**PREFACE TO MALONE HOUSE GROUP BOOK**

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At the invitation of Jeffrey Dudgeon (Ulster Unionist Councillor, Belfast) who organised the event I was designated ‘Facilitator’ (i.e. Chair) at the Legacy Legislation Conference held at Malone House, Belfast, on Saturday 3 March 2018. I did not expect my role would prove difficult; I was wrong – not due to an unruly audience but rather because so many present had so much to say and were anxious to highlight their concerns. The event was clearly timely.

This booklet contains papers delivered by a range of the principal speakers. A wide spectrum of analysis and emphasis is covered, ranging from the detailed outline by Neil Faris of concern over the proposed legislation in terms of basic rights, to proposals by Trevor Ringland to meet the needs of ‘The Past’, critiques of Sinn Fein strategy (Dr. Austen Morgan, Dr. Andrew Charles and Dr. Cillian McGrattan), the role of the Westminster Parliament (Danny Kinahan), and the mounting concerns of innocent victims (Ken Funston, South East Fermanagh Foundation). The event ended with a powerful (and defiant) contribution by Ben Lowry (Assistant Editor, The News Letter) exposing the deceit underlying much of Sinn Fein propaganda when responding to events involving the security forces.

The Stormont House Agreement, concluded in December 2014, under the aegis (and participation) of both the UK and Irish Governments, proclaimed (Para 21);-

*“As part of the transition to long-term peace and stability the participants agree that an approach to dealing with the past is necessary which reflects the following principles:-*

*• Promoting reconciliation*

*• Upholding the rule of law*

*• Acknowledging and addressing the suffering of victims and survivors*

*• Facilitating the pursuance of justice and information recovery;*

*• Is human rights compliant*

*• Is balanced, proportionate, transparent, fair and equitable.”*

There followed proposals for some four new institutions (see Neil Faris paper). Now, more than three years later, none of these have been created and become operative; the Stormont Assembly has collapsed, concerns over failure to conduct inquests (in some cases dating back more than 30 years) and the Sinn Fein hypocritical indulgence in the language of human rights (with repeated references in their campaign calling for ‘Equality and Respect’) – all testify to both the political impasse and, worse, manifest inter-community distrust.

A recurring feature of the Legacy Conference was concern that human rights and justice issues were being hijacked for unscrupulous ends by Sinn Fein (with a regrettable degree of cover from the SDLP). Against this, victims and survivors in many cases were increasingly suspicious about the reasons given to justify delays in holding inquests or who question the quality of investigations by the PSNI involving some ‘Troubles’ type incidents. These concerns were matched by recurring comments from audience members who felt that the pursuit of further investigations and renewed enquiries into past events which were now decades old simply served to poison the political climate so that ‘a line should be drawn’ and these issues no longer pursued.

In this last context, Anne Graham, sister of Edgar Graham the brilliant young Queen’s University law lecturer who was brutally murdered in December 1983 as he went about his university day, made a memorable comment at the Conference when she explained how her family had learned little or nothing from the investigation of the murder and, unhappily, she had reached the conclusion that little point was now being served in continuing the process.

And so to the readers of the papers now published here. While the issues bristle with complication (and not a little risk) there is need to bear in mind the human tragedy which lies behind so much of ‘The Past’ as well as the baleful influence it can exert. Jeffrey Dudgeon certainly deserves our congratulations for having organised this important Conference.

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