


UNITY

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Johnson runs down the clock! But has he overplayed his hand?

SO, late on the 3rd of September 2019. The political commentators on all news channels proclaim another momentous day in the battle of Brexit. The day started off with the government having a majority of one, by the time Johnson rose to the despatch box in the afternoon one of his MPs in dramatic fashion walked across the floor to the benches of the Liberal Democrats.

It was pure theatre, as its designed to be, but he had played his hand and now the cards were being turned over. Boris Johnson on his first test in the house of commons had failed to keep his rebels in line, lost his working majority even with the 10 plinths from the DUP. He has lost control of the parliamentary debate. MPs opposed to an exit without a deal went on to win a vote to take control of the parliamentary agenda.

The PM looked flustered as he reiterated an earlier threat to call a general election. He says he doesn't want one and pointed to Jeremy Corbyn and claimed he doesn't want one either. We will have a clearer picture by the end of this week but a general election sometime in the Autumn looks nailed on.

The politics of all this manoeuvring and game playing is hard to keep track of. As some MPs can

By Mel Corry

hardly hide their delight at getting one over on Boris others argue that this was part of the plan all along. Even before the vote was taken and the tory rebels were stripped of the whip, Ken Clarke former chancellor of the exchequer argued that Johnson, whatever happens, will walk into a general election wrapped in the union jack declaring he is standing up for the people's choice against the evil Europeans. This is the likely strategy in a general election.

After calling relentlessly for a general election Jeremy Corbyn appears to be on the back foot, he is acutely aware that jingoism will play some part in a general election.

Corbyn has one eye on his leave constituencies and the other on his Blairite MPs. He has indicated that under the current circumstances he will not give Johnson the 2/3rds majority he needs to call an election.

This position will surely expose him to some ridicule amongst his opponents. In the background lurks the shadowy Farage and his Brexit party ready and willing to give Boris a hand in taking Labour votes in Labour heartlands.

The question is whether a general election clears the decks or return a

similar breakdown. Labour needs a solution to the problem of Europe in order to mobilise around a progressive manifesto such as the popular 'For the many not the few'. The Tories underestimated the power of that message in 2016 and may well do so again.

The shenanigans in London have overshadowed the potential for any return to Stormont here. The DUP have more to gain as kingmakers in London rather than legislators in this place. In Sinn Fein it seems that John O'Dowd is preparing a move to oust Michelle O'Neill as Vice President of Sinn Fein and consequently its Northern leader.

Its hard to know whether this is a move from the right in Sinn Fein or from the Left or indeed if it will be successful the interesting thing is that the challenge is happening at all.

So the Question remains has Johnson got a cunning plan to crash out of Europe and ride back into Downing Street on a white charger or has he overplayed his hand and underestimated the resolve of his opponents, domestic and in Europe.

As Jacob Rees Mogg drapes himself prostrate on the green benches it becomes clearer that the ruling class contempt for the people and the British contempt for the Irish people remains as strong as ever.

Editorial

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Political manoeuvring

THERE is no doubt that the decision to suspend parliament is nothing short of a political manoeuvre by the government. However there are some on the pro-EU anti-Brexit side who are also adept at political manoeuvres. Their argument, like the People’s Vote campaign, is not so much about the right of parliament to discuss the question of a no-deal Brexit but more about the stopping of Brexit all together. This, alongside the call, now adopted by Labour, for a second referendum, is of the same scenario, another bite of the cherry, as they say.

In our part of the world the backstop argument is just another example of political manoeuvring to thwart the UK wide vote, a political entity of which Northern Ireland is still a part of until the people decide otherwise, as outlined in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA).

We are constantly told by these people that Brexit threatens the GFA yet it can be said that their commitment to it now seems superficial. They also claimed that leaving the EU breaches the consent principle but the Supreme Court ruled in 2017 that the principle only refers to a choice between the union and a united Ireland.

Not to be outdone they then argued that 142 cross-border policy areas under the GFA require EU membership.

That line suffered the same fate as the consent argument. In other words it was a nonsense.

Of course they have their allies from across the water.

Last week we had Liberal Democrat MEP Chris Davies visiting and telling us that Brexit will lead to an unprecedented tide of violence, and politicians will have “blood on their hands.”

Remember the then Liberal Democrat leader Vince Cable warning us that the flow of Guinness in the north would dry up ? The last thing we need is advice from these people.

What we do need is a People’s Brexit. However the events of the last few days and the present position of the Labour Party leave us to believe that may be just a pipe dream.



Saturday 28th September:

Abortion Rights Campaign March for Choice, Dublin. Sun Assemble at Garden of Remembrance, 2 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday, October 5th and 6th World BEYOND War’s fourth annual global conference on the abolition of war in Limerick, Ireland. Rally on the 6th at Shannon Airport, where U.S. military forces routinely pass through in violation of Irish neutrality and of laws against



Unity Appeal Fund

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MEDIA REVIEW

What is loyalism ?

IN his page recently *Irish News* columnist Alex Kane referred to Radio Ulster's Nolan Show broadcast on 21 August which devoted 90 minutes to the "supposed" marginalisation of loyalist opinion and voices in the media.

At the end of it Kane, whose political views are of the unionist variety, declared that he was none the wiser to what loyalist or loyalism actually meant.

He put this down to the fact that the two protagonists, Jamie Bryson and Jim Wilson didn't go into any detail.

He did write that it was not entirely their fault as he wasn't sure there was a catch-all definition of the term, let alone a single, coherent message.

He asks who, for example, speaks for loyalism ?

