

David Trimble helps Norwood raise £6,000 at YN event

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David Trimble, the former First Minister of Northern Ireland and Nobel Peace Laureate, was put under the spotlight this morning at the inaugural YN Today event – Breakfast with Trimble. He was interviewed by journalist and former politician Daniel Finkelstein OBE at the offices of top law firm Norton Rose, before being grilled by guests in a lively question and answer session.

YN Today is a new YN fundraising and networking initiative for young professionals interested in current affairs. The event raised £6,000 for Norwood, the Charity that supports more than 7,000 people with learning disabilities and children and families in need each year to reach their potential in life.

As leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, David Trimble played a key role in delivering his party's support for the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in 1998. He was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with John Hume of the Social Democratic and Labour Party. He has since joined the Conservative Party and now sits as a Life Peer in the House of Lords. Lord Trimble is widely tipped to be given a significant role in the government should the Conservatives win the next General Election.

During the discussion, Lord Trimble gave his views on a wide range of subjects, from the peace process in Northern Ireland during the 1990s to the current situation in the Middle East.

Turning his attention first to Northern Ireland, he declared: "The terrorist campaign is over and will not reoccur". The flare up in sectarian violence last year was the responsibility of a small number of individuals with no significant popular support, he added. He later claimed that the Good Friday Agreement would not have been reached without former Prime Minister Tony Blair's personal contribution. "We wouldn't have had an agreement under Major," he said. "Unionists got a better deal from Blair than they would have got from Major."

Lord Trimble was then asked for his opinion on possible parallels between negotiating with the IRA and negotiating with Hamas. He said it was risky to enter into negotiations without clearly-defined objectives and conditions, adding: "The key thing is whether the people you are talking to are still seeking victory over you or whether they are prepared to reach accommodation with you." Speaking about the occupation of Palestinian territories and the effect this has on British opinion of Israel, he added: "There are plenty of Israelis who have come to the view that for the health of Israeli society they need to end the occupation themselves. That's why Sharon made his famous switch. It was a great tragedy that his health gave way and I believe that had he remained as Prime Minister you'd have a settlement by now."

At another point in the discussion, when asked about his willingness to serve in a Conservative Government under David Cameron, he told Finkelstein: "I'll do anything David asks me to do, within reason, but I'm not sure whether he has that in mind."

As a previous recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, he also admitted that 'he was a bit surprised' by the recent decision to award the honour to US President Barack Obama. But he told guests the decision should be understood within the context of the Norwegian Nobel Committee's aim of encouraging Obama to maintain his current stance on foreign policy.

And, responding to a question about the BNP and the BBC's decision to allow leader Nick Griffin to appear on Question Time tomorrow, he said: "It's difficult to refuse them when they have elected representatives. Although they only have a few councillors and MEPs, you don't want to give them the opportunity to cry discrimination. People are voting for them because they feel the present political arrangement doesn't meet what they want. Marginalising their elected representatives isn't going to ameliorate the feelings those voters have." Earlier, he said the BNP's rising popularity was a result of the 'mistakes and problems' of the Labour Government and claimed it was their responsibility to find out why those BNP voters, many of whom previously voted for Labour, were so disaffected.

Following the event, YN Fundraiser Alisa Fleishman said: "I would like to thank our speakers, Lord Trimble and Daniel Finkelstein, for making our first YN Today event such a fascinating one. I would also like to thank everybody whose hard work over the past few months ensured such a successful morning, our hosts Norton Rose and, of course, our guests. YN is now a key part of Norwood's fundraising programme and events like these are key in supporting people with learning disabilities and children and families in need."

David Sinclair, Senior Partner at Norton Rose, added: "Norton Rose is delighted to host this first YN Today event and is proud to support such a wonderful cause."

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