



MIXED RESPONSE: Former Irish rugby international Trevor Ringland has been appointed special envoy to the US on Northern Ireland

# NIO appointment is a tactical kick

**T**HE appointment of former Irish rugby international Trevor Ringland as special envoy on Northern Ireland to the United States is the political equivalent of a Garryowen by Secretary of State Brandon Lewis.

The announcement last weekend has received a mixed response from political leaders in the north.

Sinn Féin first minister Michelle O'Neill described the move as "arrogant and disrespectful" given that it was done without consultation with the executive. Matthew O'Toole of the SDLP seemed to question whether someone opposed to the protocol was the best choice for the job.

Predictably, UUP leader Doug Beattie welcomed it as a "fantastic opportunity" and First Minister Arlene Foster commented that she hoped it would "...help some in the US understand better the views of people in NI."

On his appointment, Trevor Ringland said the role was: "about challenging some of the simplistic views on Northern Ireland. You can't stereotype everybody. There is a variety of views. But some are based on the 'it is an occupied island' mentality."

"And it's for me to say: Look, it is not like that at all."

"It's actually people here who choose to live inside the UK, and there are many benefits to that."

It is correct that many people in this part of Ireland choose to live inside the UK, but it is not the only view. There is another, equally valid view that a better option is building a new Ireland which places at its heart the best interests of everyone who calls this island home and builds from there.

Ringland is a former Westminster election candidate for the Conservatives and Unionists who has also worked with the American Ireland Fund, Co-operation Ireland and Peace Players International. He must understand that if his new role is to be truly representative of everyone who lives here, then it must be respectful and honest about the range of views that are held about the

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future of this place. In March 2019, following the "Beyond Brexit" Conference organised by Ireland's Future (of which I'm a board member) in the Waterfront Hall and attended by over 1,500 people, Mr Ringland said that nationalists were "emboldened" due to Brexit uncertainties and increasing calls for a border poll.

He continued: "The message that meeting at the Waterfront sent to me was 'Boy, are we going to get our own back when we get control.' All of this needs hand-braked very quickly and a touch of reality brought to bear."

The consistent message of the Beyond Brexit conference was that there should be a rights-based approach to societal change, which is quite the opposite of Ringland's assertion.

Perhaps what he meant needed handbraked was those who wanted a better future having the temerity to come together and articulate

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that this might be best found outside the United Kingdom?

Given that tourism and enterprise are devolved matters, there really is no real role for a special envoy that the NI Bureau, Invest NI, the Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland aren't already fulfilling.

The NIO's skin in the game is the need to undertake a propaganda campaign in the US in advance of trying to negotiate a trade deal.

The protocol is bad, but not so bad that it negatively impacts the Good Friday Agreement. Oh, and say nothing, but if you invest in the north, you'll have a back door to the EU market as well.

We have vast experience of recent Tory governments talking out of both sides of their mouth.

The difficulty with a strategy which seeks to create a counter-narrative of history is that the US President, multiple senators and members of Congress, along with a sizeable diaspora, know exactly why their ancestors had to emigrate from Ireland. No amount of trying to paint the British government as a neutral party in Ireland will change that reality.

This is a US administration that intends to finish the job of implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and its subsequent agreements. Recent political developments in Washington underline that fact.

It is only three weeks since the US Senate passed a bi-partisan motion calling for the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Stormont House Agreement and Northern Ireland Protocol. Just days before that, 25 members of Congress signed a letter to President Biden requesting him to appoint a US Envoy to the north; something it's understood the White House is likely to do in coming months.

Lewis has kicked the ball up as high as he can in the hope that his forward will catch it and get it over the line. Ringland, however, may find that in terms of the NIO's propaganda battle with Irish America, he has been handed a hospital pass.

## ON THIS DAY

JUNE 10 1921

### Irish-Russian Treaty

A WHITE Paper was issued yesterday giving particulars from documents, said to have been captured in Dublin, of a proposed treaty between the Russian Soviet Republic and the Republic of Ireland.

The draft, dated Dublin, June 15th, 1920, pledges the Republic of Ireland to promote the recognition of the Russian Soviet Republic by the nations of the world on condition of a reciprocal attitude. After outlining the various commercial clauses, the treaty states that the avowed purpose of both parties is to end imperial exploitation.

A memorandum by Dr Patrick McCartan (Sinn Féin MP for Kings County, now in Russia) reveals his intention of asking for 50,000 rifles to be run into Ireland.

### Viceroy on Belfast Riots

SPEAKING at Belfast City Hall yesterday, the Irish Viceroy, Lord FitzAlan said he could not forget what was due to Ulster in the Ulster Division at the Somme (applause).

He added: 'I have only one fault and one criticism to make about Belfast. There are occasions when you are too fond of having riots. You want to see the inhabitants of this great city living in friendship with one another. Let us remember there is a great thing called charity.' (Applause.)

### Gaeltacht College Reopens

PREPARATIONS are well advanced for the inauguration of the eighth session of St Malachy's College of Irish, Ballycastle on July 4, 1921. Students of all stages of proficiency will find classes to suit them. In this connection boating excursions to Rathlin Island are very often arranged so that those anxious to practise the language with the islanders may do so. Prospectus and fuller information may be had from M. Mauguin, Irish College, Bank Street, Belfast. (Founded in 1913, this summer Gaelic college used native Irish speakers from Rathlin and Glenariffe. Meanwhile, a British White paper confirmed a secret treaty between the Irish Republic and the Soviet Union in 1920. Tyrone IRB figure Dr Patrick McCartan TD was instructed by President de Valera to negotiate an interest-free loan of £25,000 to Soviet Russia as the Russian Revolution continued. In exchange, the Soviets offered part of the Russian Crown Jewels as collateral. The deal, however, did not prevent the Soviets from rejecting a proposed trade pact with Ireland. Harry Boland brought the jewels back to Dublin and, following the treaty split, instructed his family that they be given to de Valera when he returned to power. This occurred in 1932, but the jewels lay forgotten in government offices until they were discovered in the late 1940s by the finance minister, Patrick McGilligan. They were returned to the Soviet Union which promptly repaid the loan.)

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