



PROJECT ROME

NORTHERN AGENDA

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Editorial

Let's change tack this month and start by analysing the latest devolution wrangling between the warring Yorkies. On the Labour side the GMB HQ, a mile outside Wakefield, provided the backdrop for a private meeting between Labour council leaders, trade unionists and a smattering of business representatives.

The event was put together by experienced fixer Regional TUC Secretary Bill Adams. Ex Leeds City Council Leader, Hemsworth MP and the man who has drawn the short straw to organise Jeremy's General Election Campaign, Jon Trickett, was the keynote speaker. He argued strongly for a one Yorkshire devolution solution which he conceded would involve a directly elected Mayor. He pointed to the leaked proposal from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, which proposed such a Mayor, together with cabinet members nominated by the



Bill Adams



Jon Trickett MP

constituent local authorities. This is not a dissimilar model to that agreed in Manchester but a world away from London where Ken, Boris and now Sadiq have had wide ranging powers of appointment and the London Assembly is basically a well paid and well resourced Scrutiny Committee.

Trickett said it was up to councils on both banks of the Humber to decide if they

wanted to be included. The flying start made by Hull, in its year as City of Culture, may give the local leadership the confidence to move forward. Council Leader Steve Brady is certainly in favour of an All Yorkshire deal and the idea of a Humberside Combined



Steve Brady

Authority which would mirror the area covered by the Local Economic Partnership is gaining momentum. Less happy are the Comrades in Sheffield. First out of the blocks to condemn Trickett's speech was possible South Yorkshire mayoral hopeful Clive Betts MP. He was soon joined by his steel city colleagues who argued basically that Sheffield's economy has far more in common with the north of Derbyshire than Leeds. It will be interesting to see what the good people of that county think themselves. Following the intervention of the High Court,



Clive Betts MP

an extensive consultation will now have to take place before any further moves to elect a South Yorkshire Mayor. Given that the Leader of Barnsley and the Mayor of Doncaster are now out and proud in their call to examine Yorkshire wide alternatives, it is hard to see that South Yorkshire alone is going to get a Mayor any time soon.

It is understood that the outcome of the aforementioned meeting was that under the chairmanship of Bill Adams, a small committee made up of council leaders and trade union representatives, will draw up a new detailed One Yorkshire devolution proposal. This will then be considered by all councils. It was recognised that all party and business support would be needed for success. Plaudits went to Labour Lord John Prescott who apparently added gravitas to the proceedings and was crucial in persuading council leaders to seek common ground. One council leader commented. "We need somebody to play the role Tony Blair played in the Northern Irish Peace talks - in Yorkshire it may well be some combination of Lord Prescott and the Archbishop of York!"

Meanwhile the Tories look on warily. Minister Andrew Percy is still officially committed to the South Yorkshire deal. **He has claimed that the existing legislation would not allow an all yorkshire mayor although this itself is hotly disputed by others.** His colleague David Davis MP twisted the knife in Labour's divisions by announcing that after the local elections in May he will be hosting a Brexit Consultation of elected Mayors from across the North in York with nobody representing Yorkshire or any part of it. Nevertheless, Carl Les, the Leader of perhaps the most important Tory Council in the region North Yorkshire is reportedly prepared to



Minister Andrew Percy



David Davis MP



Carl Les



contemplate One Yorkshire devolution. Fellow Leader Stephen Parnaby in the East Riding of Yorkshire would have to be persuaded that such a solution could be implemented within the framework of the current law.



The Greater Manchester Combined Authority has recently announced its recommendation, for the body's new CEO. Eamonn Boylan, currently Chief Executive of Stockport MBC (since 2010), has been appointed as post-holder by the GMCA. In his new role, Eamonn will be the crucial interface between

the New Mayor and his cabinet, which will be made up of local council leaders.

Relations between mayoral frontrunner Andy Burnham and his council colleagues continue to be edgy. His opposition to the Combined Authority's spatial development plan, on the grounds that it threatens the greenbelt, has not endeared him to them.



Decisions are also awaited from the HQ in Piccadilly, Manchester of Transport North. The timing of the publication of the new

Transport plan is believed to be either May or September.

It is hoped that before then, the Government will grant the body the statutory powers it has been seeking. There is a feeling that 2017 may be the first year that Transport North really impinges on the public consciousness. Northern Powerhouse Rail as a concept has not yet caught on as a brand to replace HS3. Once controversial decisions on rail improvements and funding start being made, the organisation will need a powerful trusted advocate to make their case. Will it be CEO David Brown or Chair John Cridland, who sceptics point out lives according to his Wikipedia entry in that great northern stronghold of Bedfordshire?

Finally the think tanks and lobbyists continue to battle to position themselves as the go to people for understanding the mind of the Northerner. IPPR North boss Ed Cox was

dead chuffed to get his 'State of the North' report discussed at length on the floor of the House of Lords. DevoConnect is also about to embark on a series of devolution debates across the region to inform, educate and to entertain and perhaps to drum up a little business!



Sir Howard Bernstein