Ministère de la culture et de la communication

Concours réservé « loi Sauvadet » pour l'accès au corps de conservateur du patrimoine, spécialités « archéologie », « monuments historiques et inventaire » et « musées », organisé au titre de l'année 2015

SESSION 2015

Épreuve orale d'admission n°2 : épreuve d'anglais

3 octobre 2016

La seconde épreuve d'admission consiste en une conversation dans une langue vivante étrangère à partir d'un texte.
La langue vivante étrangère faisant l'objet de cette épreuve est choisie par le candidat lors de l'inscription parmi les langues suivantes: allemand, anglais, arabe, chinois, espagnol, italien, japonais, russe, portugais, polonais.
(Préparation de l'épreuve : 30 minutes ; durée de l'épreuve : 30 minutes ; coefficient 1).

Avertissement :

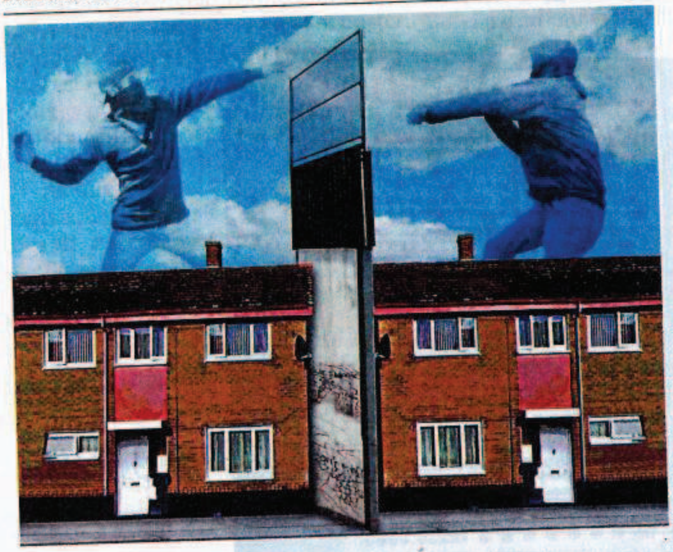
- avant de commencer, vérifiez que le sujet qui vous a été remis comporte toutes les questions ; signalez aux surveillants tout de suite les anomalies éventuelles (page manquante, page illisible...).

Ce document comporte 2 pages au total.

SUJET n°5

Bagehot | History trumps democracy

Northern Ireland's continuing troubles hold lessons for Britain about the rest of the world



MARY, a middle-aged mother of two living in Bombay Street, a double row of 1970s terraced houses in west Belfast, says that things in her area have changed greatly for the better since the height of the Troubles. In those days loyalist thugs used to shoot at the houses in her neighbourhood. Now they only throw missiles—evidenced by the broken tiles, scorch marks and scattered half-bricks that lie scattered around the street—accompanied by shouts of "Fenian bastards!" She would not live anywhere else, she says.

People in the rest of the United Kingdom tend to think that the problem of violent sectarianism in Northern Ireland was solved by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. An issue which they found frightening and yet boring, because they did not understand its origins nor feel its passion, seemed happily to have been consigned to the history books.

Unfortunately it has not been. To be sure, levels of violence are nothing like what they were at their height: some 500 people were killed in 1972 alone, and deaths averaged over 100 a year throughout the Troubles. But there are still a couple a year, and sectarianism continues to plague the society. That is in spite of efforts by Richard Haass, until recently the US Special Envoy for Northern Ireland, to forge agreements on the most neuralgic post-Troubles issues—including unionist (Protestant) marches, the status of the union flag and restitution, of some kind, for some 3,500 killings. His proposals have been flatly rejected by unionists. In Congressional testimony on March 11th, Mr Haass did not hide his fear over what this failure could mean: "Alienation will continue to fester and violence, I fear, could very well re-emerge as a characteristic of daily life."

The burnt fool's bandaged finger

Reflecting on the end of the first world war, Winston Churchill wrote: "As the deluge subsides and the waters fall short we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that has been unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world." Much the same could be said today, as Britain emerges from financial crisis, failed military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan and, in Northern Ireland, a historic process of peace-making and economic growth. The endurance of its conflict, between the descendants of 17th-century Scottish and English settlers and the indigenous Catholics they were sent to police, is a marvel of the Western world.

It is not that democracy and prosperity have failed to make progress in Northern Ireland in recent years. As part of the peace agreement, power was devolved from Westminster to Belfast. In Stormont, home of the devolved government, Sinn Fein—the old IRA in all but name—and the hard-line Democratic Unionist Party rule in coalition together. In the spring sunshine central Belfast gleams with glass and steel buildings, fruits of a best-of-luck splurge by the British government and the European Union. And almost everyone your columnist met, in Belfast and County Antrim, said, like Mary, that the fighting was over now. Yet of real reconciliation—meaning a blurring of the sectarian divide—there is almost no sign.

One side of Bombay Street is fringed by a 20-foot steel fence whose job is to separate Catholics from Protestants. These "peace lines"—in Troubles argot—are not merely still standing: some have been extended. Public housing and schools are similarly segregated: only 7% of children go to a "mixed" school and they, being of the province's small tribe of liberals, are perhaps in least need of such social re-engineering. There has been no significant increase in mixed marriages, even as church attendance, as across Britain and Ireland, declines. As in Bombay Street, there is plenty of non-fatal violence throughout the province—typically over ancient quarrels, such as one concerning the unionists' right to march by Catholic areas, with fifes peeping, drums beating and orange flags flying, on the anniversary of a 17th-century victory for a Protestant king.

If there is a resurgence of violence it will most likely be a result of the anger, disorientation and gloom increasingly evident among the province's dwindling and rudderless Protestant majority. Their Catholic rivals are united and ruthlessly led by a party tempered in the conflict. Unionists, by contrast, are divided by church and party, poorly led, plagued by gangsterism and quietly questioning, in some tough quarters, whether peace was worth the loss of ancient privileges it entailed.

Northern Ireland is not unique—Gerry Kelly, a former IRA jailbird and now Sinn Fein assembly member, says the sectarian vitriol he once heard at a Scottish football match was worse than anything the more polite Northern Irish would dare utter—yet the translation of bitterness into extreme violence is peculiar to the province. Britain should have learned from it, though. The main reason for the West's failures to reshape societies in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere was all along apparent in this corner of the United Kingdom: history and culture, orphans of neoconservative policymaking, almost invariably trump its darlings, democracy and prosperity.

As the tragic aftermath of the Arab spring shows, those two delicate flowers need to be tended with great care if they are to have a chance of survival—and even then, they may not make it. Northern Ireland's peace process has had money and attention lavished on it—not just by the British government but also by numberless foreigners. Yet the province's well-wishers are dispirited these days. Mr Haass, now immortalised in Shankill graffiti by the slogan "Up yer ass, Haass", has got it right. Mainland Britons think the conflict is over. But without urgent—and currently unlikely—progress, Northern Ireland could all too easily revert to blood-steeped type. ■