



REVOLT: Edwin Poots during the nomination of Paul Givan as first minister, just hours before he resigned as DUP leader

# DUP drama more about personality than policy

**T**HE spectacular implosion of Edwin Poots's leadership has been a failure of personal style rather than political strategy: he knew the DUP had to compromise but not how to bring along anyone who doubted or disagreed with him. So instead he shut them out and charged on, culminating in the extraordinary nomination of Paul Givan as first minister in defiance of three-quarters of the party's MLAs and all but one of its MPs – Ian Paisley, to make matters worse.

The revolt against Givan's nomination was not because most DUP MPs and MLAs were determined to collapse the executive over Irish language legislation.

They were mainly upset at Poots not consulting them or keeping them informed; some complained he had accepted a deal too quickly to extract concessions on other issues.

Rivals saw their chance and moved against him, with careless regard for Stormont but no wiffling intention to collapse it.

However, as this has been more about personality than policy, nothing of substance has been resolved.

Poots's successor will find himself in all the same binds, especially on the Northern Ireland Protocol, where much of the party really might rather quit Stormont than compromise. Sorting the DUP's drama out for everyone's sake is going to take a reckoning at the ballot box, be it sooner or later.

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SINN Féin claims the government promised it three week weeks ago to legislate for Irish if the DUP failed to do so, suggesting the language deadlock was well gamed out in advance.

Republicans could not risk going into the next election without legislation but also could not risk an early election. So they took out insurance in London before calling the DUP's bluff.

An intriguing question is what Edwin Poots knew and made of this - passing the buck to Westminster took the problem off his hands, although less than he may have hoped.

The government's pledge is to introduce legislation in October if Stormont has not done so by September, which makes a mockery of DUP complaints about a breach of devolution. If the party is that concerned, it has three months to introduce legislation

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himself: plenty of time with the relevant bills already drafted.

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A BILL is currently passing through Westminster to implement the 'sustainability' reforms under New Decade, New Approach, designed to prevent another Stormont collapse.

This will enable ministers to stay in post for up to six months if there is a vacancy in the offices of first or deputy first minister, rather than the current one week. When an executive does collapse, the bill requires an election within three months.

However, if first and deputy first ministers still cannot be appointed, all outgoing ministers can stay in post for a further six months - meaning a partial executive could remain in power for a year with a snap election half-way through.

Would these provisions have made Stormont more or less sustainable this week? They would certainly have changed calculations.

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TÁNAISTE Leo Varadkar has said he foresees a united Ireland in his lifetime and wants Fine Gael to work towards it. Responding to a question from DUP MP Gavin Robinson, secretary of state Brandon Lewis told the

*It appears the DUP is being set up for accusations of flooding the south with cheap booze. Would the Reverend Ian Paisley have found that outrageous or hilarious?*

Commons he was concerned this might "deviate" from the consent principle in the Good Friday Agreement.

Nothing Varadkar said contradicted the agreement or went beyond previous remarks. If anything, he played down prospects for a border poll.

Further comments from Lewis about the need to "dial down any rhetoric", plus a jibe at Varadkar over Sinn Féin topping the polls in the Republic, suggests this was all Brexit-related venting of a remarkably knockabout nature, especially as the tánaiste will be taoiseach again in 18 months.

What Lewis should have told Robinson is that Varadkar is a 42-year-old doctor. He could easily live for another 50 years.

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LAST week, the DUP backed later opening hours for pubs and clubs.

Now an even stranger prospect is on the horizon. Leo Varadkar has written to Edwin Poots "respectfully" suggesting Stormont introduce minimum alcohol pricing by the start of next year, simultaneously with the Republic.

Although UUP health minister Robin Swann has been consulting on this, Northern Ireland is "years away" from implementing such a policy, as the Republic's health minister Stephen Donnelly recognised in a statement in May.

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ONE person in four in Northern Ireland will claim to be an Alliance voter when asked. That is the main conclusion to be drawn from the latest Life and Times Survey from Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, plus the latest BBC-commissioned poll from LucidTalk, Northern Ireland's main private polling company.

Life and Times took a randomised sample of the adult population and ended up with twice as many Alliance voters as expected, at 24 per cent. LucidTalk's unweighted sample of online respondents also came to 24 per cent - three times more than expected, as it asked about an earlier election.

Perhaps the peace process should be considered complete when Alliance's vote actually reaches 24 per cent.

## ON THIS DAY

JUNE 19 1921

### Evictions Rampant

EVICTIONS of Catholics from their houses, attended with scenes of violence and brutality on the part of Orange mobs and reminiscent of the worst days of July and August last year, have taken place during the past week in certain streets between the Falls and Shankill Roads.

The occupants of something like 150 houses have been left bereft of homes, furniture and clothing - many of them were lucky to escape with their lives.

The streets principally affected are Panmark Street, Argyle Street, Cupar Street, and Conway Street in an area lying midway between the Falls and Shankill Roads in these various streets. Orange mobs from the Shankill Road have repeatedly attempted to invade the Falls Road, their route being along the streets mentioned.

The evictions started on Sunday evening and the tactics adopted by the gangs of rowdies were similar to those of last year.

Windows were smashed as a preliminary; doors were broken in and anyone still remaining at the houses was brutally assaulted. Occupants were compelled to get over the back walls.

One case cited to our representative was a particularly hard one and shows the mercilessness of the Orange rowdies.

In this instance the head of the house was an ex-soldier.

Owing to gas poisoning and wounds received during the war he has been unable to work and is in receipt of a disability pension. His wife has been ill and there are five young children.

Owing to the delicate health of the father and mother, when the attack on the home began, the family were in desperate straits.

The father and mother were unable to get over the back wall themselves or lift the children over. With the help of a neighbour, they succeeded in pulling away a few bricks and through the hole thus made, the family were compelled to creep.

These poor people were among those fired on by Orange snipers. Their worldly possessions now consist of the clothes they wear.

The evictions continued throughout Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and all the Catholics residing near the Orange quarters have been made the victims of bigotry.

Great numbers of the men are ex-soldiers who have served with distinction during the war. In their campaign of intolerance, the Orange gangs took advantage of the absence of the police.

(This graphic report of the pre-Twelfth eviction of Catholics living on the fringes of the Shankill, taken together with reports of violence in Belfast and South Armagh involving the IRA and the Specials, underlines the realities of the situation as the Royal yacht left Holyhead for Belfast.)

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