

## **Article for Corrymeela Journal**

The odds against the Assembly, transforming itself into a fully operational institution can hardly be lower.

The DUP suggest they need more time than is available between now and midnight on 24<sup>th</sup> November before they decide on Sinn Féin's bona fides. Reports from the International Monitoring Commission may or may not guide its decision. Ultimately the DUP is determined to play the arbiter - not just for itself, but for the rest of us as well.

For Sinn Féin those bona fides are beyond question. Their electoral mandate is the only test they recognise for their participation in an Executive. For them support for policing arrangements does not have any urgency or role in furthering confidence that Sinn Féin truly is committed to peaceful and democratic politics exclusively.

Both positions have all the ingredients for perpetuating the political logjam.

Meantime society in Northern Ireland remains trapped in its vicious sectarian circle where tragedies like the murder of fifteen year old Michael McIlveen repeat themselves with an unerring regularity and where economic and social progress towards the normality promised by the Good Friday Agreement seems as remote as ever.

Is that to be our political legacy come the 24<sup>th</sup> November or will we seriously attempt to break the logjam and restore hope to a political process that has lost a great deal of its credibility over the past four years?

The SDLP will not use the Assembly to raise false hopes and expectations. We will not pretend that that decisions can be taken over matters for which the Assembly has no authority. Expectations that the Assembly will immediately change Direct Rule decisions or be able to direct additional funding to any project would not be deliverable and so will not be advanced.

Instead if progress towards restoration emerges opportunities to prepare for government will be strongly encouraged by the SDLP.

Engagement with the social partners will be essential. This would establish the basis for what didn't prove possible under our previous experience of devolution, i.e. the creation of genuine social partnership to address economic, social and community relations.

Central to that engagement would be addressing sectarianism and laying the basis for a truly 'shared society'.

Our aim will be to make the Assembly the shortest lived assembly of our time. Then we can move rapidly towards the prize of genuine partnership between the children of the Planter and the Gael, not just in the North but throughout the whole of Ireland.

Failing to get to this point will deny this generation the most meaningful opportunity in our history of influencing and directing positively relationships between our communities.