



LOOKING FOR DIRECTION: Any future border poll should be a referendum based on facts rather than feelings

Unifying Ireland not as simple as more of us than them

UNIONISTS have once again found themselves reluctantly facing questioning about the constitutional question, after a poll commissioned by the *Sunday Times* found 51 per cent of people in the north surveyed want a referendum on Irish unity in the next five years.

The figure clearly unnerved many unionists, who turn pale at the very suggestion that such a vote could happen in their lifetime, never mind in the very near future.

But those who were shocked by the results clearly haven't been paying attention.

For a state that was created to give unionism a majority for as long as possible, 100 years wasn't a bad innings, but it was never sustainable indefinitely. It was always a numbers game, Catholics had more children, and while the Catholic Church dictated tradition of large families no longer dominates, when it comes to a straightforward green and orange headcount the larger, younger Catholic population will eventually be the majority.

What unionism, and a large section of nationalism celebrating the poll, do not seem to take into consideration is that 50 plus one does not mean a united Ireland is inevitable, because when it comes to our children, in the main, the aspiration for a better life overtakes identity.

And so unifying our island is not as simple as more of us than them, it's about where will I be better off, where will my children be better off, where will I be looked after properly in my old age or if times are hard?

It's about health – the pandemic has shown us that – it is about education and employment opportunities, so we do not continue to haemorrhage our future young talent to America, Canada and Australia.

And it is about respect, is this new Ireland going to respect my rights, my children's rights, my grandchildren's rights, will it be compassionate, will it be prosperous, with there be decent housing and jobs that pay a living wage?

Allison MORRIS



Or will it still – as the south is currently – be dictated by billionaire property developers, pricing young people out of the housing market?

I have an Irish passport, I am an Irish woman. Regardless of what side of the border I live on I will always be an Irish woman, I am comfortable in my identity. I don't need flag waving patriotism to secure my vote, I need facts, figures and answers as to what kind of society is being proposed.

What kind of world is my generation going to leave behind?

There are of course those on both sides of the debate who would vote tomorrow to sleep in a cardboard box on the pavement

as long as the border either remained or was removed.

But the majority of people whether nationalist or unionist, Irish or British, a bit of both or neither, need more information.

Five years seems like a reasonable time to get answers to all those questions, so any future border poll can be a referendum based on facts rather than feelings.

The division of the past should have no place in the debate but as with all conversations here it seems to dominate the discourse.

Brexit may well have accelerated the debate and brought forward the possibility of a poll sooner rather than later but it is far from the only factor at play.

Mocking unionists and loyalists, shouting down their opinions, treating their views as invalid is not the way to create the kind of Ireland I want to live in.

We have a peace process because sworn enemies sat around a table and discussed their very different views and strongly held beliefs.

And yet despite having this very strong and recent template there seems to be those happy to repeat the mistakes of the past.

I'm old enough to remember a time when the place I call home was dominated by one section of society, and where equality of opportunity seemed impossible to achieve.

There are those who would be happy to be poacher turned gamekeeper, turn the tables and oppress a minority, as unionism would be in the framework of a united island.

But mocking our neighbours is not the way to create the kind of inclusive and prosperous society I and many other aspire to live in.

Bringing people along the journey, even if reluctant and suspicious travellers, is always better than forcing people into a corner they feel they have no choice but to try and fight their way out of.

ON THIS DAY

JANUARY 28 1921

'Reprisal' for RIC murders

A FURTHER tragedy, which did not transpire until after curfew hour yesterday morning, occurred in Belfast following the tidings of the grim occurrence in the Railway View Hotel, Belfast.

The scene of the second tragedy was in Bray Street at the junction of the Crumlin and Shankill Road and, between 12.30 and 1 a.m. yesterday morning, a young man named Michael Garvey who lodged in the first house was shot dead by men who entered and proceeded straight to the bedroom where he was sleeping.

Michael Garvey – from County Armagh and a chemist's assistant – had been a lodger with Miss Morgan for a number of months past. His landlady recalled hearing men entering the front door, apparently with a key, and making their way upstairs. She next heard the reports of shots. When the men left she gave the alarm through a window and a passer-by went to Leopold Street [RIC barracks] and informed the police of the occurrence. District Inspector Nixon and a force of men went to the house.

Miss Morgan [the landlady] said: 'I heard heavy footsteps coming up the stairs ... The persons entered the boy's bedroom. The next thing I heard was the report of two shots and then a third. I went out on the landing and saw three men going downstairs. ... I saw the second man was wearing a black uniform and belt. ... The third man wore a short-cut Burberry overcoat and had a black hat and a long black veil or mask. The last man carried a long, bright article like a rifle. After they had left I ... saw the boy lying dead on his bed. I went to the window and shouted, "Murder, murder, they have shot the boy". The men got into a waiting motor.

John McGarvey, the other lodger in the house who was absent at the time of the shooting, was later detained. He is a native of County Sligo. The deceased is described as a quiet young man who did not concern himself in politics.

(Michael Garvey was murdered in a direct RIC reprisal for the murders of the RIC men, as recorded by Mark Sturgis of Dublin Castle: 'Later a young Shinn was shot dead in bed. I am told he was likely one of the murderers.' In fact, it was a case of mistaken identity. The gang were looking for the other lodger, an IRA volunteer. A RIC intelligence source later reported that County Inspector Harrison and DI John Nixon – a later MP – were seen in a car departing the scene. Official 'reprisals' were then the norm throughout Ireland.)

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