

on Dublin in senate bid



Trinity – college of the Protestant Ascendancy

A UNIONIST seeking election in Trinity would until recent decades have been nothing out of the ordinary.

And in fact the Republic's upper house was originally devised to give a voice to the Protestant community who suddenly found themselves a tiny minority after partition in 1921.

The earliest Seanad Eireann consisted of a mixture of members appointed by the prime minister of the then Free State, William Cosgrave (1922 to 1932), who pledged to use his appointments to grant extra representation to the fledgling state's Protestant minority.

It was intended that eventually the entire membership of the Seanad would be directly elected by the public but after only one election, in 1925, this system was abandoned in favour of a form of indirect election.

That system was changed again in 1936 when the then taoiseach, Eamonn De Valera, did away with it and introduced the current rules for appointments.

Of the 60 senators, 11 are appointed by the taoiseach, three elected by the graduates of Trinity College, Dublin, three elected by the national universities and the remaining 43 are elected by TDs, councillors and outgoing senators.

Meanwhile, from its founding in 1592, Trinity was known as the university of the Protestant Ascendancy.

Elizabeth I founded Trinity so that students in Ireland could be 'free from papish influence'.

The college has allowed Catholics to study there only since the 19th century but the Roman Catholic Church continued to ban Catholic students from Trinity until 1971.

John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin from 1940 to 1972, deemed it



Jeffrey Dudgeon with his parents on his graduation day at Trinity in 1968

a mortal sin to attend Trinity because of 'pagan' influences at the college.

In Easter 1916, when almost every other major in-building fell to the Easter Rising rebels, Trinity's students led by its Officer Training Corps members successfully defended its wall and kept the Union flag flying despite the carnage around it.

Iconic unionist leader Lord Edward Carson studied law at Trinity before going on to practice as a barrister in London. He served as a Westminster MP for the college until partition.

Other notable graduates include the philosopher Edmund Burke, playwright Bram Stoker, poet Oscar Wilde, playwright Samuel Beckett and more recently both Stormont health minister Michael McGimpsey and his brother and former Belfast councillor Christopher McGimpsey.

There have been some scattered attempts to set up a unionist society within the college. The most successful was in 2001 when Galway-born unionist David Christopher founded a group.

However, it later disappeared through lack of support when Mr Christopher graduated.

JEFFREY DUDGEON: Why I am standing

THE Trinity College constituency which I am contesting has amongst its 55,000 graduate electors some 3,000 from all the Ulster counties. TCD's three senators have traditionally included Protestants and progressives like Conor Cruise O'Brien, David Norris and Mary Robinson.

If I get a high proportion of those votes, as I hope, that makes me a leading contender for Shane Ross's vacant seat.

Some people, but not that many unionists I have discovered, wonder why I am seeking a seat in Seanad Eireann.

That is not to say there weren't southern unionists like Lord Glenavy there in the early 1920s. They were appointed as a confidence-building measure for Protestants who were fleeing the country in enormous numbers.

However, when I appeared on RTE radio last week, the question from a bemused Pat Kenny was: "If elected, would you move to Dublin?"

This reveals the present view of most southerners – that Northern Ireland is effectively a foreign, indeed, distant place.

I replied that Dublin was now only a 90-minute drive from Belfast, so I would not be moving.

Since the 1998 referendum, when the claim to Northern Ireland was dropped, we can interact with the south as friendly neighbours and fellow EU members.

It seems the closer we get, the further apart, in a non-hostile way, our peoples become, which calls into question the need for republicans, then and now, to wage war on the people and

institutions of Northern Ireland. This would be a major theme for me, especially with the looming decade of centenaries, not least that of the Easter Rising. Having written a book on Roger Casement, I am well versed in 20th century Irish history and the origins of republicanism.

Saturday's murder of a police officer in Omagh necessitates arguing, as this campaign escalates, it is all the more important to calm unionist fears and keep dialogue going between the two main traditions.

I would be a unique, non-abrasive voice in Dublin for nationalists and unionists. That sort of voice is seldom heard, leaving the interests of Northern Ireland, not least in our increasingly intertwined economies, unstated.

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