**BELFAST TELEGRAPH**

**DEBATENI  BLOGS**

**[Accumulated unedited/unabbreviated versions]**

**Jeff Dudgeon**

**THE 1918 GENERAL ELECTION IN IRELAND**

**1 December 2013**

This month sees the 95th anniversary of the 1918 general election which some say was effectively a referendum on Ireland’s status.

It certainly changed the political landscape for ever. Sinn Fein almost eradicated Redmond’s Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP). Out of 105 seats in Ireland, it was left with six, all but one in the north. Unionists won 26 seats taking a majority in the province of Ulster. A Unionist actually won Dublin Rathmines and another was a close runner-up in South County Dublin.

Twenty-five of Sinn Fein’s 73 seats were however uncontested by the home rule IPP as the lines between the two parties had become blurred since the Easter Rising. On conscription, the main issue for nationalists, they basically agreed. The colossal geopolitical repercussions from the 1st World War also played their part.

But it wasn’t a referendum on separation. It was a general election and billed as such. No unit of self-determination had been agreed as is often the case. The electorate in the north certainly recognised that the vote would determine the level of Ulster’s exclusion from home rule but those in the south were not presented with a clear choice on their future. None the less for eighty years the IRA took its legitimacy from the result in justifying their campaigns.

Cardinal Logue brokered an electoral pact in Ulster between the two nationalist groupings, after nomination day. Catholic electors showed an iron discipline in that whichever party agreed to stand aside got fewer than 140 votes in each of six constituencies. Where the home rulers did fight Sinn Fein there was no clear cut winner while Joe Devlin even defeated de Valera in the Falls constituency. West Belfast was not to be Republicanised for another 65 years.

It was indeed the last all-Ireland vote, until 1998, when the southern electorate voted for the abolition of the constitutional claim to Northern Ireland by an astonishingly overwhelming 94%. (The south could usefully have dropped the claim in 1985 or even 1974 and still got a majority). In Northern Ireland, in a simultaneous referendum, the Belfast Agreement was accepted by 71% of voters - with a small majority of Unionists assenting. United Kingdom sovereignty was thus reinforced.

Once those votes happened, the 1918 myth on which the IRA was basing its legitimacy (it claimed to be the legal Irish government!) was swept away for ever. This is a strong reason for believing the Dissidents can never – well not in this generation – get a significant popular base in the Catholic community. At the same time, Sinn Fein will not advance in the south while there is any lingering element of paramilitarism.

**MIGRANTS IN BELFAST**

**19 November 2013**

Last week, former Labour Home Secretary, David Blunkett, said "We have got to change the behaviour and the culture of the Roma community, because there's going to be an explosion otherwise. We all know that." He called on those in his Sheffield constituency to change aspects of their "behaviour" such as congregating on the streets and dumping litter, which was "aggravating" local people.

Later, Nick Clegg a LibDem MP in the same city described the Roma as sometimes "intimidating" and "offensive" adding, "We have every right to say if you are coming to live in Britain…you have got to be sensitive to the way that life is lived in this country."

If either of these politicians had said this only a year or two ago they would have been hounded off the airwaves and grilled mercilessly by the BBC. If a Tory MP had said it their career would be over.

So it is worth reviewing what happened four years ago in South Belfast. A number of such immigrants’ homes had their windows smashed and around 100 Roma took refuge in a local church. They were flown home. The world and the PM condemned the actions of a very few young men who had also attacked a left wing solidarity demonstration.

Was Belfast exceptional? Apparently not, it would seem from Blunkett and Clegg’s febrile views.

In truth, those families filtered back to Belfast. They had not been driven out permanently and seem to have settled down to lead regular lives here. The community around them has become used to, and tolerates, their presence, without aid or assistance from the state or the Socialist Workers. Locals will get no praise or recognition from those whose income level ensures they will never become neighbours of a new immigrant family on the breadline.

The unspeakable truth is that the less prosperous are expected to cope with rapid demographic and cultural change, even though it is not explicable to many older people and tests younger men and boys. South Belfast has been managing and indeed coping with the accelerating number of arrivals, particularly lately of Somalis from other EU countries. About such drastic adjustments people are of course not consulted.

Over 10% of primary school places in South Belfast are now filled by children for whom English is not their first language. This is a testing process but teachers, parents and fellow pupils are handling it well. The city has tholed the transition and matured. Even if we will be guilt-tripped for a long time to come, Belfast is a tolerant place.

