

AUGUST 2018

UNIONIST

VOICE NEWSLETTER



FIRST EDITION

**KATE HOEY MP WRITES EXCLUSIVELY ON
THE ZIMBABWEAN ELECTIONS**

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH RANGERS
LEGEND NACHO NOVO**

THE 'GLENANNE GANG' MYTH IS EXPOSED

AND MUCH MORE....

Inside this issue:

Editorial	3
News Snippets	4-7
The myth of the 'Glenanne Gang'	8-9
Kate Hoey MP on Zimbabwean elections	10-11
In Pictures– Criminalising culture	12-13
Paul Peterson writes on our current prison system	14
Exclusive interview with Rangers legend Nacho Novo	15
Moore Holmes writes on Brexit	16-17
Why Loyalism must oppose the proposed legacy structures	18
'Progressive' Pan-Nationalism is trying to use Brexit to destroy the union	19
A Loyalist perspective on the targeting of east Belfast bonfires	20-21
Alison Blayney writes on the challenges facing women's education	22
Legacy Statistics	23



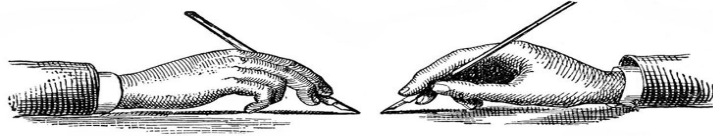
FOLLOW US ON TWITTER
@UNIONIST_VOICE

EDITORIAL
@JAMIEBRYSONCPNI



@REALUNIONISTVOICE

Editorial



By Jamie Bryson

Welcome to the first edition of Unionist Voice's monthly downloadable magazine.

Unionist Voice began in August 2017. The concept was to provide grassroots unionism with a platform to articulate political views and opinions, but also to launch a unionist fight-back to the relentless stream of propaganda emanating from nationalism and the wider 'progressive' pan-nationalist coalition.

I am confident in saying that the initial year of Unionist Voice has been a success. The site has broken a number of 'news' stories, but most crucially played a key role in rallying grassroots opposition to the proposed DUP-Sinn Féin deal. Alongside this we have focused heavily on highlighting the legacy imbalance and keenly followed the Loughinisland case through the courts, being the only site to consistently highlight the mistruths being spread within the mainstream media. We were eventually vindicated on this front when it became clear that Mr Justice Weir had not previously represented any of the applicants in the Loughinisland judicial review case.

In November we launched Unionist Voice Policy Studies, a grassroots unionist think-tank designed to debate innovative policy ideas. We provided a substantive written submission to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at Westminster and were invited to give verbal evidence to the committee sitting in the Thatcher Room in Westminster.

Unionist Voice exists to allow disenfranchised sections of unionism to have a platform and the space to debate and discuss not only the political issues of the day, but

also community issues that have an effect on citizens' day to day lives.

This month's first edition of our newsletter carries a range of articles covering a broad spectrum of political, community and social issues. These include an exclusive article by prominent Labour MP Kate Hoey, an exclusive interview with Glasgow Rangers legend Nacho Novo, a focus on Brexit and women's education on top of a plethora of news snippets and other contributions.

We have reproduced an in-depth critical analysis of the recently released 'Glenanne Gang' film, and highlighted the trajectory of the republican propaganda woven throughout such legacy projects.

I am proud to say that Unionist Voice has launched such an ambitious project as our monthly magazine, and I think the level of contributors sets it apart within Unionism in terms of a dedicated publication.

Our plans for the next year are numerous, and we have mapped out an ambitious strategic development plan for Unionist Voice. This includes, as part of our re-launched site, providing regular email bulletins to those that wish to sign up. In the coming months we also plan to host a number of discussions which will be available to view on YouTube. These discussions will bring together grassroots unionism and critical voices from within journalism, civic society and the legal sector to debate live political issues. This, we hope, will provide a further forum for grassroots unionism to engage in the 'battle of ideas' and to formulate and develop political positions that can advance the cause of unionism.

One of our strategic objectives is addressing the one sided legacy narrative through the medium of storytel-

ling. Walk into any bookstore and go to the Irish history section and you will find shelves and shelves of books written by, or about, Irish republicans. You will find very little, if any, books written by loyalists or unionists. That story hasn't been told and Unionist Voice is currently working to develop a mechanism for older generations of loyalists to commit their experiences to writing.

However, let me be very clear. There is a vast difference between writing about experiences, and self-incriminating yourself or others. Often for loyalism there has been no distinction between the two. I personally would urge all loyalists to keep their own counsel in relation to matters for which they have never been convicted, and instead to focus on telling their stories in the context of hardships faced by their families, the loss of friends or loved ones and of more light hearted memories of community camaraderie. If such experiences aren't properly documented and shared, then not only will the one-sided republican legacy narrative assume a pseudo 'factual' status, but those memories, experiences and hardships will die with the 'conflict generation' of loyalism.

Finally, we are passionate about encouraging political engagement within grassroots unionism, especially within a younger generation. As such we are always keen to hear from any young unionists that have an interest in journalism or digital media, or who simply want to engage in debate and commit their ideas to writing.

Thank you for taking the time to download or purchase our first edition. We hope you will join with us over the coming months and years to build a strong unionist voice.

“It has been interesting 2 (sic) watch the impact of dehumanising nature of Shinnerbot myth play out over the last few days.”

Niall O'Donnghalie takes to Twitter to complain about Sinn Fein trolls being challenged.

“No, absolutely not. It wasn't a sensible or balanced deal back in February, so I cant see how it would be a sensible or balanced deal today.”

Arlene Foster MLA on whether the February deal would be a baseline for further talks with Sinn Fein.

Niall O'Donnghalie stung by Shinerbot criticism

SINN FEIN senator Niall O'Donnghaile took to twitter recently to complain about Sinn Fein social media activists being labeled 'Shinerbots'.

The Short Strand man even went so far as to present the 'Shinerbots' as online victims. This is bizarre given that Sinn Fein are not only prolific trolls, with O'Donnghaile encouraging other Sinn Fein members to troll political opponents, but one

of their prominent members, from Short Strand, administers the online trolling site 'LAD'. Is it really appropriate that a political

party would operate an anonymous site to troll political opponents?



Foster again rules out standalone Irish language act

THE DUP leader Arlene Foster has again ruled out any stand alone Irish Language Act.

Speaking on BBC Good Morning Ulster on 1 August, Ms Foster made clear that there were no circumstances in which she could support a standalone Irish language act.

The comments come as SF demanded that the previous 'deal' was the baseline for any further talks. Grassroots unionism sent a clear message to the DUP at the time of the previous proposed 'deal', which later collapsed, and this message was that no form of Irish language act was accept-

able.

Opposition to any form of Irish language act was reaffirmed by the largest unionist grassroots organisation, the Orange Order on the 12th July.

The unionist community will not accept or tolerate any further concessions to Sinn Fein.

Sinn Fein demand media censorship of 'unhelpful' unionists

SINN FEIN have stepped up attempts to force the mainstream media to boycott unionist voices of which they do not approve.

Sinn Fein press officer Sean Maguire has repeatedly told BBC producers that Sinn Fein will not appear on programs with Unionist Voice editor Jamie Bryson, Jim Allister or Nel-

son McCausland. In the case of Mr Bryson and Mr McCausland Sinn Fein claim this is because they are unelected. This is despite the fact that Sinn Fein regularly engage with unelected nationalist commentators such as Chris Donnelly, Andree Murphy and Allison Morris.

Sinn Fein also share

panels with unelected unionists such as Sophie Long and Linda Ervine.

It appears Sinn Fein's real position is that they want to censor 'unhelpful' unionists and amplify those they deem to be 'helpful' unionists. This coming from a party that cried 'censorship' for years and had their voices banned.

Unionists blast Robinson's dangerous border poll comments

SENIOR DUP MP

Sammy Wilson has blasted comments by the party's former leader Peter Robinson.

