



UNEASY PEACE: Tony Blair, Senator George Mitchell and Bertie Ahern smiling after they signed the Good Friday Agreement in 1998

Placating unionism will not secure the peace

ACADEMICS are a funny breed. I know it is dangerous to stereotype, they are not all bookworms. Some are tougher than the most hard-edged mafia don. Many do fit the caricature – cerebral, head in the clouds, and brains but no common sense. But the world needs people who are paid to think – more than we sometimes realise – and not just university alchemists who do great things with medicines, or technologies, or both.

One of those thinkers is Jim Waller. He calls himself a political psychologist and he is professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Keene State University in New Hampshire. On Monday I attended the virtual launch of his new book. It left me chilled, but also angry about how the peace process here is being framed as an internal fight that needs resolved.

The issues here are not about lasting peace in Northern Ireland, they are about peace in Ireland – the unfinished business from a century ago when this entity was gerrymandered into existence through violence.

For a man who has met more than 200 alleged or convicted perpetrators of genocide, Waller comes across as easy-going, lucid, and the type of guy you'd happily sit down and have a pint with.

Like many academics with a fascination with the darker side of humanity, he has the ability to slip easily between academia and more sinister worlds where your religion, or race or gender is enough to get you killed.

His book is the result of a sabbatical at Queen's University's Mitchell Institute for Global Peace in 2017 – amid the post-Brexit maelstrom. Waller documents factors which create instability, and Brexit was a classic, throwing up issues around identity and the constitution which threaten still to destabilise the political settlement here.

A Troubled Sleep: Risk and Resilience in Contemporary Northern Ireland (nothing like a catchy title) from



Tom COLLINS

Oxford University Press is the result of more than 100 conversations with the usual suspects from "a diverse range of political, academic, civil society, and community actors across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland".

From those discussions, and by comparing the situation here with his detailed studies of dysfunctional societies which have descended into disorder and sometimes into genocide, Waller paints a bleak picture for Northern Ireland – the pain of his vision soothed little by his parting observation that "every story has the potential for a happy ending".

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This is a vision of the Good Friday Agreement as a chimera disguising deep

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binary divisions, different memories of what brought us here, broken governance structures, social fragmentation, and an escalating risk of a return to violence.

He talked about how the Good Friday Agreement had taken deep divisions and "sewn them into the fabric of how Northern Ireland is governed".

The book may be more nuanced than his talk on Monday, but Waller spoke much about the existential threat felt by unionism – the border down the Irish Sea, the threat of a Catholic majority after this year's census, the risk of ceding the position of first minister to a nationalist, the symbolic threat posed by an Irish Language Act, and the prospect of a border poll on Irish unity.

To survive as a society, he said, we needed to find something that binds us – a cohesive sense of national identity, promoting healthy memories, the growth of political moderation and a "commitment to recognising a common superordinate identity".

What I heard was a suggestion that nationalists needed to row back on their aspirations for fear of the consequences from a frightened unionism – as nationalists were forced to at the time of partition, and as they have been forced to over this past 100 years.

His advocacy of a two-thirds majority for a border poll is an affront to democracy. Erroneously he said a "supermajority promises the possibility of greater stability".

We had a supermajority for the first 50 years of Northern Ireland – to what end? Sectarianism, discrimination, and a war of attrition that left more than 3,000 dead and countless more maimed.

Waller told his audience that Northern Ireland was not a failed state, nor was it a failing state. But it was "closer to breakdown rather than breakthrough".

The evidence is clear, Northern Ireland has failed. If power sharing is not the solution, neither is a return to a unionist veto on the future of this part of Ireland.

ON THIS DAY

MAY 20 1971

Judge Accused of Bigotry

JUDGE WWB Topping was the sort of person who, if his earlier political speeches while he was Minister of Home Affairs were made today, they could be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions as incitement to religious hatred, stated Mr Paddy Devlin (SDLP) at Stormont.

Mr Devlin was moving a motion supported by nine Opposition members asking the Governor, Lord Grey to remove Judge Topping from his office on the grounds that he secured judicial preferment through politics and that he made partial decisions in his Court.

Mr John Hume (SDLP) asked was such a person fit to be trying political cases. But the Prime Minister [Mr Brian Faulkner] said the charges against Judge Topping were unfounded. The motion was defeated by 27 votes to 6.

Mr Devlin said that Judge Topping had stated that the Protestant religion had two great enemies, the Catholic Church and Communism, and in 1948 had suggested a fighting fund to combat 'Roman Catholic infiltration'. He had also referred publicly to the late Mr Jack Beattie, [Labour] MP for West Belfast as 'a Prodigal in Pottinger and a Fenian in Falls'. Many people felt these were the utterances of a bigot.

New Light on Belfast Population Movement

A QUEEN'S University lecturer presented to the Scarman Tribunal yesterday a study of residential displacement during the disturbances in the summer of 1969.

The Report by Dr Michael Poole and Miss Margaret Day showed: 1. The percentage of Catholic families in Belfast who suffered displacement is very much higher than the percentage of non-Catholic families. 2. The displacement problem was consistently more severe in the west and north west of the city. 3. The percentage of Catholic families displaced was much higher than the percentage of non-Catholic families. The report's findings were based upon information received from the emergency housing list of Belfast Corporation Estates Department, the records of displaced families compiled by the Corporation's Welfare Department and files on the money paid to families to help cover loss of property in the riots.

These revealed a total of 3,570 families displaced from their homes in Belfast (in 1969). In the city as a whole 82.7 per cent of all displaced households were Catholic.

JUDGE Topping QC found that his earlier utterances as a hardline unionist cabinet minister had come back to haunt him. Some 60,000-100,000 people were forced from their homes due to violence and intimidation from 1968-72 in the biggest population movement in western Europe since the Second World War. Among those driven from Rathcoole were the family of the later IRA hunger-striker Bobby Sands.

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