**DISAPPEARANCE IN DUNMANWAY**

**12 November 2013**

“The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there,” wrote L.P. Hartley at the beginning of his novel ‘The Go-Between,’ set just before the 1st World War.

Well they didn’t in the 1920s, in relation to people disappearing. However as Billy McKee, OC in the IRA’s Belfast Brigade in the early 1970s, so brutally and frankly stated in the recent TV documentary, when he ordered people to be executed they were not disappeared. Their bodies were left in the open, often along border crossings, so that relatives and others were left in no doubt as to their fate.

In the years 1920-22, disappearing was a common practice, especially in Cork. The reasons varied. The most infamous sectarian killings were in the Dunmanway massacre in April 1922 (after the Truce) when thirteen Protestant men and boys were put to death over two days. The initial targets, three members of the Hornibrooks, a farming family in Ballygroman, were never seen again. Their fate was variously said to have been hanging, dismembering or shooting. Either way they disappeared for ever and had to be declared dead by the courts.

The past just doesn’t go away, as the consequent Bandon Valley killings of a further ten Protestants by an out-of-control IRA unit, bent on revenge and sectarian hatred by becoming controversial again nearly a century on so indicates.

Tim Pat Coogan quoted a local woman writing at the time, “For two weeks there wasn't standing room on any of the boats or mail trains leaving Cork for England…refugees who were either fleeing in terror or had been ordered out of the country...none of the people who did these things, though they were reported as the rebel IRA faction, were ever brought to book by the Provisional Government.” These dead were parked and thought forgotten, not least by southern Protestants who reckoned it better not to dwell on their fate.

Former Senator Eoghan Harris in this week’s *Sunday Independent* reminded us how, “These victims’ disappearance was compounded by the vicious malevolent rumour mill that attempted to cast aspersions on their characters.” This even continues with false stories about them being ‘informers’ appearing as fact on Wikipedia. Of course they were mostly anti-IRA but so are, and were, most of the country.

It is a remarkable fact that Sinn Fein must now recognise. No matter how much they try to appear modern and reconciling, the reality of a 40-year war which, if nothing else, was needlessly prolonged will haunt them for a century, especially in the south. If the campaign wasn’t simply sectarian, it was a war crime, ethnic cleansing, a crime against humanity, and genocidal. All those phases of the public discussion are yet to come.

Truth is a moving target liable to bite back. It is best left to historians not political campaigning.

**RED AND WHITE POPPIES**

**5 November 2013**

I have an uncle and a cousin buried in the same war cemetery in Libya near Benghazi. They were killed months apart although I don’t know if either knew the other was nearby. Both were at my parents’ wedding in 1939 and were to be dead three years later.

My mother’s brother was in the Royal Engineers. He died aged twenty-nine. I am named for him. His widow only died in 2007. Their cousin Raymond wasn’t in the military. He was a conscientious objector and had joined a Friends Ambulance Unit attached to the Free French Army. I am thus in a fairly unique position of being entitled to wear a red and a white poppy on Remembrance Sunday.

Raymond worked first in Syria and then Egypt and finally in Libya. Just before he died he wrote “We have had some busy and exciting hours but no casualties. The main Unit (am now writing in the bottom of a slit trench - halt for dive bombing) has started on some of the hardest and most satisfying work we have done since the Unit came out - working in a filthy hospital among tired and understaffed personnel doing a really splendid job.” Three days later he was killed in the same slit trench aged twenty-three. Raymond’s partner lived on until 1994.

His parents were luckily reconciled to his decision to be a CO before he left for the Quaker brigade. Otherwise their earlier estrangement, only to be followed by letters of condolence from various Cadbury and Rowntree comrades and from French Generals talking of his bravery would have been unbearable. Anita Leslie, daughter of Sir Shane from Co. Monaghan served in the same ambulance unit writing ‘*A Story Half Told: A Wartime Autobiography’* which is both a human and horrifying war memoir, well worth getting hold of.

I respect the sacrifice both made in their different, civilised ways. They didn’t start or prolong a war. Like the 1,000 people killed in the Belfast blitz in 1941, they are history. However each has a story which should be collected and told. Historical disputes about the reasons and justifications for this and every war will continue and are valuable, if only to learn how to prevent future conflicts. Some like the Second World War have a more comprehensible and ethical aspect than others but all have unexpected courses and unforeseen consequences. Unpicking and rewriting history is however not a worthy process and will lead only to demoralisation.