Speaking at a summer school in the Republic of Ireland, Mr Robinson said that people should prepare for the possibility of a United Ireland and accept the result.

Sammy Wilson branded his comments "dangerous, disturbing" and "out of kilter" with the majority of

unionists.

The former DUP leader drew even stronger criticism from East Londonderry MLA Maurice Bradley who said Mr Robinson was "out of touch" with grassroots unionism.

Many unionists outside of the DUP, including the UUP's Lord Empey and TUV leader Jim Allister, also reacted furiously to the comments.

Unsurprisingly Sinn Féin, Alliance and the

SDLP all welcomed Mr Robinson's comments. A clear indication perhaps of how damaging his comments have proved to be.

Peter Robinson continues to work for property developer Paddy Kearney.

During the Nama scandal the then DUP leader denied any relationship with Mr Kearney. His claim was widely rejected and since leaving office Robinson has taken up a formal post with Kearney.

"Peter Robinson is entitled to his own opinion as a member of the public but I think he is out of touch with unionists on the ground, certainly unionists in my constituency would not share Peter Robinson's views."

Manchester Arena Islamic bomber was rescued by Royal Navy

THE ISLAMIC terrorist that bombed the Manchester Arena, killing 22 innocent people, was previously rescued by the Royal Navy.

Salaman Abedi was 19 years old when he boarded the HMS Enterprise in Tripoli in 2014.

It is understood that Abedi and around 100

other persons were taken to Malta from where they then caught a flight back to the United Kingdom.

The Islamic terrorist was on a security services watchlist when he travelled to Libya, but was taken off the list around a month prior to his rescue by the Royal Navy.

At the time of his rescue Abedi was on list of 'stranded' citizens who were to be rescued.

He returned to the UK and plotted the brutal and barbaric Islamic terror attack on the Manchester Arena which killed 22 people including women and children.

DUP East Londonderry MLA Maurice Bradley on Peter Robinson's United Ireland

"Here we have a former leader of unionism urging preparation for fulfillment of the republican dream."

TUV Leader Jim Allister on Peter Robinson

NIO Legacy consultation still open for submissions

THE NORTHERN IRELAND Office legacy consultation is open for just over another month.

The consultation accepts submissions from anyone. Unionism has traditionally been slow to engage with such consultation processes and this has often lead to the grassroots unionist viewpoint being

misrepresented, or entirely absent.

Nationalism is full of publicly funded 'legacy' groups such as Relatives for Justice and the Pat Finucane Centre. It is vital unionism challenges the extremely dangerous legacy proposals.

Anyone wishing to request a submission form

can do so by emailing legacy-consultation@nio.gov.uk or by writing to the Legacy Policy Team, NIO, Belfast T4 3SH. You can also complete a form online by visiting www.gov.uk/nio.

It is crucial that unionism engages in the consultation and puts forward the case for legacy balance.

“Maggie Thatcher would turn in her grave if she knew what they were doing to her boys..”

An Operation Banner veteran speaking on the witch hunt against those that served in Northern Ireland

“The border poll question should be put to one side until the dangers of Brexit are mitigated.”

**Mary-Lou McDonald 5:36pm
Monday 30
August 2018**

“Sinn Fein wants to see a Border Poll as soon as possible.”

**Mary-Lou McDonald
11:56am Tuesday
31 August 2018**

Bloody Sunday veteran breaks silence on legacy ‘betrayal’



A BRITISH ARMY veteran has spoken out about the relentless witch hunt against former members of the Armed Forces.

The veteran, who was recently interrogated in relation to events on Bloody Sunday in 1972, slammed the Governments ‘betrayal’ of British Army veterans.

There is growing anger at the one-sided witch hunt against former members of the armed forces that served in Northern Ireland, whilst IRA terrorists have benefitted from a de-facto amnesty in the form of Royal Pardons and on the

run letters.

Despite 90% of troubles related fatalities being attributed to non-state groups, the majority of which were carried out by the IRA, and only 10% attributed to the state, 30% of the PSNI’s legacy caseload is focused on the actions of the State.

There were around 47,000 troubles related ‘incidents’, only 2% of which are attributable to the state.

‘Hooded’ man found guilty of IRA activity in Dublin



KEVIN HANNAWAY, one of the so-called ‘hooded men’ has been found guilty by Dublin’s non-jury Special Criminal Court of helping the IRA and sentenced to three

years and nine months imprisonment.

Mr Hannaway was convicted after the court found he had a “central role” in interrogations carried out by the IRA at a house in Castleknock in Dublin. Gardi set up listening devices at the property and arrested five men.

The interrogations centered on allegations that the Gardi had been tipped off by an informer which had lead to IRA ‘operations’ being foiled by the Gardi.

The conviction of Hannaway will raise further questions about the continued existence of the IRA.

Mary-Lou McDonald forced into border poll u-turn

SINN FEIN leader Mary-Lou McDonald appears to have been forced into a humiliating u-turn by hard-line elements controlling the party.

On Monday evening Ms McDonald said that a referendum on Irish unity should not be held until after Brexit. This position was then dramatically re-

versed on Tuesday morning when the party leader issued a statement saying that Sinn Fein wants a border poll “as soon as possible”.

Former IRA ‘Adjutant General’ Gerry Kelly also done a round of interviews on Tuesday, directly contradicting the comments of Mary-Lou McDonald the

previous evening.

Many have pointed to the fact that Gerry Kelly was sent out to rebuff the leader as an example of the IRA Army Council voicing their disapproval with Ms McDonald’s comments.

A recent PSNI assessment re-affirmed the 2015 position that the IRA continue to ‘direct’ Sinn Fein.

Sinn Fein's position on EU referendums revealed

SINN FEIN voted no in every European Union referenda in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland from 1972 until the 2016 Brexit referendum when they dramatically changed their position.

Sinn Fein voted no in the following referendums:

Accession to the EU 1972

UK membership referendum 1973

Single European Act 1987

Maastricht Treaty 1992

Nice Treaty I 2001

Nice Treaty II 2002

Lisbon Treaty I 2008

Lisbon Treaty II 2009

Fiscal Compact 2012

Sinn Fein's 'progressive Europeanism' only became fanatical after the UK Brexit referendum of 2016, when the republican party saw an opportunity to try and wedge Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom via a form of

'special status' which would have seen Northern Ireland subsumed into an economic United Ireland within the Customs territory of the European Union.

Instead Brexit will put an end to nationalism's all-Ireland 'harmonisation' agenda due to the fact that a border will be required between the UK and the EU and quite possibly signal the end of the failed Belfast Agreement.

"The people who came out and voted 'no' in the South form the real conscience of the Irish nation and are saying that despite the purported benefits of the EU, their souls, their sovereignty, are not for sale."

Charity commission probes funding given to dissident groups

THE CHARITY COMMISSION is investigating donations made by the Joseph Rowntree trust to Teach Na Failte, an INLA linked ex-prisoners group which shares its offices on the Falls Road with the INLA's political wing.

The watchdog is demanding answers from the

trust after the IRSP offices were raided in April 2017 in connection with criminal enterprises, including drug dealing and prostitution.

Unionist Voice has also previously highlighted funding provided to Conflict Research Services Ireland, a dissident linked 'restorative justice' organi-

sation linked to RNU. This funding continued despite the offices being used to print terrorist material and a member of staff being convicted in court in connection with serious stalking of a woman. It is believed the particular employee has since been sacked by the organisation.

Ex-member of the IRA Army Council and former Sinn Fein Director of Publicity Danny Morrison

PSNI raise 'concerns' with Romanian families

AFTER UNIONIST Voice recently exposed the exploitation of the Romanian community in South Belfast by Nicolae Nicola and Sinn Fein's Mairtin O'Muilleoir the PSNI visited a number of Romanian families to enquire about their safety and whether they are being mistreated by others within their com-

munity.

The Romanian gang-master and O'Muilleoir have been working together in South Belfast to try and win votes for the IRA controlled party.

