

Courage of nationalist centre ground should be applauded

Newton
EMERSON



THE centenary church service in Armagh has passed off peacefully, to use an appropriately Northern Ireland expression. As church leaders delivered their thoughtful and respectful addresses, it became instantly clear that objections to the event have been absurd. What sort of 'unity' is imagined by people who think this row advanced the cause of a united Ireland?

Archbishop Eamon Martin and SDLP leader Colum Eastwood should be admired for standing up to the hysteria. Nationalists have a reasonable objection that unionists bank such outreach gestures without reciprocation – or that if you feed a crocodile it keeps coming back for more, to use an inappropriate expression, but while unionist political leaders may fail to acknowledge the courage of the nationalist centre ground, the unionist centre ground is another matter. This whole episode has been closely watched from the garden centre, and carefully noted.

THE Strule shared education campus in Omagh was meant to save money by sharing sports facilities and making use of land gifted by the Ministry of Defence. It is now projected to run \$60 million over its \$170 million budget – twice the cost per pupil of building an integrated school, as Amnesty Northern Ireland director Patrick Corrigan has observed.

All six Catholic and state schools planned for the site were to be completed last year but due to the complexity of the project only one, Arvalee special school, has so far been built.

So what is the point of it, or of the entire concept of 'shared education'? Omagh's children are to be brought to one site, yet still separated, which can only underscore their separation. At least when children are on different sites they just assume other schools serve other areas – until their 'shared education visits' reveal the terrible truth.

SAINSBURY'S has caused some Brexit-related alarm by announcing the closure of its supermarket in Craigavon, putting 109 jobs at risk. Trade union Unite says the protocol may be responsible. That certainly sounds more plausible than Sainsbury's explanation of "changing demographics". However, no complex explanation is required: central Craigavon is over-provided with supermarkets, Sainsbury's is the most tired offering among them and the chain is closing up to 80 such stores this year across the UK.

The real protocol issue is how many stores any British chain must have here to make sea border procedures worthwhile. Closing Craigavon takes Sainsbury's down to 12. Tesco has 51, plus 152 in the Republic.

NEW Decade, New Approach created an assembly committee to have another go



STOOD UP TO HYSTERIA: SDLP leader Colum Eastwood at Thursday's service at St Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland

at devising a bill of rights.

Sinn Féin's Emma Sheerin has informed MLAs she is "frustrated at the failure to appoint the panel of experts" to advise the committee, on which she sits, adding "that blockage is not coming from the Sinn Féin side of the executive office".

Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill concurred, saying: "the blockage in progressing the appointments does not sit with me."

However, DUP first minister Paul Givan then said expert panellists have been "identified" but Sinn Féin will not sign off on them. Sinn Féin did not dispute this.

So the 'blockage' appears to be Sinn Féin not liking the experts, or at the very least, others recommending experts Sinn Féin does not like.

This is all reminiscent of how the bill of rights project last fell apart, in 2009. It is also the same language Sinn Féin has used to blame the DUP for blocking the report from the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition.

THE BBC news website used curious language in a report on the new northern edition of the

Sunday Independent.

"Historically, many newspapers in Northern Ireland tended to have an editorial bias related to the political situation, catering for either a mainly unionist or mainly nationalist readership," it wrote.

Most newspapers have editorial lines, which they declare openly. This is not 'bias'. Believing you have no editorial line is what risks introducing bias to your reporting.

BALLYMENA DUP councillor John Carson has accidentally revealed a party attempt at a coordinated social media attack.

Carson put up a Facebook post criticising TUV councillor Timothy Gaston, with an unattributed note at the top reading: "Please share on your social media or put your own out attacking Gaston."

He soon deleted the note but the following questions remain: why is the DUP so bad at this? Why has it no equivalent of Sinn Féin's online support? Why is what little effort it is making focused on the TUV? The last keyboard the typical TUV voter will have used will have been on the Bontempi organ in a gospel hall.

IT IS too much to expect the Boundary Commission to balance the population of Westminster constituencies while still observing the ancient frontiers of ceremonial counties.

Nevertheless, its proposal to put Loughgall in Fermanagh and South Tyrone offends the order of nature. Loughgall is possibly the most Co Armagh place in Co Armagh, surrounded as it is by drumlins, orchards and the city of Armagh. Nudging it over the Blackwater is worse than putting Dunmurry in Lisburn.

Carson put up a Facebook post criticising TUV councillor Timothy Gaston, with an unattributed note at the top reading: "Please share on your social media or put your own out attacking Gaston."

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 23 1971

Comedy at Queen's!

MR TOMAS MacGiolla (45), president of [Official] Sinn Féin, was a prisoner in Queen's University Students Union early today after a bid by troops to arrest him had failed. The Students Union was barricaded by 200 students who refused to leave without Mr MacGiolla being guaranteed safe passage across the border. Meanwhile Government officials in Belfast and Dublin were alerted about the situation.

The Sinn Féin leader took part in a debate on the Common Market in the McMorris Hall while Special Branch and Army intelligence officers waited in the darkness of the Union car park beside the Sinn Féin president's car. The debate was cut short before 11pm when some students reported that the front rear side tyre of Mr MacGiolla's car had been deflated and that soldiers were waiting in the car park. Standing Orders were suspended to allow Mr MacGiolla to leave.

The trio left the Union by a rear door surrounded by about 100 students. As they walked to the car troops with rifles at the ready moved forward. A plain clothed man tried to reach across the crowd to touch Mr MacGiolla but he was unable to do so. Then the car, surrounded by students, began to move forward. Troops blocked its path. A plain clothes man said: 'We are going to take him' and the troops moved forward. Mr MacGiolla left the car and was hustled by a student bodyguard towards the Union door. Meanwhile police reinforcements took up position at the front of the block and soldiers kept a searchlight trained on the roof where several students had taken up guard positions.

Taylor Furious at Fiasco

THE Minister of State at Home Affairs, Mr John Taylor said he strongly condemned the security forces being prevented by students from questioning the Sinn Féin [Official] president in Belfast. Rev Ian Paisley said handling of the matter made a laughing stock of security in Belfast.

Senator Kennedy on Reunification

SENATOR Edward Kennedy yesterday called for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from NI which, he said, was becoming 'Britain's Vietnam' and urged the establishment of a united Ireland. Such action was the only way to end violence in the Six Counties, he told the US Senate.

A similar measure was introduced in the House of Representatives by Mr Hugh Carey (Democrat).

THE 'siege' of the QUB Students' Union afforded a bit of light relief amidst the unrelenting cycle of violence. MacGiolla's safe passage to the border was eventually arranged. For his part, in a strongly nationalist speech, Senator Edward Kennedy coined a new phrase for the conflict – 'Britain's Vietnam'.

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com