Is it the Ulster Political Research Group (UPRG), which is connected to the UDA ?

Or the Loyalist Communities Council whose formation had an input from David Campbell (former chief adviser to David Trimble) and Jonathan Powell (former adviser to Tony Blair) and linked to the UVF, UDA and RHC ?

Or the East Belfast Cultural Collective and East Belfast Initiative which have links to Bryson ?

***Or the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) which is left of centre on socio/economic issues many of which have roots in loyalist areas ?

Or the UVF, UDA and their offshoots ?

Or the crowd gathered at Avoniel during the bonfire stand-off ?

Or the crowd at the vigil for Ian Ogle, the man murdered as part of a UVF linked feud in East Belfast ?

To this he adds that one thing is clear, it's nonsense to pretend there is such a thing as a cohesive loyalist constituency.

He then adds, what is the support base for loyalism ?

Measured in electoral terms, he writes, it looks small.

The PUP has only three councillors out of 462 and 5,338 votes out of 675,577; less than the Greens, People Before Profit and Aontu.

He adds to this that even if you factor in the independent unionist councillors with loyalist roots it only brings the overall vote to around 7,500.

He then states there is evidence to suggest that voters in some loyalist areas are voting for the DUP, UUP and TUV; which could be interpreted as meaning they regard those parties as representing their interests.

If that's the case then he asks a further question. Who are the "marginalised" loyalists not being heard by the media ?

Kane then quotes a whole host of people from all strands of unionism, including in the past six months, "new and interesting voices" from pro-unionist backgrounds which leads him to state that it is a wide array of opinions and ask who is not being heard ?

What case is going unheard ?
He appreciates that work is

being done with transition programmes in some loyalist areas, encouraging young people in particular to look forward rather than backwards.

However, he makes the point that in other places all some young people seem to hear is top-heavy stuff about a new pan-nationalist front; the demonising of the Alliance Party; complaints about two-tier policing; the one-way trajectory of the Good Friday Agreement; and the pending destruction of loyalist culture.

He quotes Jim Wilson who blames the media, particularly the Sunday papers, for "demonising" loyalism.

Kane accepts there is an element of fair comment in his claim but he adds that that this is a decades-old problem that hasn't been addressed in a coherent, strategic way by the groups and voices claiming to speak for loyalism.

Kane tells us that whilst Wilson acknowledged on the Nolan Show that there is a problem he believes that complaining about it won't make it go away.

He adds that picking a fight with the media and complaining about liberal elites and "acceptable" voices is pointless.

He makes the point that there is no shortage of unionist/pro-Union voices in the media but if there is a voice and message not being heard then the answer is to find the people who are capable of articulating a coherent message that isn't being heard at the moment.

They could start by telling us what loyalism really is, although I dare say you might get umpteen different versions.

W. Ows

Taking a Look at Life.....by Raymond O'Connell

Sweet Home

JUST before the summer recess I wrote an article on Anna Burns' *Milkman* set in north Belfast. *Sweet Home* by Wendy Erskine is a collection of short stories set in east Belfast.

However, while they have Belfast as a setting they present very different realities of their respective districts.

This is explained in part by the different decades in which they are set.

Milkman is set during the violent recent past while *Sweet Home* has a contemporary setting.

In *Milkman* the area is graphically depicted and while there are a few dissenting or detached voices there is also cohesion around the political situation and acceptance, if not always total commitment to the struggle which has upended what might be called the 'social norms'.

In *Sweet Home* the geographical location is not always referred to specifically and the feeling is of a society with much more diffuse 'norms'. It is though evidently protestant – mostly with a small 'p', although only two of the stories are related to the violent past.

The title is deeply ironic as for most people 'home' is anything but sweet.

What links the stories is fractured relationships, in some instances tragic, within a society which is in many ways alienated from itself.

The title story begins "The name usually given to this type of building – community centre – was rejected since it was thought to be pejorative in its suggestion of entrenched cultural and political ideologies.

People's centre, however, was considered more inclusive so people's centre it was."

This can be taken in several ways. It can refer to the disparate nature of the area, politically, socially and through the intersection of the secular and the religious.

It can also be taken as a criticism of Catholic/nationalist/republican societies/areas with their supposed homogeneity.

Conversely it may refer to the chant I recall from my childhood: "we are the people."

In many ways the first story *To All Their Dues* introduces a number of the recurring themes: fractured relationships; alienation; women's vulnerability; an air of menace lurking close by.

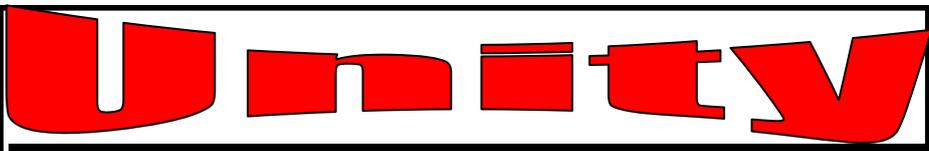
A young woman opening a beauty salon business only to be intimidated for protection money by a guy carrying a briefcase, whose girlfriend, a lapsed prod who is also "barren" and tolerates his infidelities afraid he will leave, goes for treatments in the beauty salon wondering how the window got broken.

Is she attracted by the treatment or also by the young woman?

This problematic set of relationships is explored in a range of ways in many of the other stories.

The writing is accomplished and they are told through a combination of humour, pathos and a firm grasp of the nature of the area, its people and their lives.

All set within a non-judgemental framework – we are left to draw our own conclusions.



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