**BIN WORRIES IN BELFAST**

**31 October 2013**

Belfast council’s waste management department is making radical changes to bin collection across the inner city. Some 55,000 homes are losing their weekly black bin round and have been issued instead with four vari-coloured ‘Kerby’ boxes.

A green one is for food waste. It has a separate brown inner segment or ‘caddy.’ ‘Plastic pots,’ whatever they are, can now be collected as well as Tetrapak cartons and should be placed in maroon or black boxes, in a confusing mix. These will be emptied every week by Bryson Recycling, as at present.

Big savings are expected in landfill charges. However No mention is made of any rates reduction given that large numbers of cleansing staff will only have work every other week. Will there be job losses? On this aspect we need assurance and a promise of lower rates.

However inner city south Belfast, where I live, is not the same as the leafy suburbs. Wheely bins there are perfectly presented with the right recyclable material in the correct receptacle. This however is a zone replete with HMOs - houses of multi-occupation - where even having a wheely is an achievement and, if existing, are often placed illegally on the pavement, creating difficulties for the disabled and those with prams.

During the council’s, now fortnightly, rounds, we are told “additional black bags, or side waste along with the bin, will not be collected”. The black bag is far from a rarity on HMO streets while they and wheely bins are vulnerable to teams of hokers who run a personal recycling service - without a tidiness protocol.

The peremptory tone from the council about the changes would be tolerable if it works. But after a few weeks you only need to look at some of the streets to know. The Kerby boxes lining the pavement are stuffed with waste of every vile description and thus go unemptied by Bryson, while the wheelies are overflowing on the eighth day. The result is litter strewn all over the streets and the pavements blocked. And I fear much less material for recycling, instead a soggy mass.

It won’t work in HMO areas. I just hope the council has a review mechanism and a reverse gear but given the three year contracts I won’t be holding my breath.

**CASEMENT PARK**

**21 October 2013**

This weekend in Tralee there will be a big conference on Roger Casement, close to where he landed off a German submarine in 1916. The event is organised by the American University of Notre Dame. Casement was accompanying an arms shipment for the Easter Rising, this being the second cargo of guns he had shipped into Ireland. The first was in 1914 at Howth.

As a Casement biographer and the only publisher of all his Black Diaries, my talk is on the peculiar fact that Casement is celebrated in Ireland despite coming from Berlin to thwart and postpone the Easter Rising, while British Intelligence knowing of the arms shipment and the Rising failed to take adequate measures to frustrate both. Some in London foolishly thought it better to let the Rising proceed and the ‘festering sore’ be cut out, so Dublin Castle was not told of the deciphered German messages. One of those key players was Major Frank Hall of Narrow Water Castle in Warrenpoint who was ‘Q’ in M.I.5.

Significantly none of the Tralee conference talks addresses Northern Ireland or Casement’s signal failure – the creation of a united Ireland. A century of partition was the result of his efforts, not least because he lacked empathy for those very Ulster Protestants he claimed to belong to. He had in fact been brought up in England, only coming to a boarding school in Ballymena as a teenager.

Exactly a century ago he organised a famous meeting in Ballymoney for Protestant Home Rulers on the ‘Lawlessness of Carson’. His separatism and Anglophobia however left most cold and there were no further meetings. The Dublin government which is internationally proud of Casement’s human rights investigations and achievements - when a British diplomat in Peru and the Congo, ironically plays down his successful role in Irish revolution and his hanging.

The renaming of a Dungiven hurling team after Kevin Lynch, an INLA hunger striker, was raised against Peter Robinson’s much praised speech at a dinner celebrating the GAA’s cross-community achievements. A fellow Dungiven republican and GAA celebrity, Joe Brolly, said people “could like it or lump it”; naming after paramilitaries was “nobody else’s business”. That the premier Gaelic ground in Ulster is called Casement Park was then used as an example of another such historic reality, one justifying his blunt remarks.

And there is a certain rationality in what Brolly said. Attempts to square circles between Unionism and Nationalism often make matters worse by exacerbating those unchangeable differences. Ethnic disputes never get resolved; they are best put into cold storage once people agree to disagree.

