



TRACK RECORD: Speaking for England alone is the stock-in-trade of Prime Minister Boris Johnson

PICTURE: Dominic Lipinski/PA

# Boot camp lessons for Boris's busted Britain

AM a strong believer in the Law of Unintended Consequences. The tiniest of actions can have a disproportionate effect – and not necessarily the one intended. Unintended consequences happen because we live in an increasingly complex world, and it is very difficult to determine the outcomes from our actions.

In the mid-nineties I visited a 'boot-camp' in Florida to see the American penal system in action. Boot camps were where they locked up young guys who had got on the wrong side of the law. The regime was harsh. Up at dawn, drill, exercises, and hard work were the order of the day. It was no frills incarceration, and the voters loved it.

Florida may be home to Disneyland, orange juice and sunshine holidays; but many locals are not what you'd call enlightened. Boot camp ticked all the boxes of people who wanted to see justice done.

But there was a flaw. As a local representative admitted to me on the way back to our hotel. "All it does it take unfit young criminals, and turn them into fit ones capable of out-running our fat police officers."

School exclusions have unintended consequences too. Turfing disruptive youngsters out of classrooms - where there is some semblance of discipline - only results in an increase in anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhoods. It's the same with booze - banning alcohol results in higher consumption, and criminality.

The same goes for drugs, where current policy has the unintended consequence of putting the trade into the hands of criminal gangs.

The unintended consequences law does not just extend to criminality.

That fact was brought home to dramatic effect this week with the release of a damning report on the state of the British union from the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at the University of Cambridge. And it helps explain why the causes of Irish unity and Scottish independence are in the air at the moment - Zeitgeist is

Tom COLLINS



the fancy word for it.

The report contains a startling admission from one of the 'keepers of the British flame'. Philip Rycroft was, until 2019, a Whitehall mandarin – and not just any old mandarin. He headed up the Brexit department.

What interests him now is the handling of Covid, and this is where the unintended consequence comes in. Referring to the devolved administrations, he says: "As other nations pursue different lockdown rules and messaging, the public may be adapting to the strange idea of a prime minister who speaks for England alone."

You can see now why the DUP has been ever-anxious to follow England's lead in handling Covid – every time Arlene Foster opens her mouth and announces something different she undermines the union.

Speaking for England alone is, of course, the stock-in-trade of this particular prime

minister.

English indifference will come as no surprise to people in this part of the world, what might be surprising is that it is much the same for the Scots and the Welsh. Rycroft talks of ignorance at the heart of Westminster about the union – even in the wake of the near-miss for Scottish nationalists in the 2014 independence referendum, and the calamitous consequences of the Brexit referendum.

Taking Northern Ireland and Scotland out of Europe against their will – at the behest of the English right – is not the action of a government which understands the constitutional settlement holding the United Kingdom together.

Professor Michael Kenny, who co-authored the report, puts the blame on No.10 Downing Street. Boris Johnson's brand of unionism is that of an abusive partner who tries to get his way by bullying and – as Northern Ireland has found to its cost – lying.

Those waiting for the break-up of the UK will take some comfort from Rycroft's assertion that preservation of the union is "not in the bloodstream of the UK state".

I suspect Johnson will not even bother reading a briefing on the report, never mind the document itself. He is a man in denial of political, economic and social realities.

And that is typified in this observation from Rycroft – a man, let us not forget, recently part of the ruling elite. "There is little emotional engagement across government with the trends towards independence, no sense that maintaining the union is part of everyone's job."

Predictably the British – sorry English – government said: "The United Kingdom is the most successful political and economic union the world has ever seen."

I have news for them. It's not, it never has been, and it never will be. The sun is not just setting on the British empire, it is slowly setting on the British state.

*Taking Northern Ireland and Scotland out of Europe against their will – at the behest of the English right – is not the action of a government which understands the constitutional settlement holding the United Kingdom together*

## ON THIS DAY

APRIL 15 1921

### Sinn Féin's Candidates

A Sinn Féin official statement issued reveals that the following candidates have been selected for the 'Partition' elections in the Six County Parliament: Belfast University – Sean Dolan, MA (in jail); East Belfast – Archie Savage; North Belfast – Michael Carolan (in jail); South Belfast – Dermot Barnes; West Belfast – Sean MacEntee and D McCullough (in jail). County Antrim – Louis Walsh, Ballycastle (in jail); Joseph Connolly (Belfast). County Armagh – Michael Collins; Frank Aiken (Camlough). Derry – Eoin MacNeill (in jail); John Walsh, Maghera (in jail). Down – President de Valera; Pat Lavery, Newry (in jail); Dr P M Moore (Strangford). Fermanagh and Tyrone – Arthur Griffith (in jail); Sean Milroy (in jail); John O'Mahony and Kevin O'Sheil.

### Shocking Atrocity in Kerry

A TRULY sensational occurrence took place in Listowel, County Kerry yesterday when Sir Arthur Vicars was taken from his house by armed and masked men and shot dead. The deceased was formerly 'Ulster King of Arms' and was custodian of the Crown Jewels in Dublin Castle. His body, found near his residence, Kilmorna House, bore several bullet marks and on it was a label with the inscription: 'Traitors beware; we do not forget – IRA'.

Kilmorna House was burned to the ground. Sir A Vicars retired from his office in Dublin Castle at the time of the 'Crown Jewels scandal' [1907].

### Newry Specials Sentenced

THE following result of courtmartial were announced by GHQ yesterday: John Warton, John Boyd, Samuel Leebody, George Lee, Thomas Harkness and Thomas Murray, Special Constables, RIC, Newry were tried in Belfast.

In Newry in January, they stole a silver watch and thirty bottles of whiskey, fifteen bottles of brandy, a quantity of rum, cigarettes and tobacco, the property of James Casey. Warton was sentenced to two years with hard labour while Leebody and Lee to three months each with hard labour.

### Partition Confusion in Strabane

AT THE monthly meeting of Strabane Board of Guardians, the clerk announced the receipt of sealed orders from the Local Government Board separating Strabane Number 2 Rural District from Strabane Union and amalgamating it with Stranorlar Union [in County Donegal].

Of the leading Sinn Féin candidates selected for the northern elections, only two – Eoin MacNeill (originally from Glenarm) and Sean MacEntee (from Belfast) – were from the north. Despite the anti-partition pact with Joe Devlin, tensions between the parties meant that seats were lost to unionism. Sir Arthur Vicars resigned after the theft of the Irish Crown Jewels from Dublin Castle in 1907.

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX  
e.phoenix@irishnews.com