



# We love our centenary celebrations – just not the same ones

ONE thing nationalists and unionists have in common is a love of centenaries. The 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising was marked in a very comprehensive way and next year's centenary of the foundation of Northern Ireland will doubtless be remembered in a significant manner, north of the border anyway.

Boris Johnson has plans for a centenary forum and an historical advisory panel, bearing in mind the need to be "sensitive to the point of view of all communities".

It's not every day you see "sensitive" and "Boris" in the same sentence.

The big political event of 1921 in the north was of course the opening of the parliament on June 22 where King George V made an emotional appeal: "I pray that my coming to Ireland today may prove to be the first step towards an end of strife amongst her people, whatever their race or creed." That speech (he referred to "the Six Counties" twice) was prepared in consultation with South African prime minister Jan Smuts who was sympathetic to Irish nationalism (although not what you'd call progressive on racial equality issues back home.) Two days later, the British government decided to invite republican leader Éamon de Valera to tripartite talks with themselves and the unionists. The following month, a truce was called which ended the Anglo-Irish War.

The opening of the Northern Ireland Parliament took place at Belfast City Hall (Stormont didn't become its home until 1932). Along with the British monarch and his wife, Queen Mary, the attendance included the north's first prime minister, Sir James Craig, chief secretary for Ireland Sir Hamar Greenwood and plenty of other grandees.

Fast-forward 86 years to May 2007 when a rather different political arrangement began with the appointment at Stormont of Ian Paisley

Deaglán DE BRÉADÚN



and Martin McGuinness as first minister and deputy first minister respectively. There were no royals present but presumably George V would have been pleased to see two long-time exponents of hard-line unionism and republicanism joining together for the common good. The attendance was more wide-ranging than in 1921. It was the last time I encountered Senator Edward Kennedy, who was there with his sister Jean Kennedy Smith, a former US ambassador to Ireland who died in June this year. Other key figures present included then-prime minister Tony Blair, then-taoiseach Bertie Ahern, former taoiseach Albert Reynolds and some fellow called Gerry Adams.

There was a time, not all that long ago, when predicting a close friendship and working alliance between Paisley and McGuinness would have been considered a

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less-credible forecast than a united Ireland. Memories of "The Chuckle Brothers" were revived by the recent RTE documentary, entitled simply *McGuinness*, where Eileen Paisley said her late husband and his new colleague enjoyed that label, because there was "joy in both their hearts" to think that the past was past and a new future had to be built.

Five years after that dramatic day, another Rubicon was crossed when Queen Elizabeth shook hands (not once but twice) with Martin McGuinness. I was part of the media contingent when he emerged from the Lyric Theatre in Belfast and declared: "I'm still a republican".

The handshake was condemned by opponents of the Good Friday Agreement, including the Republican Network for Unity who said that it "defies all republican logic". Whatever about the republican version, ordinary logic at the time reflected the perception that the northern conflict had reached a stalemate. The forces of the British state had failed to crush the IRA but republicans were not achieving their aims by violent means. Politics emerged as the only way forward and subsequent events support that analysis. Unity by means of a border poll has become a realistic, but not of course inevitable, prospect if the right atmosphere can be created between the two main communities.

Nationalists and republicans in the north are not exactly enthused at the prospect of events to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland, given their experience of living there. As someone who grew up in the south, I would not be uncritical of the society which developed in my part of the island.

But if we obey the rule that only the person without sin can "cast the first stone" then, hopefully, no stones will be cast at all.

## ON THIS DAY

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### No Peace Without Work

NO JOBS, no peace – that was the Bogside's message to Mr Richard Sharples, Minister of State at the Home Office during his tour of Derry yesterday.

After an hour talking to unemployed men on street corners and people standing at their doors in the Bogside he seemed to agree. "I think the underlying problem is that of jobs ... particularly shortage of opportunities for school leavers." Mr John Hume, MP, who accompanied Mr Sharples on his visit, said: "The main thing I wanted to impress on the Minister was the unemployment problem and to press the urgent need for action."

At Rossville Street the Minister was approached by Mr Eamonn McCann, chairman of the Derry Labour Party, who bluntly told him: "I feel you are only fulfilling a public relations exercise but if you come here with factories, you are welcome."

### End Gerrymander, Minister Told

NATIONALIST MP, Mr John Carron put the case for a drastic reform of local government in Fermanagh to Mr Richard Sharples who visited the county yesterday. Mr Carron said the Unionist minority was represented by 35 Councillors while the Nationalist majority was represented by only 17.

### Blast Victim's IRA Funeral

THE Belfast man killed in an explosion at an electricity transformer was buried in the Republican Plot at Milltown Cemetery yesterday. He was Mr Michael Kane, a 45-year-old labourer. About a thousand mourners walked behind his remains from St Patrick's Church in Donegall Street. Crowds of Protestants gathered at Peter's Hill and were contained by RUC and military police as the funeral passed. In a brief oration, Mr Sean Stevenson [the Provisional IRA leader, Seán MacStíofaín] said that another patriot had made the supreme sacrifice 'because of the great evil of British rule'.

### 'Petticoat' Peace Brigade for Belfast

A 'PETTICOAT Brigade' to help ensure community peace may soon be operating throughout the Belfast area. Last night twenty women, including some from Ballymurphy, Cregagh, North Belfast and Lisburn, met at the invitation of Protestant and Catholic Encounter [PACE] and talked about peace and how they could bring their influence to bear.

### Trinity Ban Goes

THE BAN on Catholics attending Trinity College, Dublin has been lifted officially. An announcement from Ara Coeli, Armagh, residence of Cardinal Conway, said the Holy See had given the necessary approval to the repeal of Statute 287 of the Maynooth Synod.

As the civil rights reforms continued to work themselves through, these reports highlighted the growing gulf between Hume's constitutional nationalism and the IRA's campaign. In an increasingly militarised situation, there was little space for the well-meaning 'Petticoat Brigade'.

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