**CARSON A TERRORIST?**

**14 October 2013**

Tuning into Sunday Sequence last week, I heard Jim Allister cross swords with BBC presenter William Crawley on whether Sir Edward Carson was a terrorist. Crawley had suggested this possibility since he “had taken up arms organising against the state”. This is of course the current nationalist, and now even the Methodist view of Carson, that he introduced the gun to Irish politics. It conveniently ignores the United Irishmen in 1798, Robert Emmet’s 1803 rising, the 1848 Young Irelanders led by John Mitchel, and the 1867 Fenian rising, not to mention the 1882 Invincibles Phoenix Park assassinations.

In Carson’s own time, the nationalist view was that he was bluffing. Failure to take him seriously led to Asquith and Redmond’s refusal to compromise on Home Rule in relation to Ulster and the inevitable partition. Many of the forebears of those who decry Carson signed the 1912 Covenant and, if young males, joined the UVF although many in east Ulster today are embarrassed about it. Not very British. But even London accepted Ulster could not be coerced, the mobilised social forces being too great.

Carson, a reluctant warrior, realised that unorganised resistance would almost certainly lead to great loss of life. He decided to lead from the front. The Protestant all-class alliance was a people’s national response and one which did not descend into terror, rather preventing it. Its opposite number the Irish Volunteers (Oglaigh na hÉireann) in 1916 were acting for a minority of nationalists. They failed to create a Gaelic and separate Ireland ending up with a 26-county Catholic state, much as Unionists predicted.

The other speaker in the programme was the Rev Lesley Carroll of the Presbyterian Church, a member of the Eames Bradley Consultative Group on the Past. Her view of terrorism revealed a new and equivocal concept within the reconciliation world.

She accepted that the first decade of killings were terroristic. However under questioning said, “by the end of the 1970s things had fallen into such a state of collapse we were running a system of informers where nobody knew what we were really doing and it was just a general mess.”

Her view, when drilled down, is that the thousand+ murders from 1980 were not morally culpable because the state’s security response makes such a judgment impossible. There will be much more of this if the rewriting of history is not resisted.

**CONSOCIATIONALISM AND BRENDAN O’LEARY**

**7 October 2013**

Last week QUB was graced by the return of Professor Brendan O’Leary now of Pennsylvania University. He was giving a lecture entitled “Remarkably Successful Power-Sharing in Northern Ireland: Reflections on Excessive Ingratitude, Especially Among the Astonished.”

This self-regarding title was probably justified as having started off as an adviser to Labour’s shadow Secretary of State Kevin McNamara, he is widely credited as the academic who created our current power-sharing arrangement. Known as Consociationalism, it basically differs from the earlier model by dividing the spoils of government proportionately between the big parties.

Each get a due number of ministries under the D’Hondt system (the brainchild of Pat Bradley the then Chief Electoral Officer) while decisions requiring agreement at the centre are then negotiated, but only in crisis. These are the difficult decisions as it is relatively easy to spend money or allocate resources in each ministry. O’Leary felt if decisions are parked there is no great downside as government continues, for the most part, on its parallel lines. The system leads however to impasse and to nothing ever changing – not unlike the previous Unionist era from 1920 to1970!

This lecture was not just an exercise in self-congratulation, as O’Leary ably pointed out how effective Stormont had been in its, admittedly, small number of fully-functioning years. He instanced a somewhat dubious comparison with Scotland, saying each devolved assembly had passed a similar amount of legislation.

He also noted how the boot was often on the other foot with the police now having a crisis of acceptability in Protestant areas; British support having weakened (although not in the key financial area) and Unionist ‘hegemony’ ending forever.

This all rather denied the view of an equally famous political scientist from the 1960s, Richard Rose, who famously said, “The problem of Northern Ireland is there is no solution.” Nonetheless the death rate had plummeted to an all-time low which O’Leary was pleased to say was another plus point of the new arrangements. (I did point out that the level of killing depended more on paramilitaries choosing not to murder.)

The Professor reserved a final criticism of the ‘others,’ the centre parties and the reconciliation community, who had not achieved such items as the Bill of Rights and were needlessly promoting integrated integration when a consociational system needed strong, separate schooling. He had a good first point.

