

GOING: Sinn Féin's Martina Anderson will not stand in the next election



## Autumn election likely after parties' great red-up

**M**AY 24 marks the 100th anniversary of the first election to the new Parliament of Northern Ireland. Held just a few weeks following partition, the poll saw an overwhelming win for the Ulster Unionists, who grabbed more than three quarters of seats.

A century on, our five main parties are again gearing up for another election. The swift dumping of two unionist leaders and an overhaul of Sinn Féin in Derry points to an imminent assembly poll.

No matter who is elected DUP leader, Sinn Féin is not expected to back the largest unionist party's pick as first minister without some large concessions, primarily around an Irish language act. Without Sinn Féin agreement, the secretary of state must call an election, most likely for the autumn.

Mindful that time is not on their side, three of our main parties are undergoing their own great purges. DUP leader Arlene Foster – going. Ulster Unionist leader Steve Aiken – going. Sinn Féin MLAs Martina Anderson and Karen Mullan – going. Only the SDLP and Alliance have, so far, escaped a shake-up.

It's the political equivalent of a good red-up before relatives come round at Christmas: put your underperforming leaders and MLAs in a box and take it to the dump. Incidentally, red-up itself comes from the Middle English verb *rediden*, which meant to clear or to free from or rescue. While some DUP members may feel glad to have freed themselves from a party she no longer recognises. Similarly, Steve Aiken will probably feel more relieved than disappointed by his resignation.

The Northern Ireland Protocol and subsequent loyalist protests have put unionist parties under severe pressure. Terrified as being seen as soft on the union – the ultimate

Claire SIMPSON



Paisley-era insult – the two parties are now trying to outdo each other to show who's most furious about the protocol.

"Politics is a very brutal game," Mrs Foster said after she was dumped by the party.

The DUP leader may get a rare nod of agreement from former MEP Ms Anderson. While Ms Anderson was a divisive figure to say the least (who can forget her telling then Prime Minister Theresa May to stick her idea of a post-Brexit border 'where the sun doesn't shine?') few could struggle to feel empathy for someone sacked by those she naturally would have considered friends and comrades. Her entire life, including 13 years spent in prison, has been dedicated to the republican

movement – a point hammered home when she posted a Twitter video filmed in front of the largest poster of the Proclamation ever seen.

In the video, Ms Anderson said that while most people who contacted her "had urged me to stay on... this struggle is bigger than any one of us". Unfortunately, the video had shades of Boxer being forced to tell the rest of the animals in *Animal Farm* he is perfectly fine with being sent to the knacker's yard because it is all for the greater good.

"It has been a difficult time for Karen Mullan and I," she said.

With photos of the all-male signatories of the Proclamation looming behind her, the optics of the party telling two female MLAs they had to go didn't look terribly progressive. Ms Anderson's family were more direct in their criticism of the party leadership, with her sister Sharon Burke saying the MLA had been "sacrificed" despite her long service.

There's no doubt Sinn Féin in Derry had a difficult couple of years. Elisha McCallion's narrow victory over Mark Durkan in the 2017 Westminster election pointed to serious cracks in the SDLP's Fortress Foyle.

But the loss of five Sinn Féin seats on Derry and Strabane council in 2019 and Ms McCallion's defeat by SDLP leader Colum Eastwood, by a majority of more than 17,000, in that year's general election showed Sinn Féin's success was short-lived. The triple resignation of two party officials and Ms McCallion, then a senator, in October over the failure to return £30,000 in wrongly allocated Covid-19 support funds came as a further blow.

With just a few months to rebuild, the question for the DUP, Ulster Unionists and Sinn Féin will be are these drastic changes too little too late? By October, we may well know the answer.

*Martina Anderson's video, filmed in front of the largest poster of the Proclamation ever seen, had shades of Boxer being forced to tell the rest of the animals in Animal Farm he is perfectly fine with being sent to the knacker's yard because it is all for the greater good*

## ON THIS DAY

MAY 12 1921

### Youth Shot Girl

MR JOHN Gray, RM presided in the Belfast Custody Court yesterday when William Gillespie, a respectably-dressed youth, was charged with attempting to murder Jane Mitchell, Jerusalem Street. District Inspector Nixon prosecuted. Constable Saunderson deposed to seeing the accused being held by a crowd in Atlantic Avenue the previous evening. He took Gillespie to the Antrim Road police barracks and proceeded to a house in Ponsonby Avenue where he found the girl, Mitchell with her head bandaged and her shoulders covered in blood. Witness had the injured girl conveyed to the Royal Victoria Hospital. He charged the prisoner with attempted murder.

Mr Graham (defending) said the boy was an apprentice draughtsman. District Inspector Nixon said that the bullet lodged in the girl's head but it was extracted. The chairman said that bail could not be granted as the girl was very nearly murdered.

### Belfast Funeral of Ambush Victim

THE funeral of the late Mr John [Sean] McCartney (23) of Norfolk Street, Belfast who was killed in the recent ambush in Cavan took place yesterday from St Peter's Church to Milltown Cemetery. Heading the funeral procession was an armoured car and at the rear were two lorries filled with soldiers. The coffin was draped with the Sinn Féin colours and the cortege was a very large one.

### Raids in West Down

THERE was considerable police activity in the Laurencetown district of Banbridge on Monday. A large force of RIC Specials searched houses at Chapel Row and also at Kernan and Ballydougan. Three young men were arrested.

### Fight Against Partition

MR JOSEPH Devlin, who is the Nationalist candidate for Antrim County [as well as West Belfast], delivered a great speech to a huge and enthusiastic audience at Ballycastle. He asked for their cooperation in the fight against the establishment of a six-county parliament. He called for Nationalists to transfer their votes to Mr Louis Walsh, the Sinn Féin candidate.

**IN HIS efforts to maximise the nationalist vote against partition, Joe Devlin urged his supporters to honour the election pact with Sinn Féin against partition. Meanwhile, the funeral took place of Sean McCartney, a Belfast IRA member killed in an ambush in Co Cavan to which a 'flying column' had been sent from the city. The Belfast court case features District Inspector John W Nixon. A Cavan man posted to Belfast in 1920, he was a leader of a 'reprisal' gang within the Belfast RIC. He became an independent unionist MP and a scourge of the Craigavon government.**

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