GOOD INTENTIONS: The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev and Rt Hon Justin Welby, third left, was on a visit to Clonard Monastery and later took part in a peace walk along the peaceline between the Shankill and the Falls roads in west Belfast PICTURE: Mal McCann

Discussions on legacy must be an inclusive process

Allison MORRIS

AS WE approach the end of 2020, a year where the days seemed long but the months flew by, politics here seems to have reverted back to pre-pandemic level bickering.

Once again legacy is the one issue that manages to divide our society like no other.

A meeting between 'stakeholders' at Lambeth Palace made the headlines this week, just as the refusal by the British government to hold an inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane made last week's front pages.

Until legacy is resolved these types of situations that bring hurt to victims, divide society and pick at unhealed wounds, will continue to arise.

The Lambeth Palace process has managed to hurt sections of the victims' sector, angry that they were not invited or represented.

The palace held a meeting earlier this year that we've now been told wasn't secret, despite those taking part having been told not to talk about the event publicly.

The Most Reverend Justin Welby was made a Canon of Coventry Cathedral in 2002, where he led its international reconciliation work. During this time he worked extensively in Africa and the Middle East and is said to have had a passion for reconciliation and peace-making ever since.

So it is hardly surprising that the 105th Archbishop of Canterbury agreed to host a meeting of the great, the good and the not so good at Lambeth Palace to discuss the unresolved aspects of our legacy.

David Porter, appointed palace chief of staff and strategy in 2016, is said to have helped organise the gathering.

He has a long history of working in Northern Ireland in a peace building capacity and has the ear of the Archbishop, who clearly trusts his judgment.

However, despite what those who have been wheeled out to promote the event have been saying over the last few days, the perception is that once again victims are a secondary consideration when it comes to dealing with our past.

What also hasn't been said is while the guest list was impressive, this was not a gathering of people with the ability to deliver unilaterally on a way forward for legacy.

If sorting out the issue of our past was only that easy it would have been resolved long ago, for this type of event has been taking place for 20 years under different names, in different locations and with various attendees.

Those trying to put a positive spin on the event point to Winston Irvine being present to represent loyalism.

That's stretching the truth. The influence Irvine has over loyalism is with a small faction of the UVF.

He does not have influence over the UVF as an organisation to the point that he can deliver on a truth and legacy process.

The perception is that once again victims are a secondary consideration when it comes to dealing with out past

He also has no influence whatsoever over the UDA/UFF, who claimed over 400 murders during the conflict and who would need to be on board with any truth and reconciliation body in order to make it credible.

Sinn Féin say they were invited to Lambeth Palace which was not entirely the case, as the organisers were at pains to point out that no political party was invited.

Sean 'Spike' Murray was not invited because he is a card carrying member of Sinn Féin but in his role as a former IRA member who is perceived to have influence over republicanism.

And while there is more unity among former republicans than there is within loyalism, Murray can only speak for a specific group of people when negotiating the terms of any cooperation with a future truth commission.

Large numbers of republicans walked away after 1998, some involved themselves with dissidents, others melted back into 'normal' life and are no longer likely to cooperate with any orders coming from on high.

Once again the INLA, who claimed 120 murders in the conflict, some of those high profile and controversial, were unrepresented.

Those who have monopolised the peace industry often fight back against any inclusion of former comrades turned enemies.

Ironically sitting with old adversaries does not cause them the same problems.

Victims groups, themselves divided on a way forward, are right to feel aggrieved when those with influence throw money and time at a process that excludes them.

But it must be said that while such conversations have been important in making our peace possible, without total buy-in from all participants in our conflict they are unlikely to deliver on outstanding issues.

When planning a guest list for future events, those with good intentions should remember that if they want to really make a difference they need to cast their net much wider.

ON THIS DAY

DECEMBER 10 1920

'Cromwellian Repression'

SPEAKING to his constituents in Hough Green last night, Mr Arthur Henderson MP [former Labour Minister] said: 'It is difficult for me to exaggerate the deplorable conditions that now prevail in Ireland. Coercion has been applied with such indiscriminate violence that the terror-stricken and normal life has been made impossible. … It is actually true to say that life was safer in Brussels during the German occupation than it is now in Dublin, Cork or Derry…

'All this cannot be dissociated from the Government's settled policy which is reactionary in its conception, brutal in its application and destructive in its consequences. One can find no parallel to the treatment of Ireland in the modern history of any democratic country. It has achieved the distinction of applying a more intensified form of oppression than anything known since the days of Cromwell – I mean the policy of reprisals.' He was convinced that there was a possibility of making peace with the Irish people. A Constituent Assembly should be elected.

North's Textile Workers' Plight

THE situation in connection with the local textile industry still remains very gloomy. Some ten large establishments are closing down entirely for one month, covering the Christmas holiday season; others are closing for periods of a fortnight and in practically all cases, the number of working hours in the week is being cut to a negligible proportion. Several thousands of workers are being laid off.

Portadown Barracks Burned

A party of Sinn Féiners visited the Birches district near Portadown] on Wednesday and set fire to the police barracks which was vacated a short time ago.

Ballykinlar Filling Up

FOLLOWING the departure on Sunday from Dublin of the destroyer Valorous, conveying over 100 prisoners from Dublin to Ballykinlar Internment Camp, County Down, it was learnt that a destroyer will bring another contingent of deportees to the camp.

'No Looting'- Specials Warned

REVIEWING Special Constables at Newtownards yesterday, Colonel CG Wickham, Divisional Commander USC, said he was absolutely opposed to anything in the nature of looting or burning or indiscipline. Their primary business was to prevent crime and not to make it. He reminded them that their actions would be watched very critically, not only in Ireland and England but even further afield – in the Dominions.

(As the British Labour Party and Asquith called for Irish elections to hammer out a settlement, hundreds of Republicans were interned at the former UVF base at Ballykinlar. They included Sean Lemass and Louis J Walsh, the Ballycastle Sinn Fein lawyer. Meanwhile in a strange speech the USC commander urged his new police force against 'looting and burning'.)

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