



LOOKING AHEAD: Solicitor Niall Murphy is secretary of the 'Ireland's Future' group, whose latest publication contains high quality suggestions about how to advance the constitutional debate

# Broadening the debate vital on road to creating an independent Ireland

**U**NIONISM is a noble tradition on this island. The British identity will be a cherished identity forever. But we need to hear their opinion in their own voice.

Niall Murphy, the secretary of the 'Ireland's Future' group, was addressing the unionist and Protestant people during the week at the launch online of the group's latest quality publication, 'Advancing the Conversation – The Way Forward'.

His comments are the most far-reaching to come from a leading figure on the nationalist side and they reflect a growing appreciation among nationalists that the unionist and Protestant people need to hear such views to encourage them not only to participate in the debate about this country's constitutional future but to realise that nationalists respect and appreciate the contribution unionists and Protestants have made and are making to life in Ireland, north and south.

Ireland's Future is providing an online platform on Thursday night at 7pm for a panel of speakers from a unionist and Protestant background to present 'their own voice'.

The theme for the discussion is 'New Ireland: A Warm House For All'.

Two of the participants have recently been in the media outlining their views: Trevor Lunn MLA and Denzil McDaniel, former editor of the *Impartial Reporter* in Fermanagh.

The long conflict in Ireland has left a legacy of hurt and pain on all sides and as a consequence caution is required to ensure that this hurt and pain is not allowed to restrict, narrow or limit the thinking that is required to open up minds on all sides in terms of language, ideas and gestures.

'Ireland's Future' is to the fore in its approach to opening up the debate on this country's constitutional future and this is reflected in its current production.

In stating its preference for a united Ireland it also makes the point crystal

Jim GIBNEY



clear: "No one on the island should be 'fearful of participating' whether in making a case for a United Ireland or for the maintenance of the union with Britain."

New language, ideas and gestures helped lay the foundation for the lead in to the ceasefires of 1994.

They played a part in the negotiations which led to the Good Friday Agreement.

They sustained the peace process over the last 25 years.

And they are needed now more than at any time since partition one hundred years ago this year.

Arguably we are in the prerequisite phase of the debate, discussion and creative thinking which must precede actual constitutional change and which will make the transition to a new, independent Ireland as smooth as possible.

*Ironically, Brexit has freed up the thinking of some unionists and Protestants who are open to consider a new Ireland inside the EU but outside the UK*

Independence can be achieved through the referendum mechanism of the Good Friday Agreement.

And the exercise of that right will be taking place at a time of significant change: Brexit, demographic and societal.

These factors are encouraging many people to reconsider their attitudes to a future Ireland, constitutionally changed.

Whether it is united or federated is a matter for the people of Ireland to decide. However, it must be independent.

The biggest challenge facing nationalists and republicans in achieving a united Ireland is convincing the unionist people that it is in their and our interests, that after centuries of political conflict, such an outcome would be beneficial to all of the people of Ireland and to all the people of Britain.

Nationalists and republicans are broadly of one mind on the issue of a united Ireland, or for that matter an independent Ireland.

It is not arrogant or complacent to say that the referendum on the constitutional future of this country, negotiated and guaranteed in the Good Friday Agreement, will comfortably carry a firm 'Yes' from nationalist Ireland.

At this point in time, it is difficult to be as certain about the outcome of the referendum among unionists and Protestants.

Ironically, Brexit has freed up the thinking of some unionists and Protestants who are open to consider a new Ireland inside the EU but outside the UK.

And that is why the high standard of suggestions in the latest publication from Ireland's Future are so important.

The document calls on the Irish government to be more pro-active; to establish a citizens national assembly; for a defined date for the referendum; for the parliaments of Ireland and Britain and the EU to be involved and for there to be no vetoes – let the will of the people on this island decide Ireland's future.

## ON THIS DAY

FEBRUARY 8 1921

### Craig's Comments on Ireland's Future

YESTERDAY afternoon the old and new Ulster leaders were entertained to luncheon in the Ulster Reform Club. Sir James Craig said it was very difficult to visualise what might happen in the future but, for his part, he had a very broad vision. It was quite simple for them to close their doors upon themselves [in Ulster]. He hoped their doors would always be open, especially in the face of the great Imperial connection...

With regard to the rest of Ireland, they wished to set an example to the South and West but he would say the South and West should not want for any example, but go along step by step towards progress and reform. It was an opportunity which might not arise again to bury the past and to make an excuse for taking into their own hands the government of their own part of the country and showing that Munster, Leinster and Connaught were just as good as Ulster.

'We are very much bound up in the rest of Ireland', he proceeded, 'and therefore I do sincerely hope that in the heat of the coming contest no word will be said which would alienate the sympathy of those desirous of having peace throughout our land.'

'We must hope not only for a brilliant prospect for Ulster but a brilliant future for Ireland. I will sincerely welcome anything that will put a stop to the present campaign of murder but let no-one read into [my words] that I am prepared to sacrifice the old principles for which we fought.'

'We in Ulster will not tolerate anyone or anything which attempts to wrest from us the position we have attained today. Remember that the rights of the minority must be sacred to the majority (hear, hear) and that it will only be by broad views, tolerant ideas and a real desire for liberty of conscience that we here can make an ideal Parliament and executive.'

**The future Unionist PM's moderate tone towards the minority and the South was in stark contrast to his earlier support for the sectarian shipyard expulsions. His words enabled Craig to meet de Valera as Lloyd George's emissary later.**

### Go Antrim Barracks Destroyed by IRA

THE new police barrack which had just been taken over by the RIC at Loughguile was completely burned down yesterday. It adjoined the house of a schoolmaster named Daly.

The attackers held up Mr Daly and, having removed him, attacked the barrack with bomb and rifle fire.

**Patrick Daly was the Roscommon-born father of the late Cardinal Cahal Daly, whose childhood home was destroyed in this attack.**

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