It is understood there are a number of mainstream media outlets investigating the claims and it is obvious that the PSNI are

now taking an interest, all thanks to the issue being highlighted by Unionist Voice.

PSNI left a card with Romanians they visited and urged them to contact them if they are threatened and intimidated. It is understood a number are considering making statements.

"The Romanian gang-master and O'Muilleoir have been working together in South Belfast to try and win votes for the IRA controlled party."

Exploitation in South Belfast exposed

A Republican myth – ‘Glenanne Gang’ film is IRA propaganda

By Jamie Bryson

In August 2018 a new film will premier. It is directed by the son of IRA Northern commander Sean ‘Spike’ Murray, also called Sean Murray. The film purports to investigate the so called ‘Glenanne gang’.

This film is based largely upon allegations made in the book *Lethal Allies* and interviews with a convicted murderer, John Weir.

The film also includes contributions from Pat Finucane Centre ‘caseworker’, Paul O’Connor. It has previously been alleged that Mr O’Connor is in receipt of an OTR letter in connection with the murder of a child.

Within Ms Cadwallader’s book, *Lethal Allies*, there is a subtle revelation as to the real narrative underpinning the work of republican legacy activists, and their publicly funded groups such as the Pat Finucane Centre (PFC) and Relatives For Justice (RFJ).

Within the book’s introduction Ms Cadwallader writes as follows; *“Collusion does not resolve conflict- it fuels it. The Historical Enquiries Team (HET) says that a belief among the nationalist community was taking place ‘contributed to the spiralling violence in the area’ and ‘UDR Soldiers, whether on or off duty, were considered prime targets for republican paramilitaries’.”*

At page 16 of her book *‘Lethal Allies’*, Ann Cadwallader is remarkably clear about the one sided nature of her research for the book. She writes *“I do not pretend to focus here, however, on anything other than loyalist violence and the members of one particular, and vicious gang.”*

And in *Lethal Allies* conclusion, referencing the allegations of collusion perpetuated within the book, it says;

“This is a debt the British government owes the entire Northern Ireland community. Not only Catholics and nationalists died as a result of this Irish mutation of British counter-insurgency strategy.

Protestants and unionists died too- and not only the ten who died at Kingsmill in the IRA response to the deaths in the Reavey and O’Dowd families. Hundreds of RUC officers

and UDR men died at the hands of young IRA recruits alienated from the state.” The subtle message from the introduction, the one sided nature of the research within the book, and the conclusion is that the actions of the IRA flowed directly from the actions of the British state, therefore providing some form of justification to the IRA’s terrorist campaign.

Disgracefully this narrative references the sectarian IRA slaughter carried out at Kingsmill, and the murders of UDR, RUC and British Soldiers, and suggests that these events were ultimately the fault of the British State due to the republican terrorists being motivated by ‘collusion’ between the British State and loyalists.

This highlights the quite blatant agenda at the heart of republicanism’s legacy agenda; to present IRA terrorism as a justified response to the actions of the British State. In order to bolster this narrative, republicanism puts much emphasis on attributing every action carried out by loyalists to ‘collusion’, therefore making the British State ultimately accountable for all actions carried out during the conflict.

This is all, of course, not just about re-writing the past in order to justify and sanitise the murderous acts of terrorism carried out by the IRA. The logical conclusion flowing from the ‘bad’ British and the ‘good’ IRA narrative is that the only way to resolve political conflict is for the removal of the British presence from Northern Ireland. This is the very core of republicanism’s argument for a United Ireland.

Therefore when assessing the purpose of Sean Murray’s new film, one need only turn to *Lethal Allies* to understand the republican legacy agenda and the narrative that underpins all research carried out by republican activists.

However, it is prudent to highlight the fanciful nature of many of the allegations contained within the film.

The film is reported as being based upon the actions of the ‘Glenanne gang’. Yet no such organisation ever existed. In fact the term ‘Glenanne gang’ only started being used, at the earliest, in the late 1990s. Therefore the fundamental premise of the film is flawed because it, and *Lethal Allies* before it, has created an overarching ‘gang’ to which all loyalist incidents in that particular area can be attributed.

The film relies heavily upon allegations made in a 1999 affidavit by John Weir. It is rather bizarre that for those continually stating that the state cannot be trusted, and who continually perpetuate the politically motivated collusion narrative, that they would all of a sudden hold up a former RUC officer and a convicted murder as a beacon of truth and justice.

Of course, many of the key persons named are no longer alive including Robert McConnell, James Mitchell, Robin Jackson, RJ Kerr and many others. They therefore have no opportunity to defend themselves. It is also worth pointing out that the Pat Finucane Centre and Relatives For Justice refused to call for the identities of the IRA OTRs and their alleged crimes to be made public, citing their right to due process, yet they take no issue in continually making unproven allegations against loyalists and former members of the security forces. John Weir is a convicted murderer, a fact acknowledged at paragraph 2 of his 1999 affidavit, who offered to give evidence against Robin Jackson and RJ Kerr, and implicate them in murder, if the charges against him were dropped. Therefore the selfish motivation of Weir was plain to see from the moment he was charged.

At this point Weir did not feel it prudent to make any of the further allegations that later appeared in his 1999 affidavit. Let us think on that. Here is a man offering to give evidence against Robin Jackson and RJ Kerr, therefore clearly a man desperate to do anything in order to save himself from an impending murder charge. Yet if Weir's later affidavit was to be believed, he was also in possession of information that could have lead to dozens of loyalists and security force members being charged with the most serious crimes, including the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, yet it never crossed his mind to leverage this information in furtherance of his objective, namely to be granted immunity?

The starting point of the 'collusion', according to Weir, is a 'realisation' that members of the security forces were involved in what he describes as loyalist terrorism. This was apparently 'confirmed' when a fellow RUC officer firstly informed him that James Mitchell was a loyalist paramilitary, and then expressed concern that Mr Mitchell or others may have been murdered.

Therefore, if we are to believe Weir, collusion was 'confirmed' by this interaction- which was based upon hearsay and a fellow officer expressing concern loyalists may have been murdered. It was therefore 'confirmed' in his mind that there was collusion, long before any alleged associates told him about it. This somewhat bizarre admission is contained at paragraph 6 of his affidavit.

Of course, almost all of Weir's affidavit is based on hearsay. For example, at paragraph 13 he outlines how then RUC officer Laurence McClure had told him about the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, and he then goes on- without providing a shred of evidence- to state these allegations as fact. Laurence McClure, in a television documentary, denied all of these allegations.

Therefore why do the allegations of Weir, a convicted murderer, carry more weight than the denials of Mr McClure?

Following his 1999 affidavit Weir met with Don Mullan for his book 'The Dublin and Monaghan Bombings', during this meeting Mr Mullan claims at page 217 of his book that Weir sought to distance McClure (referred to in the book as Officer A) from the bombings, and claimed that Officer A was "*not directly involved*" in the bombings. This therefore, by his own admission, moves Weir's alleged information to, at the very least, third-hand sources and thus places a serious question mark over its already questionable credibility.

If we are however to believe Weir's affi-

you believe existed?

Weir's affidavit was published by the Barron report in 2003. This report was relied upon heavily by Anne Cadwallader in *Lethal Allies*. Indeed within the book Ms Cadwallader states that following his enquires, Judge Barron was in no doubt that loyalists were actively protected by the security forces.

Yet within this report, in reference to Robin Jackson and others, Judge Barron says they were "**reliably said** to have relationships with British Intelligence and/or RUC Special Branch officers. It is reasonable to **assume** that exchanges of information

took place." officers. It is reasonable to **assume** that exchanges of information took place."

Therefore in Judge Barron's own words it was 'reliably said' loyalists had relationships with the security forces. He did not say he was in no doubt that loyalists were actively protected. The account put forward in *Lethal Allies* is quite simply a convenient interpretation applied to Judge Barron's words, and is not a true or accurate reflection of what he actually said.

