



SUPPORT: President John F Kennedy acknowledges the cheers of the crowd when he visited New Ross, Co Wexford, in 1963. When it comes to north-south issues on this island, the US remains a significant player

No doubt leading figures in US will play part in unity referendums

ARE you mad or are you mad? That was the question, with built-in implicit answer, running through my mind. A more detailed formulation might have been: "Are you out of your mind, buddy, sitting on a block of stone in the open air for an hour in Dublin with rain occasionally falling on you?"

In fact it turned out to be one of the most enjoyable experiences I've had in recent times. Me and my umbrella were at the Yeats Memorial in St Stephen's Green for a lunchtime performance of *Jackie*, written by Gerard Humphreys and directed by Anthony Fox. The play was originally due to be staged at The New Theatre in Temple Bar under socially-distant conditions but, because of the Covid situation, it had to be moved outdoors with the audience limited to 15 persons (little did I realise that even tighter restrictions might be looming.)

The play draws on the platonic friendship between Jacqueline Kennedy and an older, semi-retired Irish priest who became a mentor to the woman who married the ill-fated US president who was shot in Dallas.

Father Joseph Leonard was a native of Sligo and their paths first crossed in 1950 when Jackie was visiting Ireland. They only met in person once more, in 1955, but she corresponded with him for 14 years until the kindly clergyman died in 1964.

I haven't read the letters, which reportedly reveal her feelings on a range of issues, including JFK's interest in other women and her grief and despair after his assassination, when she wrote: "I always would have rather lost my life than lost Jack."

Full marks to the performances by Amy O'Dwyer who even looks like a young Jackie and Michael Judd as the good-humoured man of the cloth who

Deaglán DE BRÉADÚN



nevertheless has dark memories of the First World War where he served as a chaplain on the Western Front.

It was only after the play ended that I realised its location was only a few minutes' walk from the place where, as a young schoolboy, I saw JFK in person as he was being driven to a state dinner in Iveagh House.

The crowd was ecstatic to catch sight of the person of Irish extraction who held the most powerful position in the world.

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When it comes to north-south issues on this island, the US remains a significant player. No doubt when the time comes for unity referendums on both sides of the border, leading figures across the Atlantic will contribute to the debate.

The Latin phrase *festina lente* ('hasten slowly') should be borne in mind. Yes, it's 22 years since the GFA was approved and some nationalists and republicans are getting impatient. But they should bear in mind that, if a majority opt to retain the status quo, then another referendum cannot be held for a further seven long years.

If the vote takes place in 2023, for example, and there isn't a majority for unity, then it won't be on the table again until 2030. Some will point out that 2023 marks 25 years since the agreement but a counter-argument is that we are trying to end a relationship which goes back to 1169.

Another feature of the agreement is that the decision to call a referendum in the north is left to the British secretary of state, if it appears likely to him or her "that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland".

The Irish government would have no formal role in calling the northern referendum but would doubtless express an opinion. Presumably a succession of pro-unity opinion polls would be a factor. Another key influence would be if parties other than Sinn Féin pressed for such a vote. I note that Alliance Party MP Stephen Farry has called for "civilised, rational and evidence-based discussions" on the issue. Now that would be a good place to start.

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 7 1970

Opposition Pressure over Reforms

WITH the approach of the stage when legislative effect is to be given to two of the most vital reforms agreed upon between Stormont and Westminster, there was clear evidence in anti-Unionist circles of a mood which will tolerate neither duplicity nor double-talk by the Stormont Government.

The demand will be for a Central Housing Authority and a restructuring of local government which will be the means of removing abuses and of enabling justice and democracy to flourish in future.

It is widely accepted that until local authorities, and particularly those who have so shamelessly and blatantly misused their powers, have been effectively and permanently dismantled, there will be no peace. That is why it is so essential to have the Central Housing Authority created without delay and the re-shaping of local authorities carried out with radical effect.

'Faulkner to Take Over'

WITH Unionist MPs speculating last night on how long it will take Mr James Chichester-Clark, the PM, to throw in the towel, a prominent member of the party said: 'There seems to be general agreement within the Party that Mr Brian Faulkner will take over very shortly.'

Mr Faulkner, Minister of Development, has also been doubling up as Minister of Home Affairs during the PM's indisposition.

The Unionist MP added: 'As far as the Party is concerned, Mr Faulkner is well considered for the position, but because of what appears to have been an about-turn in his way of thinking he has lost some support.' Mr Faulkner has rivals for the premiership: Mr John Brooke, son of the former Premier, Lord Brookeborough, has a big following, and Mr William Craig, an outspoken critic of Mr Chichester-Clark, is also well in the running. Mr Craig has the solid support of that section of the party which opposed the handing over of NI's security to the British Army, the disarming of the RUC and the demobilisation of the B Specials

NDP to Follow Fitt

THE central council of the National Democratic Party (NDP) has been dissolved in order to encourage and facilitate members of the party to play a full part in the development and growth of the newly-formed Social Democratic and Labour Party, led by Mr Gerry Fitt, MP. (Backbench Unionist hostility to the reform of local government and housing allocation continued to undermine the beleaguered Major Chichester-Clark. The urbane, articulate Brian Faulkner with his strong Orange credentials was seen as best equipped to stem the tide of concessions to the SDLP and Westminster. Meanwhile the SDLP absorbed the local NDP branches and professional membership.)

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