



CONFLICT: Main picture, members of the Orange Order pray at Drumcree bridge in 2006. Inset, Michael McGoldrick pictured graduating from Queen's University Belfast three days before his murder by the LVF

Bonfire regulation would benefit everyone

I DID not know Michael McGoldrick, though I will never forget him. In the summer of 1996, we graduated from Queen's University on the same day, and his name is included with my own and many others on the T-shirt provided to those who graduated together that July afternoon.

The picture of him smiling whilst wearing his graduation gown has been shared widely throughout the years. A young father who had completed a degree whilst maintaining a job as a taxi driver, with the ambition to continue his studies to join the teaching vocation.

He was murdered only days after his graduation, a victim of loyalist paramilitaries intent on committing murder and creating mayhem to force an Orange Order parade through the overwhelmingly Catholic Garvaghy Road area of Portadown. The three Quinn children would later become victims of loyalists pursuing the same cause two years later.

The Orange Order has never recovered from Drumcree. Such is the arrogance and lack of any sense of shame that typifies too many within its ranks that, to this day, the Portadown Lodge still applies to parade down the Garvaghy Road every week, purportedly to complete their 1998 parade. They stopped for a while due to Covid but have since recommenced their weekly applications.

The establishment of the Parades Commission in 1998 proved to be the most significant step in defusing tensions every summer. Whilst some parades continued to cause difficulty over subsequent years, the number dwindled after being resolved locally and within parameters encouraged by the commission.

The absence of conflict and contention makes everyone a winner, not least members of the order and their supporters for whom the day can be of particular significance for reasons personal and cultural.

In spite of this, unionist politicians continue to bitterly oppose the existence of the Parades Commission and the very notion of loyalist celebrations and

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commemorations being subject to any form of regulation.

Opposition to regulation is rooted in a deeply held perception within unionism that 'the people' retain an inalienable right to assert their Britishness without any form of constraint. One-time DUP and then TUV councillor Mel Lucas expressed the sentiment perfectly more than a decade ago when rejecting criticism of flags erected outside a Catholic Church in Antrim on the grounds that "it's all British – even the bits outside the chapel".

This mindset led to parading controversies over many generations and is also behind the fierce opposition to regulations being in place to restrict the flying of loyalist flags in mixed communities and to end the anarchic scenes which unfold every summer around bonfires.

The excuse trotted out these days is that loyalists believe they are facing a cultural war which has as its purpose the eradication of Britishness from this part of Ireland.

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As ever, facts are freely available to confirm the absurd nature of these allegations.

In 2019, the last complete calendar year not impacted by the pandemic, the Parades Commission reported some 2,300 loyalist parades having been held across the north of Ireland. That's an average of six parades per day. This year it was reported that there were in the region of 250 loyalist bonfires lit to mark the Eleventh night, including a bonfire in Larne which was almost 150ft in height.

No sensible person would object to laws being enacted and enforced with the intention of compelling bonfire builders to be accountable for protecting those building and gathering to watch the fires burn and to protect local residents by ensuring fires are sited appropriately so that homes – never mind fire stations – do not need boarded up and hosed down whilst the fire rages.

The horrific injuries sustained by a teenager at a bonfire in Ballysillan would not have happened if these fires were appropriately regulated and stewarded, and the number of other near-misses this summer at bonfires confirms the need for clear and firm action to avoid fatalities in the future. Regulation would also make builders responsible and accountable for the toxic sectarian aspect of bonfire culture which was widely in evidence once again this year.

As each year passes, an increasing number of people from all backgrounds believe the police and public authorities must rein in the nonsense and act decisively in defence of what are vulnerable shared communities (in the case of intimidatory flags) and in defence of basic public safety expectations and decency in relation to these bonfires.

Don't expect unionist politicians to take a lead. It will be up to the PSNI to finally fulfil their duties and responsibilities, having repeatedly failed that test over flags and bonfires up to this point.

We will all be the better for it if and when they do, including those for whom the Eleventh night and Twelfth mean the most.

ON THIS DAY

JULY 19 1921

Special's Fatal Mistake

A TRAGEDY of a most poignant character occurred on Sunday morning, resulting in the death of Mr Patrick McCarr, a well-known farmer and respected Justice of the Peace who resided at Ballylig, a few miles from Ballycastle. Mr McCarr, accompanied by Constable William Barry, RIC, Antrim, a close personal friend who was at one time stationed in Ballycastle, called at the local barracks at one o'clock on Sunday morning. The door was then opened and Special Constable Steele, the guard on duty, failing to recognise the men and evidently fearing that they were there for an unlawful purpose, fired. Mr McCarr was hit and fell, badly wounded.

An extensive cattle dealer, Mr McCarr was a familiar figure in Belfast Market and regarded as a man of integrity whose word was his bond. A poignant feature of this sad occurrence is that Mr McCarr (44) was to be married next month. He was a cousin of the late Mr Alex McBride, publican, Church Street, Belfast [assassinated in Belfast]. At the 1918 general election, he unsuccessfully contested North Antrim for Sinn Féin.

Orangemen Against Partition

THE members of the Independent Orange Order held their demonstration at Malone [Belfast] and the procession marched from the City Hall. Mr WJ Moore, County Grand Master, said great changes had come over Ireland since they last met and God only knew what changes would take place before the next 12th July. As Protestants, they were opposed to the separation of Ulster or any section of it from their fellow-Protestants in the south and west of Ireland.

Mr James H Doherty moved a series of resolutions, one of which expressed opposition to the separation of Ulster from the rest of Ireland. He said they all felt very keenly the desertion of their fellow Protestants in the counties outside the Northern parliament and they warned those responsible that no cause had ever prospered by the betrayal of their kith and kin.

Rev WJ Calvin referred to the prospect of peace in Ireland and urged them to pray for that peace and for the good of Ireland. (Applause)

FOUNDED in 1902 as a radical breakaway from mainstream Orangism, the Independent Orange Order had issued the non-sectarian 'Magheramorne Manifesto' in 1905. This remarkable call for unity between Irishmen was the work of Lindsay Crawford, a Lisburn-born journalist who later joined Sinn Féin in Canada. Though it later shed its radicalism, the IOO was angry at Carson's 'betrayal' of Southern Protestants in 1920. The 'Independents' were long associated with the Rev Ian Paisley and still have a base in north and east Antrim.

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