with the aid of advanced computer analysis. No archive would be credible unless the HET material was included.  
  
Any lawyer would advise people who were active in the Troubles, whether they are retired members of the security forces or former paramilitants, to say nothing unless they were assured that their words could not be used in criminal proceedings. Some might also   
require anonymity.  
  
One way around this would be for a panel including trained police investigators and lawyers, not just historians, to sift through the material and form a view on the feasibility of prosecution. This professional assessment would help victims decide whether evidence in their cases should be made public or withheld in the hope of future prosecutions. They could also consider whether they wanted likely perpetrators to be given immunity from self-incrimination in return for further information.  
  
A further difficulty is that the release of government papers would not be credible if they were limited by the full strictures of the Official Secrets Act and the 30 year rule.   
  
Here it might be useful to have an international element to adjudicate on whether it was really necessary to withhold documentation.   
  
Ground rules of best practice have been established in Germany and Eastern Europe where police and official files have been selectively released, sometimes in a redacted form but more often in their entirety, since the fall of Communism.  
  
If it is handled properly Paterson's idea of an archive could help us to move on from the problems of the past to the problems of today. It could cost less time and money than some of the other proposals on the table. If it is mishandled, and given insufficient powers, it will become a divisive white elephant and funds spent on it will be money down the drain.

**We've no lessons for Republic's economy**

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News Letter

23 November 2010

By NR GREER

AS a unionist I take no pleasure in the economic woes of the Republic of Ireland. I spent a fair bit of time working in Dublin while the Celtic tiger roared and it was a great place to be. Economically, politically and socially the problems of the Republic's economy are bad news for us too.

A confident, economically independent and forward looking Republic of Ireland lost interest in fighting yesterday's battles. The people I worked with in Dublin, many of whom were active in the main Irish political parties, just did not understand why Northern Ireland's nationalists were standing around whining instead of getting down to the business of growing the economy.   
  
While nationalists in Northern Ireland tried to argue that prosperity south of the border was a reason for unionists to suddenly forgo their nationality, history and personal identity, it had the reverse effect in the Republic.   
  
There people became largely post-nationalist in their outlook: in the prosperous new Ireland the backwards looking ideology of nationalism and the subsidy dependent north were things best avoided.   
  
In the good times people south of the border rarely bothered to think about "the North" at all. It was just not a priority issue for people there; Northern Ireland was small beer when there was New York, Brussels, London, Berlin and Shanghai to conquer.  
  
And conquer they did. Across the globe, whenever business leaders were interviewed there was a good chance they would speak with an Irish accent. Even Australia's national airline, Qantas, is headed by an Irishman.

While our local politicians were busying themselves demanding money for short-term "community projects" and building the wealth-sucking peace process industry, our neighbours in the south were building an international economy and a 21st century infrastructure.  
  
Just look at the roads and the trams, the urban redevelopment and the country house hotels.   
  
Then it all got out of hand. The banks went on a bender financing building developments for which there was no obvious market and which only sold because the same banks leant people silly amounts of money. The Irish property market became one giant pyramid scheme   
reliant on rising prices which were only possible due to ever more outrageous bank lending.  
  
With the quick wealth came greed, ridiculous risk taking and some very dodgy practices. Everyone knew it would all end in tears, but no one had the courage to stamp on the brakes.  
  
However while the Irish economy has taken a battering, and may well be in the recovery ward for a few years, it still has a pulse. Once the rotten tumour has been operated upon we may find that the patient is fundamentally quite fit.   
  
Large parts of the Republic boast top class infrastructure and there are still hundreds of large international companies headquartered in the state, not all of whom will leave.   
  
There is also an underlying spirit of entrepreneurism that will make itself felt again in a year or two.   
  
It is entirely possible that the Republic's economy will be well on the road to recovery while Northern Ireland's continues to stagnate.   
  
Northern Ireland has no lessons for the Republic. If Northern Ireland had a standalone economy it would be in as bad or even worse state than the Republic. We have ghost developments too: large swathes of swish looking new apartments that are being sold off cheap for social housing.  
  
While the Dail has now to go cap in hand to Brussels, Stormont has been hanging around Westminster with a begging bowl from the day and hour that the Assembly was established.  
  
While folks in the south are enraged by the loss of situation and will do their utmost to change things, the population here is conditioned to be being perpetually bailed out.   
  
But specifically why are the Republic's problems really such bad news for Northern Ireland?  
  
\*The key components of the crash, banking and property development are messily interwoven on a cross border basis and we have still not seen the full extent of the mess. Until we do the banks will remain reluctant to lend and growing businesses will remain frustrated.   
  
\*Between any two adjoining nations there is always an economic ripple effect. The UK, generally, and Northern Ireland, in particular, does a lot of trade with the Republic, everything from Jaguar cars and North Sea gas to weekend breaks in Fermanagh and shopping trips to Newry.   
  
\*Unemployment in the Republic is going to put additional pressure on the jobs market here as school leavers and graduates cast around for employment opportunities outside of the Republic's borders.   
  
\*Bailing out the Republic is an additional charge on the already emptied British coffers.  
  
\*An impoverished and demoralised Republic will be a fertile breeding ground for fundamentalist Irish Republicanism. Sinn Fein is already mobilising to reap the harvest of despair and doubtless the dissidents are not far behind.  
  
\*This week's multi-billion euro bailout of our closest neighbour will have massive, and potentially negative, implications for Northern Ireland. The question is whether the Stormont Executive will address the issue head on, or whether they will continue to bicker about the budget and stage silly anti-cuts stunts?