It is also prudent to note that Judge Barron said it was "*reasonable to assume that exchanges of information took place*". Therefore in his own words the Judge is merely

assuming that there was 'collusion'. This is quite a long way short of him apparently being in '*no doubt*', as alleged by Ms Cadwallader.

It is abundantly clear that the latest republican legacy film, this time focused on the so-called 'Glenanne gang', is simply another attempt at furthering the legacy agenda of those wholly committed to not only re-writing the past, but in doing so providing a justification for the murderous deeds of the IRA.



davit, then he was brought to a meeting at a house owned by an individual called Gary Armstrong, prior to him joining what republicans have termed the 'Glenanne gang'. At this meeting, whereby a 'gang' of supposedly professional killers and bombers were inviting the as yet un-blooded and untrusted Weir to consider joining them, those present decided to provide their potential new recruit with a vast overview of the intricate details of every action they had carried out. Actions that could have landed them all in prison for the rest of their lives. Does this really sound like the professionally organised and secretive group of killers that the republican narrative would have

Standing Strong for Democracy in Zimbabwe



Former Government Junior Minister and current Labour MP Kate Hoey writes exclusively for Unionist Voice on her role as Chair of the UK All-Party Zimbabwe group.

Kate recently visited Zimbabwe to observe their election.

OVER THE last few weeks I have escaped from the doom mongers of the zealot Remainers and their dire warnings about life after Brexit to concentrate on the elections in Zimbabwe.

At the beginning of June along with Conor Burns MP I spent time in Harare and Bulawayo on behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK branch to report on the likelihood of a free and fair election on July 30th.

We met with a wide range of people from Government, opposition political parties, business and civil society as well as speaking to Zimbabweans going about their daily life both in Harare and Bulawayo.

It is worth remembering that elections in Zimbabwe since 2002 have been both violent and rigged. In 2008, the ZEC took more than 5 weeks to declare a result and more than 270 activists, almost all belonging to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) were killed. The last national polls in 2013 were relatively peaceful but internationally regarded as rigged. There was gross manipulation of the voters roll in favour of rural voters where Zanu PF have the greatest support.

Without doubt there was a different atmosphere in Zimbabwe. Gone were the police and army on the streets. In-

deed the once common police road blocks where drivers had to hand over money were virtually non-existent. The ousting of Mugabe last year by the military led to hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans coming out onto the streets to celebrate. The feeling that change had happened was widespread and overall there was an optimism amongst the general public that this would continue. The most common remark of the 'man/woman on the street' was "We want real change"! There was huge anticipation about change coming in the election.

But throughout common concerns about the election were expressed to us - the electoral roll being rigged; Military imbedded out of uniform in the rural areas; fear of reprisals as happened last time when the vote showed ZanuPF had not been supported. The failure to ensure access to the state media by the opposition and particularly in the countryside where people relied only on state radio. Virtually no coverage of the huge Nelson Chamisa (Leader of the MDC Alliance) rally's on state television and radio

The main roads leading into Bulawayo and Harare were awash with large billboards and posters of Mnangagwa and there is little doubt that the blurring of the state with Zanu PF meant huge extra resources for ZanuPF. The MDC

Alliance had not got the resources to even start to compete with the Governing Party. Virtually no-one felt the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission was independent of Government but hopes were high that despite all this and particularly with the presence of international observers there could still be a free and fair election.

On election day there were huge queues to vote and the turnout was the highest ever. At the polling stations the results were posted outside and the count was done for Parliament at the same time as the Presidential election. Yet it took 4 days for the Presidential result to be announced and then Mnangagwa was declared the winner and with 0.8 per cent more than was needed for a run off. The opposition have identified massive discrepancies in the vote—one example is in Mashonaland central where by 5pm 150,000 people had voted but in the next two hours until polls closed ZEC said 300,000 people voted!! Just one of many outrageous fixes by ZEC.

Without doubt the election has been cleverly rigged but even worse is the fact that it is the military that is behind the regime and they are now unleashing a similar

**“The courage
and self
sacrifice of
the
Zimbabwean
people is
humbling to
behold”**

**“We in the
International
community
cannot accept
the result of
the election
and the UK
Government
must take the
lead to ensure
the
Zimbabwean
Government
is seen for
what it is”**

Chamisa (Leader of the MDC Alliance) rally's on state television and radio

The main roads leading into Bulawayo and Harare were awash with large billboards and posters of Mnangagwa and there is little doubt that the blurring of the state with Zanu PF meant huge extra resources for ZanuPF. The MDC Alliance had not got the resources to even start to compete with the Governing Party. Virtually no-one felt the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission was independent of Government but hopes were high that despite all this and particularly with the presence of international observers there could still be a free and fair election.

On election day there were huge queues to vote

and the turn out was the highest ever. At the polling stations the results were posted outside and the count was done for Parliament at the same time as the Presidential election. Yet it took 4 days for the Presidential result to be announced and then Mnangagwa was declared the winner and with 0.8 per cent more than was needed for a run off. The opposition have identified massive discrepancies in the vote—one example is in Mashonaland central where by 5pm 150,000 people had voted but in the next two hours until polls closed ZEC said 300,000 people voted!! Just one of many outrageous fixes by ZEC.

Without doubt the election has been cleverly

rigged but even worse is the fact that it is the military that is behind the regime and they are now unleashing a similar fear and terror campaign on leading opposition activists and curbing all protests by killing and arresting innocent Zimbabweans.

The courage and self sacrifice of the Zimbabwean people is humbling to behold. We, in the international community cannot accept the result of the election and the UK government must take a lead to ensure that the Zimbabwean government is seen for what it is a mark 2 Mugabe regime and one that deserves no support whatsoever.

Kate Hoey MP

Hoey raises legacy imbalance with Secretary of State

Labour MP Kate Hoey recently challenged the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Karen Bradley, on the imbalance in regards to legacy.

Ms Hoey highlighted the statistics, which included the fact that 98% of troubles related incidents were carried out by non-state groups, the majority of which were the work of the IRA, and yet 30% of legacy investigations focus on the State.

The Labour MP also raised serious concerns in regards to investigations.

The PSNI have advised that those who were injured during the troubles will not have their cases re-investigated under the proposed new legacy structure.

The only cases to be re-investigated are those which resulted in fatalities. This means someone blown up in an IRA bomb, but who did not die, would be unable to have their case investigated by the PSNI under the new Stormont House structures.

Kate Hoey MP also pressed the Secretary of State on what she intends to do to protect our veterans who served under Operation Banner. The Secretary of State agreed that there was currently a legacy imbalance with a disproportionate focus on the state. Karen Bradley urged people to take part in the ongoing consultation on the legacy bill.

The consultation remains open until the end of the month.

People are sent to prison as a punishment, not to be punished writes Paul Peterson

“It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

Words of the revolutionary and former South African President the late Nelson Mandela, himself once incarcerated in penitentiaries, including among others the infamous Robben Island prison, speaks a message which every nation should take heed of.

If we ponder Mandela’s aphorism in the context of Northern Ireland’s prison regime what does it tell us about our Province and how we treat our prisoners and our prison service personnel?

Frequently we’re led to believe by representatives of the Prison Officers Association (POA) and Prison Service Management, that their members are under extreme duress as they seek to maintain functionality within the prison regime, while facing staff shortages, low pay, security fears and breaches and also poor managerial administration.

Many visitors to Northern Ireland’s prisons agree that whatever internal pressures the Prison Service is experiencing, it is undoubtedly having a detrimental knock-on effect upon prisoners and negative bearings on their families.

“It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails.”

What would an investigative walk around or a visit (never mind a sentence) tell us about our jails?

1. There is low morale among prison officers, among prisoners and civilian staff working inside the system, all of which impacts upon the lives of prisoners and their loved ones.

2. Suicide / attempted suicides, self-harm, psychosomatic illnesses, long term sickness and drug addic-

tion among prison officers and prisoners is extremely high.

3. Rising tensions between prisoners and prison staff could lead to further riots or altercations, simply because officers are forced to implement ‘go-slow’ or ‘lock-down’ procedures because the system cannot cope with the demands on its limited resources.

