



UNDOING:
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Poots underestimated depth of loathing for all things Irish

FOR a brief period of time, observers of unionism flirted with the notion that the crisis engulfing the DUP was a consequence of a split between a more pragmatic and reforming wing, loyal (well at least partially) to Arlene Foster and a fundamentalist, traditionalist bloc rallied by Edwin Poots and Ian Paisley jnr.

The dramatic fallout since the British government's decision to finally begin honouring commitments over the Irish language, 15 years after these were first made at St Andrews, has highlighted the central flaw in that analysis.

Edwin Poots's move to effectively take that decision on the chin and proceed with re-establishing the executive, with his own man at the helm, cost him his job only a matter of weeks since assuming office.

As political humiliations go, this one will take some beating.

The party revolt confirmed that intolerance of the many manifestations of The Other in this society continues to run to the core of the DUP's identity and politics.

One hundred years into the state's existence, the impoverished nature of their vision is reaffirmed time and time again.

Amidst all the noise, it should not be forgotten that the leader of unionism was forced to resign simply because his colleagues can not stomach modest legislative protections for the Irish language in a part of Ireland.

The voices fulminating against Poots from within the DUP were those who had led the charge in defence of Arlene Foster and for whom Jeffrey Donaldson was the chosen replacement.

Poots's undoing was his calculation that party colleagues could see that the fight had been fought and lost over the Irish language.

This was a reasonable assumption. After all, his predecessor had publicly called on him to deliver on implementation of the Irish Language Act which formed a critical part of the New Decade New Approach deal.

His words uttered in the Stormont

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assembly chamber before nominating Paul Givan as first minister were intriguing when he spoke of "a brand of confident unionism" capable of "recognising those things that do not do us demonstrable harm".

Yet he underestimated the depth of loathing consuming both his own followers and internal adversaries when it comes to all things Irish.

His subsequent Lundification was brutal, swift and unmerciful.

The simple truth is that the root cause of political and communal angst being visited upon many unionist and loyalist communities is the pervasive and enduring sense of entitlement that continues to afflict unionism.

It can be seen in the proliferation of loyalist flags once again in mixed residential communities across the north of Ireland, including in parts of Glengormley, south Belfast and a north Lisburn at the heart of the constituency shared between the current and likely next DUP leader. Don't expect senior

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unionists to condemn the practice or call on the PSNI to do their job of serving and protecting ordinary people from the sectarian bully boys.

The principle of 'The People' being entitled to fly their flags when and where they want along the Queen's Highway will not be compromised.

It was visible in the loyalist parade that culminated in an orchestrated protest and banner burning episode at the west Belfast peaceline and in the recently floated plans for a "mass" loyalist protest in Dublin over the summer, neither of which has been roundly condemned by senior unionist leaders.

It explains the recent decision of unionist politicians (including from the UUP) in Derry to withdraw from a bonfire management group, unconvincedly citing an incoherent list of reasons to explain a decision which will resign their own people to a miserable fate of coexistence with open litter sites for the next month.

Down in Moygashel, they take entitlement to another level.

There, loyalists are advertising a "thermal protection scheme" for windows in houses that have been inconveniently built near to a loyal bonfire.

File that amongst things you could not make up.

A brazen sense of entitlement was apparent in the unionist reaction to Tánaiste Leo Varadkar's call for Fine Gael to prepare for Irish unity, including by setting up in the north and appealing to middle ground voters here. Foster loyalist, former DUP special adviser and one-time DUP South Belfast MP, Emma Little-Pengelly, furiously tweeted that Leo Varadkar's speech was "mad stuff" because "unionism is trying to ensure a peaceful summer", implying that nationalists merely voicing support for the entirely legitimate cause of constitutional change somehow threatens peace.

Drawing out that poison does not even appear to be on the agenda for a political leadership blinded by prejudice and short-sightedness.

ON THIS DAY

JUNE 21 1921

Plight of Belfast Catholics

MOST Rev Dr MacRory, Bishop of Down and Connor, spoke frankly on the existing situation in his diocese with particular reference to Belfast in the course of an interview with the Irish News. Regarding Belfast, the bishop replied that he hated all quarrelling, especially in the name of religion. However, the condition of the city deplorable. Unemployment is painfully widespread, riots are almost daily occurrences and religious bigotry, he feared, was growing in intensity; and there was no security for human life as was made only too clear by [recent] tragic events. Several policemen had been shot in broad daylight; a dozen Catholic citizens had been dragged from their beds during Curfew hours when the Crown forces held the streets and done to death.

'I consider that the present position of Catholics in the city is simply intolerable. Thousands of them had been expelled from their work, their houses burned...and they and their families - nearly 30,000 souls - had been forced to subsist on the generosity of the civilised world. They had also been disarmed and now they were left largely at the mercy of Special Constables... Considering the acute religious and political differences in Belfast, he regarded this arming of one section of the people against another as one of the most iniquitous and indefensible things [by] the government...'

On the [Dáil's] boycott of Belfast the bishop regretted that it should ever have been deemed necessary to resort to such a weapon. 'But it was to be remembered that the present boycott began in Belfast last July when our Catholic workers and some of their Protestant comrades were expelled from the shipyards and denied on religious and political grounds the right to work and live...'

Attack on Ulster Hero's Birthplace

DURING an attempt last night to burn down Castletown Mount [Dundalk], the birthplace of Cuchulainn, several members of the Archaeological Society narrowly escaped death. The members were arranging for the removal of the exhibits from their museum at the Mount, recently established, when a raider came in with a can of petrol which he sprinkled about. The lady members asked to be allowed to leave but their request was ignored. The place was set alight and the members of the committee had to jump for their lives...

(Attacking the British government for failing to protect the Catholic minority in Belfast, Bishop MacRory recalled the expulsion of over 8000 Catholics and Protestant Labourites from their jobs in July 1920. This, he argued, justified the Dail-sanctioned boycott of Northern banks and firms in the South.)

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