



THAT'S HANDY: David Trimble, John Hume and Bono on stage at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast in 1998 for a concert to promote a Yes vote in the Good Friday Agreement referendum

# Expect unity referendums in both parts of the island soon

**A**LL RIGHT, so the date at the top of the page may be February 24 2021 but let's fast-forward to April 10 2028.

That will be the 30th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement and on the day you just might be reading that the occasion is being marked by the formal exit of Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom and the establishment of an all-island independent state.

In my imaginary scenario, this would be taking place on foot of referendums in both parts of the island, with the south voting, say, 75 per cent in favour with 25 per cent against and 55 per cent in the north opting for unity, with 45 per cent against.

You might expect the majority in the south to be bigger but it is possible that a quarter of the electorate could vote No because of concerns about the cost and the possible imposition of extra taxes to pay for the new all-island entity.

Nationalists would obviously like to see a bigger majority on the northern side of the border but even ten per cent might not be realistic: indeed it would be quite an achievement. Mind you, the Good Friday pact itself was backed by 71 to 29 per cent in the north and 94 to six per cent in the south. A lot of work needs to be done because, in the words of Abraham Lincoln: "The most reliable way to predict the future is to create it."

Whatever about the exact time-frame, not to mention the results, it does seem reasonable to forecast that the question of Irish unity will be subject to referendums in both parts of the island in the not too distant future. That is, of course, assuming that the current difficulties over the Brexit-inspired Northern Ireland Protocol don't sink

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the Good Friday Agreement in the relatively near future, as former unionist leader David Trimble has warned.

Irish unity is of course the core element of Sinn Féin policy and there is a real possibility that they could be heading up a Dublin-based government in the next few years. Meanwhile, polling evidence at time of writing suggests that SF could end up as the biggest party when the next election to the Stormont Assembly is held, on or before May 5, 2022.

A parallel development which is adding to the momentum for a border poll on this island is the fact that the movement for Scottish independence is going from strength to strength. Elections to the parliament in Scotland are scheduled to take place in

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10 weeks' time on May 6 and the Scottish National Party, headed by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, plans to hold a second referendum if there is a pro-independence majority at the Holyrood parliament. Boris Johnson has repeatedly expressed opposition to a second referendum and a spokeswoman for the UK government said the issue had been decisively settled in 2014. Permission to hold the last referendum was granted by the UK government under Section 30 of the Scotland Act 1998 but any attempt to refuse permission this time would be "vigorously opposed" by the SNP.

Seven years ago Scotland voted by 55 to 45 per cent to remain in the UK. It is believed a lot of people voted against independence because they wanted to remain in the European Union. Two years later, however, when the UK as a whole voted to leave the EU by 52 to 48 per cent, the result in Scotland was 62 to 38 per cent for staying. Brexit seems to have changed the mood on the constitutional issue because, in 21 public opinion polls conducted since last June on whether Scotland should be an independent country, the Yes side have been ahead by margins ranging from one to 14 per cent.

The biggest threat to the movement for Scottish independence could be a rift in the nationalist camp. Former friends and allies Nicola Sturgeon and Alex Salmond, her predecessor as first minister, are involved in a complicated dispute which has nothing to do with independence but could damage that cause which both of them have done so much to advance.

One cannot help thinking of our own Brendan Behan's famous comment on Irish republicanism: "The first item on the agenda is the split."

## ON THIS DAY

FEBRUARY 24 1921

### Roslea: UVF Blamed

LARGE forces of Special Constables arrived in Roslea (County Fermanagh) yesterday evening and commandeered the hotel and business establishment of Mr James Flynn. Mr Flynn was obliged to clear out with his small family to a house at the other end of the village, leaving some thousands of pounds worth of provisions, drink, etc which he could not remove.

As to who was responsible of setting the village in flames, the general impression is that it was the Ulster Volunteers who started the nefarious work. Every person in the village deplores the wounding of Mr Lester [Unionist shopkeeper] and no-one suggests that his assailants belong to the village. Why then, people ask, should unauthorised persons, in possession of arms, be allowed to participate in an attempt to wipe out a small town?

A member of the Specials had denied to our correspondent that they were in any way responsible for the burnings. The town is now quiet and being patrolled by Specials

### Donegal Reprisals

FOLLOWING the shooting of Constable Thomas Sachwell [RIC] in the ambush near the village of Mountcharles, County Donegal, several houses and shops in the village and in Donegal town were wrecked on Tuesday night. Business was suspended yesterday, schools were closed and many people left the town. A young woman named Mary Harley, aged twenty six, of Mountcharles was found dead, shot through the heart in the yard.

### General Crozier Resigns Command of 'Auxies'

GENERAL F P Crozier resigned his post as Colonel-Commandant of the Auxiliary Division [of the RIC] in Ireland because he was dissatisfied with the methods adopted by General Tudor who is Commander of all the forces classified as police in regard to an 'incident' at Trim [Co Meath].

The Trim incident is still sub judice but we can point out that some 30 Auxiliaries were accused of looting during a raid in County Meath; that General Crozier decided to hold five of the accused men – all ex-army officers – by trial by Courtmartial and to dismiss the others. However, General Tudor overruled Crozier's decision and as a result, Crozier resigned.

By 1921 organised 'reprisals' by the Auxiliaries, Black and Tans and Ulster Specials were a daily occurrence with Dr James Gillespie, a coroner in Cookstown, protesting to de Valera about the 'depredations' of the USC in mid-Ulster. He believed that the loyalist force were 'trying to put down with the mailed fist' all who opposed partition. Crozier, the son of the Protestant archbishop of Armagh, resigned when Auxiliaries dismissed by him for indiscipline were reinstated. Crozier's resignation drew world attention to the lawlessness of the force.

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