4. After numerous failed attempts to stem the tide of illicit drugs infiltrating prison security, each prison is rife with narcotics, openly sold to inmates at usurious rates.

“It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails.”

A day spent in any prison in Northern Ireland would highlight these current realities.

“A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

How often have we heard it said, “People are sent to prison as a punishment, not to be punished?” and yet our prison system seems to tie the hands of its officers, thus preventing them doing much to promote reform and rehabilitation of prisoners.

If prison authorities cannot administratively manage their own house and deliver a proactive program for change, first for its own personnel and then for those they are deemed to care for; what chance have our prisoners got to get the right support they need to turn their lives around and become positive contributors to the wider society?

Some refurbishment and aesthetically pleasing renovations may be taking place within the structural framework of our prisons, but let’s not be fooled by the outward appearance; our prisons for the sake of our prisoners, are still in dire need of reform.

We need to recognise the prison authorities are ours, we have ownership of them, and the prisoners (though some may view them as the lowest of citizens), are our citizens, citizens like us, citizens with us; there-

fore, we should be pushing for tangible changes that bring benefit to them and to all.

Within the terms of the failed ‘Belfast Agreement’ it was stated: ‘The governments’ continue to recognise the importance of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community by providing support (both prior to) and after release, including assistance directed towards availing of employment opportunities, re-training and / or re-skilling and further education.’ (Annex B Para 5)

In 20 years, what has been done to demonstrate the ‘governments’ recognition and support for prisoners?

In a 2010 Intercommunity Forum report ‘Beneath the Mask an Imperfect Peace’, presented to Ministers at Stormont, it highlighted among many other things, that 64% of men entering and / or leaving prison, suffered from personality disorders.

What does that say about the level of support, reform and rehabilitation given to our prisoners?

More men leaving prison than entering the system, exit with a new or more severe drug dependency problem which has a negative impact on wider society.

Is this how we treat our ‘lowest citizens?’

There are many failings within the prison managerial system which need addressed.

‘People are sent to prison as a punishment not to be punished’, yet we fail to treat our prisoners with the dignity, respect and humanity they deserve. This needs to change!

If we in Northern Ireland are judged by how we treat our ‘lowest citizens’, then we are all found wanting.

Paul Peterson is a drugs counsellor who has worked with prisoners & addicts for over 25 years.

Unionist Voice has spoken exclusively to Rangers legend Nacho Novo. The Ibrox hero tells us about the sectarian abuse at Belfast International Airport, why he believes Steven Gerrard will be a Rangers legend and his disappointment at being knocked back for the Glentoran job.

Nacho Novo was recently the victim of a tirade of threatening abuse as he arrived at Belfast International Airport, the incident was recorded by the perpetrator himself, Daire Smyth from Downpatrick, and published online. I started by asking the Rangers legend how he felt about the incident.

"A disgrace. It is hard to take when these things happen, however I am well used to it as it has happened to me so many times. He is not a sensible person, but I won't let anyone disrespect me. There has been a lot of coverage over incidents involving Neil Lennon, maybe not so much when it happens to a current or former Rangers player."

He continued "I met Neil Lennon a few times at charity events and other things, and he is fine, a nice person. No player or manager whether Rangers or Celtic should be subjected to abuse and threats."

Prior to the incident a number of Celtic fans posed for photos with the Ibrox legend, these are genuine football fans with whom he enjoys the banter. On them he said "they were nice boys, proper football supporters. I had banter with them and they had banter back, it wasn't nasty or threatening."

In Monday's Belfast Telegraph Smyth offered a half-hearted apology for the incident however Novo has rejected this saying "I don't accept his so-called apology. He has only given it because of the bad attention he brought on himself. He is sorry about the negative press he brought onto himself, not sorry for what he done. He wanted to act tough and a big man online to his

Mates. He was never going to get a reaction from me because he isn't a sensible person, but at the same time I am not going to run away from anyone, especially a bully like this man. He doesn't scare me." The purpose of the trip was to visit East Belfast Football Club's growing youth development set up, and the ex-professional had nothing but praise for the club. He said "They are doing a great job, I was really pleased to attend. It is amazing what they have done with the young kids, they do not get enough credit for this. I know many people in East Belfast and I know they have spent a lot of



time with the kids trying to build them up and set them on a path to professional football, but most importantly they are taking the kids of the streets."

He also had a word of praise for local football talent saying "there is lots of great football talent in Northern Ireland. It is how they are coached that matters and I think a lot of that talent could go far in professional football with the right coaching."

Nacho Novo makes no secret of his love for Glasgow Rangers, he describes it as simply "the best club in the world". He thinks the glory days will soon return to Ibrox under Steven Gerrard, and he lavished praised upon the Liverpool legend.

"I think he will be a phenomenal manager. I spoke to Stevie earlier in the week. He is a quiet lad and he knows it is going to go slowly, success won't come overnight. But Steven Gerrard is a winner, and that is what I like about him. He is abso-

lutely a winner and nothing else will do. He is a legend as a footballer player and I have no doubt he will be a legend as a manager at Rangers."

After many years living the dream as a Rangers player, Novo admitted he finds it difficult to replace those magical moments. When asked to highlight one, he says there are too many to mention, but specifically talks about the UEFA Cup semi final and Scottish Cup Final. You can sense this is a man who continues to pine for involvement at the highest level of the game.

"It is difficult to replace the buzz of being a professional player, I feel very low now. Football was my life, and especially after my heart attack it is more difficult. Football is all I know and am going to try and keep playing in some way. I am a winner, and I want to win, and I will always push myself too hard, so I have to be careful with my health. I miss it, it was the greatest time of my life playing for the greatest football club in the world."

Whilst he claims his days as a professional player are most likely over, he does not rule out a managerial or coaching role. He twice applied for the Glentoran job but was rejected on both occasions. He doesn't feel he was treated well by the board of the club.

He told Unionist Voice "I applied two times for Glentoran but wasn't successful. They weren't professional in how they treated me I believe. I believe it as a great club and that a professional ex player would have delivered success to the club. They didn't treat me well when I applied for the job."

Despite the set-back, the Ibrox legend remains upbeat and positive about the future.

"I will keep looking for avenues into the game that I love. I will always be a Rangers man and I will always love the club. It is the greatest football club in the world."

“Those who wish to see a reunification of Ireland are using Brexit to advance their dream of a 32-county state”

“There is an implicit logic in contingency planning and ‘insuring your house’ so to speak”

“There has always been a relatively unchallenged understanding that Northern Ireland’s place in the 5th largest economy is a good thing”



By Moore Holmes

Those who wish to see the reunification of Ireland are pouncing upon the uncertainty of Brexit and using it to advance their dream of a 32-county state.

Immediately after the majority of the British electorate voted Leave in 2016, Sinn Féin IRA and their followers intensified their efforts in trying to navigate a border poll onto the frontline of political discussion.

Whilst SFIRA have kept plugging away at the idea, the media have grown numb to their outbursts and the public clearly don’t share the same appetite or support for reunification (Queens University Poll in May 2018 - 59% In favour of NI in Union; 23% Against). All the more surprising therefore that it would be Peter Robinson, the former First Minister

and Unionist political veteran, who would further oxygenate the Republican cause by saying Northern Ireland should prepare for reunification.

Despite a bombardment of criticisms toward the former DUP leader, there is an implicit logic in contingency planning and “insuring your house” so to speak. That being said, Sammy Wilson put it best when he described Robinson’s words as an “invitation for republican arsonists to burn the house down.” *Robinson’s comments, logical as they are, fail to appreciate how they will be used as cannon fodder for the reunification agenda and add to the myth of its inevitability* – for that he is rightly criticised.

Around the same time a report was published by Irish Senator Mark Daly for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good

Friday Agreement. It was described as “the first ever report to look at the issues, policies and planning required for the peaceful unity of Ireland.” The Belfast Telegraph headlined, “Northern Ireland could be better off financially in a United Ireland – claims new report.” Again, it was another beat of the reunification drum launching an attack on one of the greatest reasons for Northern Ireland remaining in the UK – economy and finances.

