



ALL CHANGE: Outgoing DUP leader Arlene Foster and leadership contender Edwin Poots

Given the choices ahead, DUP ousters might have done Foster a favour

WILL a new leader of the DUP make much of a difference? Will Edwin Poots or Jeffrey Donaldson be able to settle the nerves of those MLAs who wanted rid of Arlene Foster?

Fair enough, they wanted a scapegoat, but will a new goat be strong enough to butt away the pile of problems that remain for the DUP? In other words, with an election due by May 2022 how likely is it a new leader will deliver victory rather than simply minimise losses?

Matters will be complicated by the fact the new leader will not be first minister. Sinn Féin has indicated the choice of leader is a matter for the DUP and the DUP alone. What is not so clear, though, is whether Sinn Féin might have a problem with the choice of first minister: because, if it does, we'll be straight into another crisis for the executive.

If, for example, it wanted some quid pro quo for accepting the nomination (and some in the party might want a bit of payback for the hits they took over the Storey funeral) is there anything the DUP could offer without provoking a furious internal or external reaction? Might Sinn Féin be tempted to ask for a cast iron guarantee of support for an Irish Language Act and movement on the commitments contained in last year's New Decade New Approach (NDNA) document?

I say document, by the way, rather than agreement, because NDNA was the work of the NIO and Irish government rather than the end product of inter-party negotiations. All the parties have what might be described as plausible deniability when it comes to the contents, not least because they ran straight up the steps into their Stormont offices after the most cursory read of it. Which might raise difficulties for the DUP and Sinn Féin if they had a problem which required a form of words or some sort of segue to resolve.

Alex KANE



cause anger across loyalism and the Orange Order, both of whom have shifted to 'close down the assembly' territory if the protocol remains. Quite what benefits they imagine would flow if that were to happen is anyone's guess, especially when it would probably mean some sort of direct rule by the very government which negotiated and supports the protocol.

The DUP doesn't want the assembly to collapse. It knows it's an empty gesture response, because Boris Johnson is very unlikely to bin the protocol in exchange for its return: knowing, as he does, that Sinn Féin wouldn't return in those circumstances. The DUP also knows, as I noted last week, that collapsing the assembly would probably finish the assembly once and for all. That might please a section of loyalism and party-political unionism, but it doesn't resolve their more specific problem with the protocol and with a government which is, in their eyes, prone to betrayal.

All of which puts the DUP leader in quite a bind. Damned if he pursues the learn to live with the protocol option. Damned if he pursues a showdown with the government option. Damned if he cuts some sort of deal with Sinn Féin. Damned if he allows the DUP to be openly steered by pressure outside his party. Damned if he dithers. Damned if he provokes an early election (the 2017 assembly election is still the stuff of nightmares for the DUP). Reminds me of the Frasier line: 'Abe Lincoln had a brighter future when he picked up his tickets at the box office.'

Ironically, those who brought down Arlene Foster might actually have done her a favour. She can now sit on the sidelines, freed from having to make decisions which only differ in the scale of their unpalatable repercussions. And there's a vacancy over at the UUP.

But the DUP still has a problem. The protocol. At some point it becomes inevitable the new leader will have to tell the party the protocol is staying in place

ON THIS DAY

MAY 14 1921

Sinn Féin Sweep

THE 'General Election' for the 'Parliament of Southern Ireland' under the provisions of the British measure known here as the Partition of Ireland Act was to have taken place on May 24th. However, it was over at an early hour yesterday afternoon. 128 candidates were nominated in Southern Ireland; 128 were returned without opposition.

Our Dublin correspondent wires: Sinn Féin has made a clean sweep of the elections for the 'Parliament of Southern Ireland'. The Republican candidates have been returned everywhere unopposed - even in Donegal where the Unionists withdrew at the last minute. The only non-Republican candidates elected are the four members for Trinity College Dublin. These gentlemen have declared themselves in favour of a united Ireland.

West Belfast Man Sentenced

AMONG the courtmartial results issued from General Headquarters, Dublin yesterday was the following: Fifteen years' penal servitude was imposed on Michael Charles Ryan, telegraphist, General Post Office, St Paul's Terrace, Belfast for attacking two military foot police and robbing them of their revolvers, ammunition, holsters, belts and lanyards. The accused was also identified as one of those standing at the back entrance of the Ulster Club when two bombs were thrown.

Northern Anti-Partition Candidates

FIFTY-TWO members of the 'Northern Parliament' are to be elected on Tuesday, May 24th. The following have been nominated: Nationalists - 13; Sinn Féin - 20; Independent - 4; Labour - 1; Partitionists - 40.

Three of the new candidates - Councillor James Baird (South Belfast); Mr Harry Midgley (East Belfast) and Mr John Hanna (West Belfast) have been prominently associated with the Independent Labour Party while the fourth, Rev Bruce Wallace, was formerly minister of Cliftonpark Congregational Church. Mr Midgley served for four and a half years in the Ulster Division. Mr Hanna and Councillor Baird were employed for a number of years in Queen's Island.

Mr Joseph Devlin, MP, the Nationalist leader, was nominated by Thomas R Caffrey, JP [brewer]; Rev Alfred Grevan, CC and supported among others by Daniel McCann, JP, West Street.

The Sinn Féin candidate for QUB, Sean Dolan, is nominated by Dr James V Moore, Clifton Street and Rev James P Cienaghan, President, St Malachy's College. (Despite their opposition to Partition, Sinn Féin used the elections to the doomed Southern Parliament to return a new and larger Dail. In the North, three of the Labour candidates opposed partition, including Councillor James Baird who had been expelled from the shipyards as a 'rotten Prod'. Dr JB Moore, who backed a Sinn Féin candidate, was the father of the future novelist, Brian Moore and a physician in the Mater Hospital. He was a brother-in-law of the Sinn Féin leader, Eoin MacNeill.)

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com