

As part of the protracted negotiations over Northern Ireland, the Government of the Republic of Northern Ireland had to give up its constitutional claim to Northern Ireland (Six Counties) before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

I think that the Spanish Government must give up its territorial claim to Gibraltar before any Agreement is signed. Unless they do a huge stumbling block will remain in the way of reaching a satisfactory solution. Personally I think that joint sovereignty is a reasonable solution but this cannot be time limited. The claim for a total retrocession of sovereignty is totally unacceptable. Otherwise it is all give from the British Government and take by the Spanish Government.

Unlike the days of Franco, Britain and Spain are friends and so the two governments ought to be able to sit down and work out a solution to the long standing Gibraltar problem. But I stress the solution must not be underpinned by the British Crown giving up sovereignty. Indeed I would say that there is unlikely to be an agreement unless the Spanish Government gives up its total sovereignty claim

### **WHAT IF NO AGREEMENT**

As a realist I accept that it might not be possible to reach agreement by 30 June. But we are tantalisingly close to the prize of a resolution of the Gibraltar problem which would result in a complete normalisation of relations between the United Kingdom and Spain and Gibraltar and Spain.

### **THE Rev IAN PAISELY**

I am surprised to hear that the Rev Ian Paisley is showing an interest in the Gibraltar problem. I quite understand the Chief Minister's response to ask the Rev Paisley to think again before visiting Gibraltar. Apart from all else the majority of Gibraltarians are staunch Catholics and Paisley is not noted for his like of anything emanating from the Vatican. It was the DUP leader who did his utmost to derail the peace process in Northern Ireland. And his visit to the Rock would have been aimed to have been disruptive. I cannot see him contributing anything positive to the debate about Gibraltar's future.

### **GIBALTARIAN SELF-DETERMINATION**

The Gibraltarians do have the right to self-determination and the Spanish Foreign Minister's views on this subject are wrong. Naturally there is room for a debate on this subject as people have different views as to what self determination means.

### **WOING THE GIBALTARIANS**

I am constantly asking Spanish diplomats and officials why the Spanish Government has not started to woo the Gibraltarians in any serious fashion. I was in Madrid a few weeks ago with the Foreign Affairs Committee and once again pointed out that if the Spanish Government wishes to reach an accommodation with the Gibraltarians then they would be considerably better off had they wooed them for the last thirty years, rather than being horrible to them.

I also found during my visit to Madrid that there was no longer a monolithic consensus amongst Spanish politicians about the Gibraltar problem. You will remember from the Franco days, the tub thumping, the demands that despite Utrecht the Rock is ours and we must have it returned tomorrow. Today there is a reasonable approach especially amongst some of the regional politicians such as those from Catalonia and the Basque region. There are many who regard the Gibraltar problem as being a grey area.

### **SPANISH GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE**

I think that the Spanish Government should behave in a more civilised way towards the Gibraltarians. First of all they must renounce their claim for a total retrocession of sovereignty. They must stop all the totally unnecessary restrictions which do not advance their case by one jot. The recent implementation of the second channel at the frontier is an example of what should be done and this must be followed by other confidence building measures. I accept that the Gibraltarians are not going to be bribed into altering their position but at least they might alter attitudes and that would be a hopeful start.

### **CEUTA AND MELILLA**

I do not think that it is helpful to draw comparisons between Gibraltar and other countries' overseas territories. I do understand why Gibraltarians wish to raise the question of Ceuta and Melilla. Apart from all else, Morocco is not a member of the European Union and there are very big differences between the two claims.

### **BLAIR-CARUANA TALKS**

I can think of no sensible reason why the Prime Minister does not meet the Chief Minister. However it is important to make a distinction between Tony Blair not meeting Peter Caruana and refusing a request for a meeting. You might well find that No 10 has not refused, in principle, such a meeting. The Foreign Secretary is the natural conduit for political meetings but I accept that it would be helpful if Tony Blair does eventually meet Peter Caruana; certainly prior to the final round of Brussels Process talks.