



DUP MP Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, launches his campaign to become leader of the DUP on Monday. Photo: Liam McBurney/PA Wire

Unionism faces its day of reckoning

SO HERE we are, four days into a new century under partition. How is it going for you? 'Grim' is the word, particularly if you are a unionist.

It's a savage irony that the first minister was deposed ahead of this bleak anniversary; and greater irony still that Arlene Foster's demise was hastened by the intervention of loyalist paramilitaries who intimidated her colleagues. They haven't gone away, you know.

Northern Ireland was the construct of loyalist paramilitaries led by Edward Carson and James Craig. The UVF was conceived as a private army before it was nationalised and rebranded the Ulster Special Constabulary.

It remained the attack dog for successive unionist governments who used every device at their disposal to subjugate nationalists. Everything they did was entirely legal – vote rigging, discrimination, human rights abuses. It was legal because they made the law.

All the wrongs of one-party rule were there to be seen – hiding in plain sight as they say. British governments looked the other way.

For Lloyd George, partition was a way of outsourcing colonialism in Ireland. The Foreign Office didn't have to worry about subjugating the natives, the Unionist Party would do it for them.

It must be said that, once they had got over partition, the Irish government did the much same thing. It looked in on itself until the violence of the 1960s could no longer be ignored, and an anguished taoiseach, Jack Lynch, called for the intervention of the United Nations.

"...The Irish Government can no longer stand by and see innocent people injured and perhaps worse," he said. But it did, until the Anglo-Irish Agreement gave it a formal role as an honest broker for the nationalist community.

Unionist leaders – and the DUP in particular – make much of Sinn Féin's roots in violent republicanism, and

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there are debating points to be had over memorials and commemorations.

But – and this is a big but – they seem to be completely oblivious to the way loyalist paramilitarism has infiltrated the warp and weft of their own politics – as Mrs Foster has found to her cost.

This 'hear no evil, see no evil' approach does not wash – unless you're the historically illiterate Brandon Lewis, and his inept boss, Boris Johnson. But then they have both declared themselves unionists – even if sticking a border down the Irish Sea is an odd way of showing it.

We know, of course, that members of the DUP are British only when it suits them.

The evidence for that is clear enough in the debates over LGBTQ+ rights and women's health; and they are democrats only when

they have the upper hand. Any pressure and it's bring out the red berets, climb a mountain waving gun licences, invite the Loyalist Communities Council round for afternoon tea and a chin wag.

Nationalists talk a lot about Northern Ireland being a failed state. There's more than enough evidence for that – so successful has it been at failure that the rest of the UK is now rushing to catch up.

Not only has it failed nationalists, it has failed unionists too – in particular it has failed most that generation of unionists who should have benefited from the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process, but who are languishing on the dole and being fed false information that this is because nationalists now have the upper hand.

Let us not forget that Mrs Foster – who channelled her inner peacenik in a resignation speech that could have been written by St Francis of Assisi – walked away from the peace talks; as did Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, now presenting himself as the voice of reason.

A political ideology that cannot respect the indigenous language of the place they claim to love; that cannot deal in a civil way with those representing their fellow citizens; and which cannot work with those who share this island for the betterment of their people, is not sustainable.

Seen another way, the centenary they celebrate this week was but their first step away from the United Kingdom, for the first half of that century they embedded separatism, and for the second half, obduracy aided the steady erosion of their ties to a nation that does not even want them.

As Alex Kane said here this week, unionism has a choice to make.

But that choice is not whether the union's salvation lies in the hands of a knight of the realm, or indeed a man who believes God only thought the Earth was 'a good idea' 6,000 years ago.

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ON THIS DAY

MAY 6 1921

Craig and de Valera Meet

IF COLONEL Sir James Craig intended to meet Mr Eamon de Valera when he left Belfast for Dublin on Wednesday he was the sole custodian of the secret for, when the announcement of the meeting was made in Belfast last evening, it evoked feelings of consternation in some quarters... One message states: 'When Sir James Craig was in Dublin on Wednesday he had an interview with Mr Eamon de Valera, leader of the Sinn Féin party. Sir James reported Mr de Valera's views to Lord FitzAlan, the new Viceroy who on Thursday morning left for London. The fact that leaders of the extreme Irish parties have been brought together is regarded in Dublin as a matter of the greatest importance.'

Another version reads: 'Sir James Craig and Mr de Valera met in Dublin today and exchanged views regarding the future of Ireland. Hopes of peace are raised by the meeting which, whatever the outcome, is regarded as magnificent progress...'

How some Unionists regarded it was indicated in remarks made by Mr Samuel McGuffin, MP at a Tory meeting last night: 'I always understood and I wish to speak candidly', he said with considerable heat, 'that we as Unionists always demurred from having interviews with Sinn Féiners. Well, if Sir James Craig had an interview with Mr de Valera he did not believe it was the end of the Parliament. His own opinion was that de Valera, being an arch-trickster, had inveigled Sir James Craig into this interview...'

Editorial

THE fact that the two leaders did meet remains and it is a fact that neither need reproach himself with. No man in Ireland should utter a word calculated to blight any hopes of peace, however faint... But Sir James Craig made it clear that, in his opinion, a complete victory at the polls on May 24th is essential... and safety for Ireland depends on the non-realisation of Sir James Craig's avowed plan... His policy is Partition and the Partitionist policy must be defeated if Ireland is to be saved from utter ruin.

THE secret meeting between the two leaders seems to have been part of Lloyd George's policy of putting out peace feelers to Sinn Féin. The British believed de Valera was more moderate than Michael Collins. The talks at Belvedere on Dublin's Howth Road were unproductive and the two men never met again. Craig said Dev had given him 'a lot of history' and some economics. De Valera recalled that Craig regarded the Crown as 'almost a sacred thing'. For The Irish News, the real issue was partition.

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