

Marshall's absence from Seanad is national disappointment

Jim GIBNEY



THE political and geographical journey from Ian Marshall's Armagh home in Markethill, to Dublin and Leinster House is better known to him today after serving four years as a seanadóir (Senator) in the Seanad.

When the former seanadóir started his journey he had to google 'Leinster House' for exact directions.

Now the actual road to Dublin is well traversed and as can be seen from the line-up of seanadóirí supporting Ian Marshall's nomination, in a Seanad by-election, the political road is also well traversed.

He has support from the widest spectrum of political and social opinion across Ireland. It includes seanadóirí Michael McDowell, former attorney general, minister for justice and tanaiste; Niall Ó Donnghaile, leader of the Sinn Féin group in the Seanad, former councillor and Mayor of Belfast, who I work with; Sharon Keogan business woman and the first independent councillor elected to the Seanad; David Norris, former university lecturer and high-profile campaigner for gay rights and Frances Black, internationally acclaimed singer and founder of the RISE Foundation, a charitable organisation.

Steve Aiken, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, and Gerry Adams, are also supporting him.

Ian Marshall, with his unionist and farming background and a pro-EU opponent of Brexit, has managed to unite this diverse group around his election message that it has never been more important to have joined up thinking across this island. Building bridges, working across all communities 'opening doors and opening minds north, south, east and west'.

He was comfortable in the Seanad. He presented his pro-union views, support for dialogue on Ireland's constitutional future; for marriage equality, women's health and membership of the EU.

His absence from the Seanad is a national disappointment for advocates of reconciliation and his election to the Seanad should be a priority.

The election is by way of a secret ballot. It is an opportunity for all elected representatives to show their commitment to engaging with unionism and sharing this island.

Recently I wrote an article here about the importance of dialogue, gestures and compromise, in making peace.

I placed emphasis on the need for unionists to engage with nationalists on this country's constitutional future.

The leading academic and reconciliation practitioner, Pete Shirlow, rang me and asked why, in my article, I had not written about the extensive and prolonged dialogue that unionists, loyalists and Protestants had with nationalists and republicans for decades. He told me that many of the unionists engaged in that dialogue were asking themselves why this was not being acknowledged and not by me but by other republican leaders.

I have long been an admirer of Pete for his pioneering work in many fields



SUPPORT FROM THE WIDEST SPECTRUM OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL OPINION: Ian Marshall on his farm in Co Armagh PICTURE: Mal McCann

in the north, not least his open and direct engagement with republicans and especially with former political prisoners, loyalist and republican.

I reread my article. And Pete was right. So let me put the record straight.

There would not have been a peace process without unionists, loyalists and Protestants engaging with republicans and nationalists.

Peace would not have endured without the direct engagement between republicans and loyalists.

There would not be a political process and the functioning all-Ireland institutions of the Good Friday Agreement with risks being taken on all sides: Irish, British and US

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governments, DUP, Sinn Féin, UUP, SDLP and Alliance.

The dialogue covered many areas and phases, not just ceasefires and their maintenance.

It fundamentally changed Ireland, north and south for the better.

And a new phase of dialogue, involving all shades of opinion, which made peace possible is now beginning to shape up about Ireland's constitutional future.

And not surprisingly Pete Shirlow is bringing his own brand of ingenuity to the debating arena under the tutelage of the University of Liverpool's Institute of Irish Studies.

He has developed an online resource and has recorded 130 contributions from a pro-united Ireland position to a pro-United Kingdom position and other views about equality, racism, education and challenging sectarianism.

The dialogue that brought us peace is to bring further change and projects like Pete Shirlow's will be part of that change and for that and his past diligent work for change I would like to thank him.

We are where we are because of people like Pete.

It could not have happened without them.

Ian's return to the Seanad and Pete's continued work promises hope and unity for the future regardless of your constitutional future.

ON THIS DAY

MARCH 22 1921

Dáil Meets in Secret

THE *Irish Bulletin* states that a session of Dail Eireann was held during the second week of March. [Members] noted that the Belfast Boycott had made great progress all over the country. The stoppage of Belfast goods was rapidly becoming absolute. A scheme for the creation of Conciliation Boards for the amicable settlement of disputes between employers and employed was approved.

Leave was given for the initiation of an intensive campaign for the development of Irish manufactures and the fostering of industries essential for the employment of Irishmen... The progressive exclusion of certain articles of British manufacture is to be undertaken, the prohibition to last until the British war of aggression upon the Irish people ceases...

A decree was passed authorising the Minister of Home Affairs [Arthur Griffith] to forbid the census proposed to be taken by the British Government...

Parish Priest Describes

Burning of Clifden

REPRISALS have continued in Clifden, County Galway, the native place of Thomas Wheelan who was executed last week. No less than sixteen houses have been burned and 300 persons have been accommodated in the Workhouse. Monsignor McAlpine, the parish priest, said he went to see 'if he could save any of poor Clifden'. A man who had been firing the houses came towards him and demanded: 'What brings you here?' The priest replied: 'This is sad work... I am awfully sorry for the whole business.' The man replied: 'You get away out of here - we do not want your sort here.' The priest continued: 'I came down towards the barracks and was speaking to one of the police when the same man came towards me again and said: "You are here again. I will give you while I count to four and if you are not out of it by that time, you will never get out of it." At the same time he pointed his rifle at my breast. One of the Irish police interfered and said: "The Monsignor is a good man and a good priest." I then left.'

Ex-Chief Secretary

Defends Reprisals

MR Edward Shortt, Home Secretary, had a lively reception in addressing a Coalition Liberal Meeting in his constituency, Newcastle-on-Tyne. He defended the policy of the British government and said Ireland was a paradise compared with Russia where there was death punishment for every offence. (Following its suppression by the British authorities in September 1919, the Dail was forced to meet in secret. It continued to issue decrees regarding Republican Courts and 'Belfast Boycott'. The British government continued to defend its indiscriminate 'Reprisals' policy despite mounting condemnation in Britain and the US.)

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