For many Unionists this would have been unsettling. There has always been a relatively unchallenged understanding that Northern Ireland’s place in the world’s 5th largest economy is a good thing and dislocating us from that would have no financial reward. The report desperately tried to reverse that assumption and was again endorsed by many SFIRA members and reunificationists.

Frankly, upon inspection, *the report is over simplistic to the point of amateur, naively idealistic and completely neglects the obvious and ominous hardships that come with reunification.*

It attempts to eliminate Northern Ireland’s £9.2billion deficit by removing all the financial contributions Northern Ireland makes toward UK defence, UK debt interest, pensions, and central UK accounting matters. Additionally, it argues for the public sector to be more aligned with that of the Republic of Ireland – reducing its expenditure and therefore a significant part of its workforce.

“Unionists must stand up, make their voices heard and robustly promote the plethora of advantages of being in this great Union”

“The majority of people in Northern Ireland are overwhelmingly in favour of remaining in the United Kingdom—a positive Unionism will raise awareness of why it should remain so”

Dr. Morgenroth, a Professor of Economics at Dublin City University, questioned the report saying he was “surprised and a little bit bemused” at some of the calculations. He claimed the report failed to mention that “in a unified Ireland, Northern Ireland would be making financial contributions to Dublin,” and if put into practice, “there could be an increase in unemployment which would have to be paid for.”

The report fails to clarify whether the UK would realistically be willing, or legally obliged, to pay NI pensions accrued when part of the UK and how the public sector could be reduced in such a way that would save so much money, when the cost of redundancy and increase of unemployment would come with a burdensome upsurge of benefits – not to mention the added social unrest of many being laid-off.

Additionally, there was no telling of what finances must be paid to the Irish government, what share of debt Northern Ireland could take on for the Republic and what adverse effect creating barriers in Northern Ireland’s trading relationship with the mainland UK would have on the economy.

Whilst the report itself is wide of the mark and promises far more than it delivers, I do suspect we will be seeing much more of this type of argument in the near future. *The economic benefit to Northern Ireland being in the United Kingdom is so damning to the Republican cause that efforts will be made to reduce its importance and deny*

its advantage.

Unionism must however take note of the ongoing demographics in Northern Ireland and engage in the debate. The aftermath of the Brexit referendum has developed an even more polarised and partisan society that SFIRA and fellow reunificationists are seeking to capitalise on.

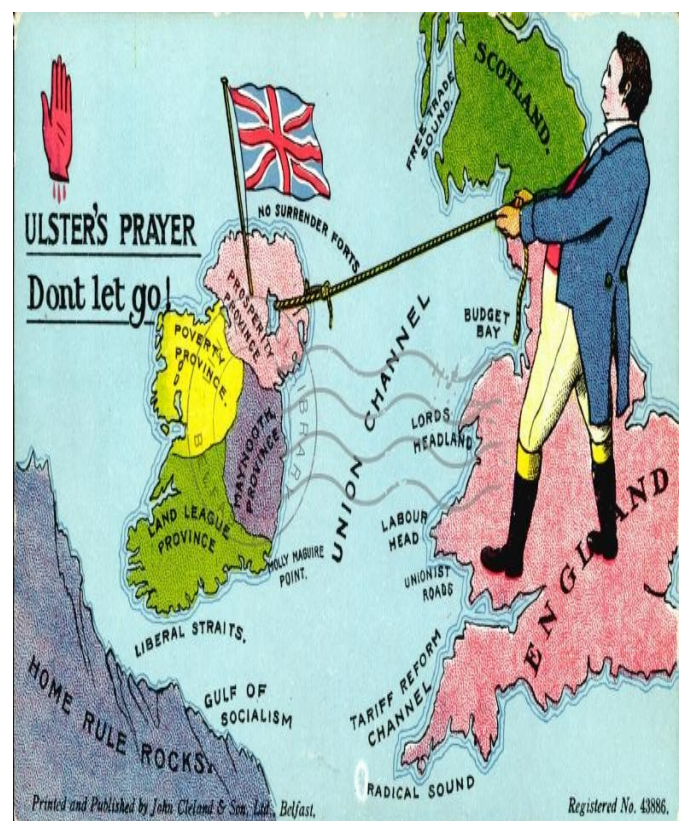
Unionists must stand up, make their voices heard and robustly promote the plethora of advantages that being in this great Union rewards us with, not to oxygenate the Republican agenda but to refute it. Not to comply with the myth of inevitable unification but to contest it.

A form of positive Unionism that emphasises the economic, political and social benefits of the

Union must take the mantel. A positive Unionism that belongs to everyone and is proud of the rich history of the United Kingdom and its significant role throughout the world. A positive Unionism that is not afraid to engage in the debate, that does not bury its head in the sand but confronts the challenges head on and demonstrates with reason and rhetoric just why this Union of nations is perhaps the greatest Union of all.

The majority of people in Northern Ireland are overwhelmingly in favour of remaining in the United Kingdom – a positive Unionism will raise awareness of why it should remain so.

Moore Holmes is a Belfast-based school teacher passionate about education, sport and human rights.



Why Loyalism must oppose the proposed legacy structures

THERE IS an increasing focus on legacy matters amidst the ongoing concern around the witch hunt against former members of the armed forces in relation to Northern Ireland troubles related incidents.

Alongside this there are a number of new legacy bodies proposed under the terms of the Stormont House Agreement, and these proposals are detailed in the current legacy consultation process which is open to take submissions from anyone within the United Kingdom.

Nationalists have continually sought to use the legacy process as an extension of their political campaign, and have regularly made pronouncements on their desire for 'truth' and 'justice'. These pronouncements run contrary to their actions.

Mary Lou McDonald, in an interview with the Newsletter's Sam McBride, stated that she could give no guarantees that the IRA would participate in any truth recovery process. Indeed, given that it is Sinn Féin's somewhat ludicrous position that the IRA no longer exist, then corporate IRA participation would in effect actually undermine Sinn Féin's own claims that they have ceased to exist as an organisational structure.

Nationalist victims groups, such as Relatives for Justice, are widely accepted to be fronts for Sinn Féin. When the UVF decided, via an interlocutor, to provide some truth in relation to Ballymurphy, Sinn Féin and their legacy front groups were incredulous. This quite clearly flushed out the fact that truth is not the desired outcome for nationalists, but rather their version of the truth is the ultimate objective.

It would be extremely foolish for any loyalist to engage in truth recovery under the terms outlined by the Stormont House Agreement legacy mechanisms. Such mechanisms will

run in parallel with a criminal investigation process, and despite Clause 45 of the proposed Bill stipulating that information received by the proposed Independent Commission on Information Retrieval would be inadmissible, Clause 45 sub section (4) is very clear that police authorities or a coroner would not be prevented from pursuing lines of enquiry disclosed by the Commission in a report to a family. This is also explicitly laid out at paragraph 155 of the legacy consultation explanatory notes on the proposed Bill.

Therefore information provided to



the Commission could, and almost certainly would, be used via the backdoor by using the reports provided as a means to generate new lines of criminal enquiry. Why then would anyone who had knowledge of, or had committed, a conflict related offence be foolish enough to open the door to inadvertently assisting a criminal prosecution against themselves or others?

Despite the obvious dangers in relation to running truth recovery alongside a criminal investigation process, there is the further opportunities for republicans, and their legacy front groups, to use the mechanisms as a Trojan horse to re-write the past.

Clause 42 of the proposed Bill makes clear that the report will only be subjected to a standard of testing is so far as the Commission is obliged to satisfy itself as to the credibility of the information provided. What does this

mean? This, evidently, is an open door for republicans to peddle their version of Provo truth into the system and beyond this Clause 42 also places a requirement on the Commission to provide a report on any "patterns and themes" identified. This to all half sensible observers is little more than a charter for republican manipulation of the truth in pursuit of their political objective of re-writing the past.

