

All ideas for new Ireland should be up for debate

IF YOU think little things don't matter, try sleeping with a bat in the house.

Earlier this week, that was the scenario I faced when attempts to dislodge the night visitor from the living room proved fruitless and I had to retire, regroup and try again in the morning.

Swinging at it with the hurl was definitely a no-go, as was imprisoning it within a towel. What was needed was a strategy which would allow the bat and I to peacefully co-exist in each other's environment.

The issue of the bat reminded me of an interesting debate I had seen on Twitter that day, where a recent graduate in International Politics at Queen's posed the question whether those in favour of reunification would accept a consociational Dáil in a united Ireland.

This would mean, for example, having an equal number of seats for TDs in the north and the rest of Ireland, or weighting the votes of TDs from the north equally to those of the remaining TDs from the rest of Ireland.

The majority of the replies from those who would be in favour of reunification dismissed this out of hand as a form of gerrymandering, or of giving unionism a political power disproportionate to its electorate.

Other responses advocated a federal approach, with each province having devolved powers. But overwhelmingly the response was negative.

Now I know it's Twitter, and you don't come expecting reasoned and detailed debate, but it was still disappointing that most of those responding failed to acknowledge (or google) that consociationalism is just a form of power-sharing, something that already exists in Stormont.

We have to stop shutting down new ideas as soon as they are mooted if we want a new society.

The home organisation expert Marie Kondo advocates putting everything you have into a big pile and holding onto only those things that spark joy, whilst divesting yourself of the rest. So may it be with a second Republic.

We should also remember that some accidental discoveries have changed the world.

When nitrous oxide was first used to try to improve the respiratory health of miners and factory workers in the early 1800s, the side-effect of the euphoria it caused led to it becoming a party drug for the middle classes and being given the nickname of laughing gas.



UNITED IRELAND: Social liberalism and political developments, not least the impact of Brexit, have re-framed the debate utterly

Patricia MACBRIDE



At one party, the dentist Horace Wells witnessed a man sustain an accidental gash on his leg, yet not feel any pain.

He began experimenting on using the gas during tooth extractions and thus anaesthesia was born.

When clinical trials of sildenafil for angina and heart disease showed unexpected yet pleasant side-effects in male users, Pfizer rebranded it as Viagra and now sells about \$1 billion per year worth of the drug.

All ideas and suggestions, and the potential accidental consequences or benefits that flow from them when it comes to building a better society for everyone, need to be open for discussion.

United Irelanders, as well as everyone else, have to be prepared to look at new approaches. Utilising a charrette-based approach to dialogue would allow everyone's

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voice to be heard, agreements to be banked and due consideration given to the important place that all minorities should have in a new society.

Those who say that any debate on possible future reunification is, in itself, divisive, need to be reminded gently but firmly that seeking to close down that debate is an attempt to silence legitimate political aspirations. Talking has never hurt anyone.

I don't believe the new Ireland we will see in the coming years is the Ireland that might have been envisioned by the authors of the Proclamation of Easter 1916, nor by the founders of the civil rights movement.

Social liberalism and political developments, not least the impact of Brexit, have re-framed the debate utterly.

We understand the visceral importance of identity and heritage in people's lives in a way that we cannot now just lay aside.

Big things like the constitution, the structure of government or how elections are run are almost the easy part because it's either one approach or another. The hard work of negotiations will be on the small, but vitally important things.

That is going to include things like flags, anthems, and the importance of the contribution of all identities to a shared society.

If we start by shutting down the debate on things where there are models and formulas internationally that we can use as exemplars, it makes the debate on the small things that matter in people's hearts that much more contentious.

As for the bat, she was found next morning in the folds of the curtains and climbed into the butterfly net that was offered her.

She was returned to the trees where it is hoped she resumed her midge-eating duties; a small, but vitally important contribution to the society that is this household. Long may we peacefully co-exist.

ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 5 1921

De Valera and Irish

SPEAKING at the [Gaelic League] Ard Fheis in Dublin yesterday, Mr de Valera said he did not come for the purpose of making an oration but to shake hands with old friends.

He was certain that as long as the country preserved its language it would be able to defend itself. The President appealed to them to lie into the work of keeping the language alive in the places where it was still spoken.

Every native Irish speaker who died was a great loss to the nation. It was not possible for any person, unless he knew Irish from the cradle, to acquire the native speaker's knowledge of it.

They should therefore do their best to save the language in the districts where it was spoken as a living tongue.

He suggested that special attention should be devoted to districts bordering on the Gaeltacht because it was easier to Gaelicise these districts than other parts of the country. 'It is my opinion that Ireland with its language and without freedom is preferable to Ireland with freedom and without its language. We must do our best to Gaelicise the places around the districts where Irish is still spoken.'

At a meeting of the Ard Fheis a resolution was proposed by the Lord Mayor of Cork requesting Dail Eireann [to ensure that] every public board would transact all their business in Irish and that the employees of a public board should be given two years to learn Irish. The resolution was passed.

The following were elected to represent Ulster at the Executive Committee: Fr Donal O'Tuathail, Sean O'Bradaigh, [Fr] P MacGlinchey and C O'Neill.

DE VALERA, like Pearse, Collins and Eoin MacNeill, was a child of the Gaelic Revival.

His decision to join the Gaelic League, whose aim was to re-establish Irish as the spoken language, marked his first step towards a political career.

Founded in 1893 by Eoin MacNeill from Glenarm and Douglas Hyde, a Roscommon rector's son, the League, while initially non-political and non-sectarian, helped to create the atmosphere for a more militant nationalism.

The Belfast branch was established on the Beersbridge Road in 1895 in the home of PT McGlinley, a customs official from Donegal.

Many middle-class Protestants joined, including its first Belfast chairman, Dr John St Clair Boyd, a surgeon in the Samaritan Hospital.

Almost immediately the Dáil came under pressure from the League to make Irish compulsory for the public service and teaching posts.

Among the Ulster representatives on the League executive were Fr Peadar McGlinchey, a Derry priest, and Fr Dan Toal from Belfast.

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com