



BLAME: The circumstances which led to recent loyalist unrest are due to a failure of unionist political leadership, including from DUP leader Arlene Foster

Loyalist violence a result of leadership failure among unionists

PSEUDIXITISM is a difficult enough word to say, never mind spell. It is the dogmatic assertion that something is factual without any proof to back it up, or because someone, somewhere said it. I came across the word in a tweet from *Countdown's* Susie Dent. It immediately sprang to mind when listening to the latest attempts, by faces old and new, to explain the most recent outbreaks of loyalist violence.

On *The Nolan Show* last Thursday morning, a caller phoned in to complain about the size of the houses on the other side of the peace line amidst a depressingly ignorant rant which highlighted how prejudice flourishes when lives are lived in splendid isolation from the Other.

We live in an age of fake news, but facts stubbornly persist as a necessary corrective to those more comfortable with myths.

In its centenary year, Northern Ireland remains a place in which Catholics are considerably more likely to be poor than Protestants.

This is a statement of fact as confirmed by the regular collation of a multiple deprivation measure by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

The most recent statistics (2018/19) from the Department of Education show that, in a single year, 883 poor Catholic boys and 543 poor Protestant boys left school without 5 good GCSEs, illustrating how educational underachievement and the troubles that flow from that are not the exclusive preserve of one community.

Relative poverty and dismal educational outcomes are always a factor, as evidenced by sporadic dissident republican-induced street violence in Derry and other pockets of deprivation across nationalist areas of the north, but they are not the main reason for loyalist alienation nor violence today.

Neither is apparent anger at the PSNI's handling of a funeral nine months ago. The setting for the first outbreak of loyalist violence in recent days was the

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Sandy Row district in Belfast.

Within a short distance of the rioting in the same loyalist area of the city, a leading loyal order figure in the locality was buried last September in a large funeral which clearly breached the same restrictions.

Two months earlier, large crowds gathered in the same area in breach of the Covid restrictions to celebrate the Twelfth of July.

If Arlene Foster's current stance of righteous indignation over the Bobby Storey funeral had anything at all to do with concerns over public safety and the example set by political figures, then she would have long ago thrown Sammy Wilson out of her party.

Nor is the violence a reaction to additional layers of paperwork requiring to be completed by businesses wanting to keep trade connections open with a post-Brexit Britain.

So what is it all about? It's about the type of leader who meets and briefs the heads of active, illegal loyalist

paramilitaries but who publicly snaps that she won't meet with the PSNI chief constable... before caving due to public pressure.

It's about the type of leader who, amidst developing constitutional discussions, proclaims that she will abandon hearth and home in the event of Irish unity, knowing that such a sentiment will spread alarm amongst her own grassroots.

It's about leaders who made a succession of calls over Brexit that were spectacularly ill-judged, callous and ultimately self-defeating, demonstrating their utter disregard for the impact it would have upon everyone living on this island in the process.

It's about leaders who take the easy option and give succour to a facile and wholly false narrative about culture to defend contentious parades and utterly destructive practices of burning wood, tyres and sofas alongside flags and emblems of the Other instead of educating people about the need to abandon aspects of traditions that are simply not worth retaining.

It's about leaders who, 23 years later, continue to refuse to embrace the Good Friday Agreement primarily because they are fundamentally opposed to its very premise of equality and parity of esteem for all in Northern Ireland.

It's about leaders who continue to act as if they represent a majority and not simply a minority voice in this society, stubbornly refusing to acknowledge the need for nuance and appreciation of consensus amidst the rapidly changing demographic profile of our shared home.

It's about a political leadership choosing fury, fear and antagonism every time instead of hope, reason and co-operation.

The role of leaders includes challenging, educating and exposing absurd claims, destructive practices and prejudice-based assertions amongst one's own supporters, not merely parroting them.

The violence is what happens when leaders fail to do what must be done.

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ON THIS DAY

APRIL 12 1971

IRA 'Trainee' Shot

A NINETEEN year old Belfast bricklayer was accidentally shot dead yesterday while on a 'training course' in the Twenty Six Counties, the IRA Provisionals said in a statement. He was Tony Henderson of Shaws Road, Belfast who went to Dublin to work only a week ago. A spokesman at Jervis Street Hospital said Mr Henderson's body was brought there but he was already dead on arrival. The IRA announced his death as that of 'a Volunteer from Occupied Ireland who had been shot accidentally while on a training course'. Arrangements are being made to bring the body to Belfast for burial.

Sinn Féin Protest in Ballymurphy

HUNDREDS of riot troops were concentrated at Ballymurphy in Upper Falls, Belfast yesterday in advance of the Sinn Féin-organised torchlight protest meeting against 'the latest phase of the war of provocation' against the people of the area. More than one thousand people gathered at Glenalina Green, Ballymurphy to listen to speeches by prominent Republicans. Ballymurphy had been virtually sealed off by troops throughout the day and estimates put the number on duty in the district at a thousand. A Ballymurphy housewife commented: 'The district is more like a military camp than a housing estate. There are troops everywhere.' Meanwhile the Rev Ian Paisley addressed a meeting in Lurgan on Saturday night protesting about yesterday's anti-internment meeting being allowed to take place.

Amnesty Brings in 1600 Guns

THE nine-day Arms Amnesty here has brought in over 1,600 weapons – including nearly 600 rifles – and 100,000 rounds of ammunition. The guns, 85 per cent of them illegally held, were handed in at police stations all over the North. The Chief Constable, Mr Graham Shillington, said: 'I am delighted with the response. I think it shows increasing confidence of the public in the security forces ...'

GAA 'Ban' Abolished

IT TOOK only four minutes to abolish the GAA's most controversial rule – the 'ban' on attending, participating in or promoting foreign games such as soccer. At the Whittia Hall of Queen's University yesterday morning, Waterford-born president, Pat Fanning signalled the end of Rule 27. The moment was something of an anti-climax. The deletion of the rule was proposed by Armagh delegate, Con Shortt and seconded by long-term leader of the anti-ban movement, Tom Woulfe from Dublin. (As Belfast and Derry prepared for rival Easter parades by the Provisional and Official wings of the IRA fifty years ago this week, the staggering arsenal netted in the Stormont government's 'arms amnesty' only scratched the surface. Both Republican and SDLP figures demanded the withdrawal of troops from Ballymurphy while West Belfast braced itself for another IRA funeral.)

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