In a wider sense there are clear problems with the legacy proposals, and no unionist should find themselves supporting such a dangerous Bill.

Approximately 47,000 incidents took place during the troubles, with 98% of such incidents attributed to terrorism and/or counter terrorism. Only 2% were attributed to the state. Despite this the proposed HIU will not investigate any incidents which did not lead to fatalities, therefore someone seriously injured in an IRA bomb attack that did not lead to any fatalities will not have their case re-investigated. This despite the fact all cases relating to the actions of the State will be re-investigated.

There is a strong argument that a failure to re-investigate such incidents may be unlawful following the recent Supreme Court Judgement in the John Worboys' case. The Supreme Court said;

"The Metropolitan Police breached the Human Rights of John Worboys' victims by failing to properly investigate reports of his crimes."

This could place an obligation on the PSNI to investigate all circa 47,000 troubles related incidents. Such a legal obligation would almost certainly ensure that the HIU collapses under the weight of such a workload, and this outcome could very well stem the tide in relation to the witch hunt against the State.

A 'Progressive' Pan-Nationalist coalition is using Brexit to try and wedge NI out of the UK



IN RECENT months we have seen a number of statements by four Northern Ireland political parties on the Customs Union and the Single Market. This is a clear example of the kind of political connivance that lurks beneath those relentlessly seeking to undermine the will of the British people.

The Alliance Party and Green Party in Northern Ireland present themselves as neutral cross-community parties. Their 'progressive' politics are strongly pro-EU and pro-harmonisation. On social issues they are common bedfellows in pursuit of the latest fashionable social causes. This makes them ideal allies for Sinn Fein and the more moderately nationalist SDLP.

The nationalist parties can saddle up with the Alliance and Greens under the veneer of pretending their coalition is based up commonly held pro-EU values and 'progressive' policies. But this could not be further from the truth.

The cord that binds this 'progressive' coalition is pan-nationalism. A quick look at the Alliance and Green voting record in Northern Ireland will show that on almost every key policy decision, they will vote alongside Irish nationalism.

It was the Alliance Party that conspired with Sinn Fein and the SDLP to tear the sovereign union flag from Belfast City Hall on 3rd December 2012, and it is they who have continuously given cover to

Sinn Fein's outrageous political demands, which deny Northern Ireland a government to this very day.

It was no surprise then to see their leader, Naomi Long, standing shoulder to shoulder with Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill, the SDLP's Colum Eastwood and Green Party NI leader Stephen Agnew in a united front against Brexit.

The demand that Northern Ireland remain in the Customs Union and Single Market is not based upon the practical outcomes of such an approach, but rather a desire to wedge Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom by stealth.

The entire Irish Nationalist strategy, given life by the Belfast Agreement, is based upon staged all-Ireland harmonisation within the context of a borderless European Union. It is for this reason that they are so desperately trying to de-rail the will of the British people.

A 'special status' for Northern Ireland within the Customs Union and Single Market would not only set us apart from the rest of the United Kingdom, but in practical terms would create an economic all-Ireland. It would be a momentous staging post for those dedicated to mutilating the constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom.

All of the political parties that signed last month's letter, which issued a series of political demands in relation to the Customs Union and Single Market, continued to trot out the mantra that Northern Ireland voted to Remain. These same parties are the chief proponents of the Belfast Agreement, which quite clearly sustains Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom so long as a majority of persons wishes it to remain so.

Therefore they on one hand wish to disregard Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom and

the legitimacy of a UK-wide referendum, but on the other hand champion the Belfast Agreement as a holy writ.

Alongside this, all of the signatories to the recent Brexit letter were supporters of the campaign to repeal the 8th amendment in the Irish Republic. Yet if the United Kingdom sought to interfere in this democratic decision of a sovereign nation then there would be outrage.

They cannot have it both ways and it is disappointing that many media outlets continue to allow this fundamentally hypocritical and cynical posturing to go unchallenged.

Yet, the conniving Remainers see no hypocrisy in their continued attempts to override a democratic referendum held within the United Kingdom, which made clear the people's desire to leave the European Union. Not to partially leave, not to maintain a key to the door. But to leave – a full and unequivocal divorce.

The real objective of all of those parties that signed the letter is to undermine the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom, and they see wedding Northern Ireland to the Customs Union and Single Market as an opportunity that they cannot let pass in pursuance of their aforementioned overriding objective.

The British citizens of Northern Ireland are constitutionally equal to the British citizens of England, Scotland and Wales. The notion that the British citizens of Northern Ireland would be abandoned by our sovereign government and forced, against our will, to be economically severed from the rest of the United Kingdom is offensive.

One would be surprised if MPs in the mother of Parliaments would sit idly by and allow themselves to be complicit in such a contrived betrayal of their fellow British citizens.

It is surely not too much to ask that the current Government eschew the connivance of fifth columnists.

A Loyalist perspective on the East Belfast Bonfire dispute

THE EVENTS in east Belfast over the 11th July were something that no sensible person wanted to see take place. They stemmed from a confrontation that no genuine interested party wanted. That is why the Department for Infrastructure (DFI), the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS), unionist parties, well respected mediators and loyalists all robustly objected to the aggressive court action pursued by Belfast City Council at the urging of one politically motivated officer and what has become known within unionism as 'pan-nationalism' - Sinn Fein, Alliance and the SDLP.

It is worth pointing out that the court action was pushed hardest by the Alliance party, even more so than Sinn Fein. The SDLP later jumped on the bandwagon and Sinn Fein, surprisingly, appeared to many of those involved to be somewhat reluctant participants.

It was somewhat of an absurdity for local Government to be taking another Government department to court in order to ask the court to interfere in an issue that is a matter for the land owner, in this case DFI. It is interesting that last year, when the bonfire was on Council land, they did not seek as robust an action. We are also aware that Alliance had pushed for DFI to take the lead in the aggressive action, in order to shield their involvement.

They used DFI as a battering ram for what is evidently a malicious agenda at play within City Hall. Many councillors referred to this agenda within their commentary and we understand that representations, from a senior political level, have been made to the Belfast City Council Chief Executive in relation to the conduct of one specific council officer, who appears to be trying in some way settle old personal scores

against unionism rather than discharging his duties sensibly and with impartiality. This is a view shared by many, including well respected persons who were involved in the discussions around the Walkway bonfire.

It is therefore an important question to pose; if the land owner said the situation was manageable, the NIFRS said the situation was manageable, mediators said it was manageable and praised the positive engagement with loyalists from the EBCI, then why did a specific council officer, the Alliance and later the SDLP and Sinn Fein



pursue a course of action that would inevitably lead to a confrontation that no one else wanted?

There were clearly political briefings and leaks from within pan-nationalism prior to the action taking place, in an effort to set the narrative and score political points against unionism. It is not hard to step back and reflect on who was behind that, and for what ends.

In contrast, loyalism worked very hard to deliver a safe and peaceful summer in east Belfast. It is a matter of great disappointment that this positive work was undermined by those relentlessly driving a political agenda and cultural war.

Let us be clear; were there issues with the targeted bonfires? Yes. Were improvements and further progress required? Yes. Did residents have genuine and well-founded concerns for property? Yes.

Let us also be clear on this how-

ever; the SF/SDLP/Alliance antagonists in this situation had no more interest in resident's genuine concerns than the man on the moon. Positive progress had been made; listen to the contribution from Gavin Robinson MP on BBC Talk Back on the 11th July, when he praised the genuine engagement from all those that took part in the talks, and the progress achieved. All those involved in the mediation were honest brokers. The honest brokers, on all sides representing those directly affected (NIFRS/DFI/EBCI), were undermined by those pursuing their own malicious agendas.