**RECLAIMING THE NORTH**

**30 September 2013**

The decision in the Irish Constitutional Convention on Sunday to allow voters in Northern Ireland to take part in southern presidential elections is witless and harmful. It was decided to add one million Ulster electors to the Republic’s rolls which would gerrymander the result, with non-residents selecting a head of state - who would become a rival in legitimacy to the Queen.

The practical problems are even more awkward. Will the NI electoral roll be purchased and will sight of an Irish passport be required or simply proof of Irish nationality in the form of your granny’s birth certificate?

We are all nationals of Eire, confusingly also known in the constitution as Ireland, whether we like it or not. The welcome dropping in 1998 of the Articles 2 & 3 claim, approved by a mammoth percentage (94%), did not alter the fact that anyone born here (of Ulster parentage) is an Irish national and potential voter. What was removed was the irredentist claim to another EU member’s territory, one that gave political justification to the IRA over decades.

This hare brained scheme effectively unpicks the Belfast Agreement. Michael McGimpsey who launched a legal challenge to the claim in 1985 has wisely remarked, “The image would be then, it’s really Articles 2 and 3 in their old form, that the national territory is the island of Ireland.” Even the Alliance Party has cautioned against the move, saying “the Agreement did not create joint authority or sovereignty. Instead it stresses NI as part of the UK ... it would alter the constitutional balance”.

At the same time as this push north, two elements of southern society which used to contain significant numbers of northerners are threatened: Trinity College Dublin where 25% of students in my day came from NI now has 2%, while Enda Kenny is scrapping the Senate which gave a place to Protestant and other dissenting traditions, as well as voices from Ulster.

Regardless of the above arguments, the change is not going to happen as the last thing the south wants is nordies having a role in governing ‘Ireland’.

**WARRINGTON**

**23 September 2013**

Martin McGuinness’s visit to Warrington, on initial examination, seems brave and what he said was well-received excepting thoughtful criticism from Unionists. Going into what turned out not to be the Lion’s Den, his only opposition was from the relatives of those 21 humans horribly murdered in the Birmingham bombings of 1974. Theirs was a rare expression of mainland opposition to the overwriting of their history.

The story of the hundreds of soldiers from England, Scotland and Wales who died so quietly to keep the peace in Northern Ireland continues to go unwritten. That their deaths led to little or no political opposition against the army’s presence in Northern Ireland is something that needs restated, and indeed researched. The 'Troops Out Movement' was a dog that hardly barked. A very few books like those of Ken Wharton ('A Long Long War') deal with ‘Operation Banner’ and the huge numbers involved, directly as soldiers, or through families at home.

Their sacrifice went almost unremarked compared to the extensive coverage by the BBC, for one, of every British soldier’s death in Iraq or Afghanistan. But then there is a certain political harvest to be gathered today in emphasising each such casualty which was not apparent between the death of Gunner Robert Curtis in 1971 and Lance Bombardier Stephen Restorick’s in 1997.

McGuinness only had to fear the sense of his own shame. Ostracism was not a danger as Colin Parry had guaranteed a respectful reception. He does not forgive the IRA, the organisation, but seems willing to forgive those actually involved, at all levels, of the murder of his son Tim in March 1993 and of the baby Johnathan Ball. Time has eased his pain, helped by the huge effort he has put in to creating the Warrington Peace Centre. The visit for him underlined the efficacy of that work. The conflict in Northern Ireland has ended or at least the Provisional IRA has disbanded and gone into government.

Its problem is the legacy of the two thousand deaths caused by Republicans. They will haunt Sinn Fein for decades, popping up unexpectedly and derailing their attempt to assume the mantle of de Valera and Lemass, the first Fianna Fail leaders, who in a real sense also had blood on their hands.

Some of the more notorious Troubles atrocities involving civilians can, Sinn Fein hope, be decommissioned with carefully crafted statements of regret. But when drilled down, words like unjustified or shameful are chosen only because they are not, and cannot be, used to describe the IRA campaign proper. It was shameful that two boys were killed. Their deaths are not justifiable as they were not the intended targets, and so on.

What went unsaid was that the bomb in Warrington was the rawest of terrorist acts. It also had the hallmarks of revenge, the particular Republican mode of revenge. Bridge Street Warrington was no economic target but the town had to pay a price for the capture of two IRA men who a month earlier had bombed an economic target, the Warrington gasworks.