



LAW:
Jim Allister's
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the Irish
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Outrage at Irish language legislation all about what's going on in unionism

IN JUNE of this year, there was a faux wobble as to whether or not the DUP would nominate a first minister in the midst of the internal wrangling that saw the party go through three leaders in almost as many weeks.

The parties were called together for discussions and, having been handed the opportunity by the DUP to negotiate with the British government, Sinn Féin said the price for their return to Stormont was bringing forward legislation on culture and identity as had been agreed in 2020's New Decade, New Approach agreement.

Following the negotiations, Brandon Lewis said it remained his preference for the language laws to be brought forward through the assembly, but added that the British government would take the legislation through Westminster. If that becomes necessary, he said, they would introduce legislation in October 2021.

Tick tock, Brandon. Protests over the Irish language from unionism are as cyclical as the seasons. It must be incredibly tiring being a unionist politician and having to live in a constant state of outrage, anger and fury.

I find this state of affairs all the more baffling when it's over something as benign as the proposals around identity and cultural expression set out in New Decade, New Approach.

Let's be clear what we are talking about. The proposed legislation provides for the creation of an Office of Identity and Cultural Expression with a director appointed by the first and deputy first minister. That office's primary aim is "to promote cultural pluralism and respect for diversity, including Northern Ireland's ethnic, national, linguistic and faith communities".

The office will guide public bodies and monitor how they provided services to users of languages other than English. It will examine how cultural traditions and identities are being promoted. The office will appoint both an Ulster Scots Commissioner and Irish Language

**Patricia
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Commissioner and any recommendations made by those commissioners or by the office must be approved by the first and deputy first minister.

The debate over the language and cultural expression legislation has all too often fallen into the trap of "false balance" in the media. Yes, of course, everyone is entitled to have their own opinion but they are not entitled to have their own facts. When a group or individual misrepresents the facts or deals in falsehoods, and are given the same airtime for the sake of balance, it gives those views a legitimacy they do not deserve.

Those who peddle inaccuracies such as an Irish Language Act will introduce quotas of Irish speakers in the civil service, or require all road signs to be bilingual or that a language commissioner will be able to ride roughshod over fair employment legislation cannot be allowed to spread misinformation unchallenged.

In an article in the *News Letter* earlier

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this month, the TUV's Jim Allister said: "Official recognition of the status of Irish will be enforced through an Irish Language Commissioner with statutory powers to 'promote and facilitate' the use of Irish throughout the public sector."

"This zealot will set standards that every public body must meet in the use of Irish in the delivery of its services. Such will bring obvious recruitment advantage to Irish speakers across the public service."

My friend knows very well the legal enforceability of language like "promote and facilitate". He also knows very well that any recommendations of the commissioners can be blocked by either the first or deputy first minister.

Unionist outrage at any legislation around the Irish language is really about what's going on in unionism. The TUV is using it to say that the DUP is selling unionism down the river by capitulating to Sinn Féin. The DUP is complaining that Westminster might make legislation over the heads of the assembly when, of course, they are quite happy for anything to do with equality or rights to be taken out of their hands so as to not spook their fundamentalist Christian voter base. We've seen this already with abortion legislation and marriage equality.

If I were of Ulster British identity, I'd be lobbying the universities to set up degree programmes in Ulster Scots so that those graduates could go on to do their PGCE and become teachers in Ulster Scots schools. I'd be looking for like-minded parents who wanted to educate their children in the heritage, tradition and language they themselves grew up with so that we could establish those schools together.

The rising tide of confidence in one's culture, heritage and tradition should lift all boats. Instead of the constant "them-muns" arguments, political unionism should focus on the positive opportunities this legislation can present for those of Ulster British identity.

Ach ní dhéanfadh an domhan capall rása d'asail.

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 28 1921

Crisis Over 2 Counties

THE Press Association says: There was no meeting yesterday of the Conference between the British Government and representatives of Ireland.

An enthusiastic welcome was accorded to the Irish delegates at a London Irish demonstration in the Albert Hall last night. Mr Arthur Griffith said he was debarred from dealing with political subjects but added: 'We are wishful to make peace between our country and this country.' A voice - 'At what price?'

The Evening Standard writes: The de Valera telegram has brought matters to a head in the Conference. The search for a formula has involved the discussion of the two fundamental issues of the whole Irish Question - allegiance to the Crown and the special position of Ulster. The situation seems to be now that, while the British want Irish acknowledgement of the Crown, Sinn Féin wants as compensation a revision of last year's Act, especially in reference to the position of Tyrone and Fermanagh. These two counties are roughly divided in their sympathies and one proposal is that they should be divided somewhat in the same way that Upper Silesia has been divided [by plebiscite]. Such a division would have to be sanctioned by an Act of Parliament. It would meet with strong resistance in Parliament. The situation in the Unionist [Tory] Party is clear. They want peace but not at the price of the secession of Ireland or the betrayal of Ulster.

Partition not wanted - Bishop

REFERRING to the political situation at the Cork Synod yesterday, Right Rev Dr Dowse, Protestant Bishop, said they must hope on. None of them wanted partition. They were too small for it. Their hope lay in unity. But how was it to come? Not by coercion, not by a suicidal boycott between North and South which could only lead to further bitterness, but rather by such a just, impartial and liberal-minded government on the part of North and South that each may come to feel that the other may be trusted.

FROM the Rising onwards, the southern Unionists (about 12 per cent outside Ulster) had firmly opposed partition which would render them a powerless minority in a Catholic state. Forming the 'Anti-Partition League' under Lord Midleton, they sought safeguards for Protestants in a united Ireland. Their efforts were rewarded by Arthur Griffith who granted them 50 per cent of the seats in the new Free State Senate (1922). Meanwhile, the Sinn Féin negotiators pressed the British for an all-Ireland federation with Craig retaining his devolved government and police force. Failing that, they demanded the transfer to the Dáil of nationalist-majority areas like Fermanagh and Tyrone.

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