Pan-nationalism's objective was to use what were admittedly difficult bonfires as a strategic precedent-setting test case. Their core objective was to further their cultural war by breaking the back of bonfires such as the Walkway, in order that next year they can advance onto more acceptable bonfires

with a legal precedent tucked away in their armoury. That is why it was so difficult for loyalism to make further progress, because we recognised that the genuine concerns were being manipulated and used by those whose only interest was in strategic precedent setting. That must be viewed in the context of the bonfire builders already being persuaded of the merits of moving their bonfire to the area identified as the safest in the area by the NIFRS, and also reducing the bonfire to half the size of the previous year.

On the evening of the aggressive and provocative court action the EBCI issued a statement offering dialogue. The court judgement provided for such discussions. Mediators reached out to the PSNI to offer them the opportunity to engage with loyalists in order that we could work together to de-escalate tensions that had been created by political parties and a council officer hell-bent on forcing a confrontation. The PSNI refused.

Instead they immediately, within hours, swung into action with masked mercenaries and a policing operation that was almost apocalyptic.

This, in of itself, raises questions. DFI were opposing such aggressive action on their land, so how come the contractors were already hired and ready to go for two days prior to the court action? Who hired them? These are all questions that will provide a big challenge for Belfast City Council officers in the coming months.

Did Belfast City Council unilaterally hire contractors to invade another departments land, without the permission of that Department? Did they contrive the whole situation from as far as a week before, thus fatally undermining all honest brokers in the pursuit of their own narrow agenda?

Despite the PSNI's apparent desire to immediately press on with the aggressive confrontation loyalists, politicians and highly respected mediators met late into the night. Despite somewhat of a sensationalist headline, the Irish News reported accurate details of some of those discussions. It is clear even from the account published in the Irish News that it is accepted that loyalists worked hard to use positive influence in order to try and de-escalate tensions that were not of loyalism's making.

However, some appeared to want loyalists to bully the bonfire builders into dismantling their bonfire or assisting the PSNI in doing so. That was never going to happen. The EBCI engaged with the bonfire builders to provide them with a voice, to assist in developing positive alternatives and facilitating progress. This was never going to extend to doing pan-nationalism's dirty work for them or turning on young men who- despite the misguided location and some understandable intransigence- only wished to celebrate their culture and who felt understandably aggrieved and let down by broken promises.

When all the smoke has cleared, there needs to be a genuine and robust discussion around the role played by all within the Walkway bonfire dispute. There are genuine political, civic and community concerns about the agenda that was pursued by a particular council officer and the petty political game and manipulation of the situation by pan-nationalism. The targeting of bonfires is really about targeting social cohesion within working class unionist communities. A key fabric of that social cohesion stems from shared cultural expressions such as bonfires and parading, it is for that reason that such effort is put into targeting those particular as-



pects of cultural expression.

They want to force bonfires into beacons, not because they are eco-warriors, but because beacons demolish the sense of community and social cohesion that stems from young lads coming together to work and build a bonfire for 8-12 weeks. They arrive on the evening to watch a beacon and go home. This is 'acceptable' cultural expression that pan-nationalism will cheerlead for. It allows them to pretend to be keen to embrace unionist culture, whilst still achieving their objective of dismantling the social cohesion that flows from the shared effort of actually building the bonfire.

Whilst no one would seek to excuse the violence that erupted- on a minor scale in comparison to the widespread anger- condemnation of the young loyalists that regrettably allowed their frustrations to boil over will not improve the situation. Civic society and the media need to under-

stand that many young loyalists have simply had enough of the relentless demonisation. Sinn Fein, SDLP and Alliance representatives are only too keen to manipulate misguided actions in order to advance their own strategic political objectives.

Loyalism is angry, especially at the policing imbalance. Officers laughing and mocking whilst masked mercenaries waded into Cluan Place to remove their community bonfire, whilst heavily armed PSNI officers deployed a containment operation locking people into a small vulnerable enclave, fed the very real perception that the PSNI are active participants in what many within loyalism feel is a co-ordinated

political agenda against their cultural expression.

The Chief Constable tweeted Jamie Bryson, Arlene Foster and Joanne Bunting MLA to challenge what he said was a false narrative on policing imbalance. Rather than a tweet to public figures with a voice, why doesn't George Hamilton engage with the young loyalists who were affected by the operation undertaken by his officers, why doesn't he listen to the pensioners and ordinary

members of the unionist community that look at Londonderry and then look at east Belfast, and wonder why the difference in policing operations?

Masked mercenaries and heavily armed officers in a scene that many hardened and experienced journalists referred to as 'unprecedented'; the resentment this has caused will not be easily forgotten. If the Chief Constable really wants to listen and understand, he should sit down with those most affected by it in a public meeting. He should also explain why the PSNI refused dialogue on 10th July.

The recriminations and blame game will rumble on, and loyalism has an important narrative that needs to be heard as part of that 'healing' process. The game played by pan-nationalism and those unelected officials assisting them won't go without challenge, they will have robust questions to answer.

Challenging times for the Women's Education sector

By Alison Blayney

Alison Blayney is the Manager of Kilcooley Women's Centre and a member of the Policing Community Safety Partnership



As Northern Ireland heads for what appears to be a never ending cycle with no functioning devolved Government, the women's community education sector has never felt as vulnerable. The usual challenges continue – the sustainability of organisations working at the coal face, with vulnerable people, who want to take the steps to improve both their and their families outcomes and life chances and address educational underachievement which blights many of our most disadvantaged communities.

In 'normal' circumstances, managers of Women's Centres and groups would lobby their local MLA and avail of the opportunity to meet the Minister in charge of the relevant department. We are now inhabiting limbo land, where we are unsure who to lobby, and if anyone is in a position in the Civil Service to make decisions in the absence of a Minister.

Departments are also inconsistent in their policy of decision making in the absence of a Minister, with some continuing to implement 'historic' funding arrangements as they have no power to deviate or introduce new projects,

whilst others frustratingly make savage cuts to frontline services (in one instance an across the board cut of 50% in Early Years funding) citing the need to augment their budgets. Some funding available for training has multiple restrictions – for instance European Social Fund remains restricted at Level 1 training. This means a qualification in Barista Hospitality – for the huge coffee and café culture industry, is too high, and a Level 1 in Childcare is below the usual threshold for employment in the sector. It is also difficult to explain to a participant who wants to improve their employability prospects, but you have to turn them away as they are also enrolled in a Peace cross community programme – you can't be on both at the same time despite one being designed for employability and the other to sustain the Peace process and build community relations in Northern Ireland.

Staff employed in the community sector have often felt they are the Cinderella sector, working on endless one year fixed term contracts, which do not give any job security to employees and restrict the impact organisations can deliver with the funding they are allocated. With the inability for the majority of small organisations to build up any cash reserves (as they operate on full cost recovery 'real cost' models), any change to income could close the doors. It would not be unusual to receive confirmation on funding for the new financial year well into the summer months, with organisations having to take the decision do they work at risk or close the doors. This is countered with the slippage which can become available in the final quarter, which is often spent hurriedly, and often quick fix

projects which have minimal impact.

The women's sector also supports women and families who are working, studying and raising a family. The requirement of organisations such as our own, to open a Food Bank and Hygiene Poverty Project is depressing, and our data indicates that this support is often needed by working families, where there is a perception that this support is for families living on welfare. Feedback from our service users has shown that women want to work, but by the time they pay for childcare and the costs of travel, they are better off not working. Many want to work, to set examples to their children, yet they are facing the added challenge of the imminent closure of the childcare voucher scheme which many working families rely on.

Universal credit is due to be rolled out in Ards North Down in the Autumn. Bangor is often viewed as a wealthy area, and no doubt there are well off residents in the Borough. Recently the area was described as the 'Yachts and Have Nots'. That doesn't mean that the more affluent client who walks through our doors does not need support. Issues such as domestic violence, historic sexual abuse, addictions and mental health and wellbeing challenges do not discriminate. The rise in the recording of domestic violence is either the result of actual violence or the success in encouraging more victims to come forward for help. Either way, organisations in the women's sector such as women's centres, refuges and Women's Aid continue to struggle, in what is a region which is only just surviving without a functioning government.