

*Reflections on Centenaries and Anniversaries*  
(Discussion 4)

**Northern Ireland 1921**  
*A state born in violence*

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# Introduction

The Fellowship of Messines Association was formed in May 2002 by a diverse group of individuals from Loyalist, Republican and other backgrounds, united in their realisation of the need to confront sectarianism in our society as a necessary means to realistic peace-building.

In 2020 the Association launched its ‘Reflections on Centenaries & Anniversaries’ programme. This programme comprised a series of discussions which were intended to create opportunities for participants, from various backgrounds and political viewpoints, to engage in discussion on some of the more significant historical events of 100 years and 50 years ago, the consequences of which all of us are still living with today.

The discussions also afforded an opportunity for those taking part to engage in the important process of challenging some of the myths and folklore associated with past events, by means of an open and respectful engagement with factual history.

In 2021, a further series of talks and discussions was initiated, focusing on the topic of Partition and its legacy. Each event was to comprise a presentation by a well-known historian, followed by a wide-ranging discussion involving invited participants from a diverse range of backgrounds.

The discussion detailed in this pamphlet had as its focus the birth of Northern Ireland and the attendant violence. The keynote speaker was **Dr Aaron Edwards**. Aaron has been a Senior Lecturer in Defence and International Affairs at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst since 2008, and an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of History, Politics and International Relations at the University of Leicester since 2019. His latest book, *Agents of Influence: Britain’s War Against the IRA*, has been published by Merrion Press.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, it was not possible for the participants to meet indoors face-to-face, and so the discussion, chaired by **Deirdre Mac Bride**, was conducted on an online basis (via a ‘Zoom’ conference).

**Harry Donaghy**, Project Manager, Fellowship of Messines Association

# Northern Ireland, 1921: A State Born in Violence

Dr Aaron Edwards

## Introduction

In a pen portrait of William Butler Yeats written in early 1920, the journalist and playwright, St. John Ervine departed from an evaluation of the great poet to observe the political context in which he was writing. There was nothing that made his ‘Orange blood boil more’, he said, than the crudity of violence in Ireland. It was a land that gave birth to ‘violent, crude plays’, inevitable in a ‘land of violent, crude beliefs.’ Ervine singled out what he called ‘Sinn Féiners’ as the main source of this violence, for it was ‘hard not to lose faith in human perfectibility when one considers how foolish are the political schemes they devise.’<sup>1</sup> Ervine believed that the Irish people had lost the ability to think objectively about radical political schemes and that these critical faculties had ‘decayed’ and been replaced by ‘emotional nationalism’. ‘For all sorts of reasons,’ he wrote, ‘political, social and historical and also religious, the critical faculty has rarely been employed and certainly has not been developed. Either you are for a thing or against it. Doubt is treated as if it were antagonism. Reluctance to commit oneself to any scheme, however fantastic or ill-considered it may be, is treated as treason to the national spirit.’<sup>2</sup>

Ervine, originally born into a working class community in East Belfast, was an early convert to Home Rule, though he rejected, on the one hand, Sinn Féin’s obsession with forcing through Irish independence at the point of a barrel of a gun and, on the other hand, Unionist propaganda depicting “Home Rule is Rome Rule”.<sup>3</sup> Ervine observed how it had come to the stage where people were beginning to assert the belief – as if it were an article of faith – that an Irish Republic could only be established by force. In these tumultuous times, argued Ervine, you were only really considered an ‘Irishman’ if you bought into this scheme wholeheartedly – there was no room for doubters, never mind dissenters. If you expressed views to the contrary, you risked being denounced as a ‘West Briton, an anglicised Irishman, even, on occasions, as “not Irish at all”, although his forebears have lived in Ireland for generations.’<sup>4</sup>

Ervine's reservations about the revolutionary change now blowing across the island point to broader political challenges on the eve of partition. Connal Parr reminds us that Ervine is probably best remembered for his 'later incarnation as a pugnacious Unionist,'<sup>5</sup> though his famous 1911 stage play *Mixed Marriage*, curiously, represented Orangeism 'as a divisive force within the working class'.<sup>6</sup> It might be observed that the Ervine of 1920 is, therefore, well-placed to offer us a window into the events surrounding the formation of Northern Ireland. This was a period, according to Marianne Elliott, when the new political entity was 'born amid heightened violence' and a 'sense of siege.'<sup>7</sup> One hundred years ago, Elliott argues, 'no one in Ireland wanted partition. Unionists would have preferred the entire island to remain with Britain. Nationalists, for their part, had been seeking a form of devolution in the return of the Irish parliament abolished in 1801. Why Unionists fought so hard against such a moderate measure has long been a matter of historical debate. Yet they did and were the first to threaten armed resistance.'<sup>8</sup> This much may be true. The threat of force certainly fused intent and capability, especially when the Unionist leadership landed guns at Larne and Donaghadee in 1914. However, the outbreak of war went some way to ensuring that they were never fired in anger – ironically, a world war staved off the possibility of civil war in Ireland.

The absorption of an estimated 35,000 members of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) into the British Army soon followed, with Unionist leader Edward Carson passionately informing the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) on 3 September 1914 that, 'England's difficulty is not Ulster's opportunity: England's difficulty is our difficulty.' Ulstermen – and other Irishmen – joined up and were deployed in large numbers along the Western Front. While they fought and died in the trenches of Thiepval Wood, among other places, however, their fellow countrymen – who had ignored the call to join the firing line – were preparing for an organised insurrection against British rule in Ireland. In Easter week 1916, some 1,600 rebels took over prominent buildings where they fortified them and waited on soldiers 'whose superior numbers and firepower soon crushed their resistance'.<sup>9</sup> According to Dublin Metropolitan Police reports from the time, 429 people were killed and 2,582 people were injured in the skirmishes that followed, many of them civilians.<sup>10</sup> However, it was the execution of the rebellion's leaders by the British that provoked a cataclysmic reaction from some nationalists, as Fearghal McGarry observes, 'the executions were sufficient to effect a conversion to republicanism'.<sup>11</sup>

The Easter Rising, for Patrick Buckland, ‘forced the government to take the Irish question out of cold storage’.<sup>12</sup> Prime Minister David Lloyd George wrote to Edward Carson proposing that they settle the matter of Ireland ‘promptly’, intimating that it was too distracting to the war effort. One aspect of the proposals was the exclusion of the six north-easterly counties of Ulster from any future settlement. After deliberation by the UUC, they agreed to Lloyd George’s proposal. Unionists in Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan were said to have ‘shed tears’ on the occasion.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Lloyd George’s proposals for Home Rule for Ireland, minus the six counties, were ‘never implemented’.<sup>14</sup> The idea of dividing Ireland according to religious and, therefore, political majorities had now moved centre stage. Yet, it was not until 7 October 1919 that the London government set up a cabinet committee to review proposals for Irish self-government.<sup>15</sup> By February 1920, the Government of Ireland Bill had been introduced into Westminster, which proposed the establishment of two parliaments, one in Belfast to preside over a six-county jurisdiction, and one in Dublin to govern the remaining twenty-six counties of Ireland.<sup>16</sup>

### **A State Born Under Siege**

In the weeks prior to the introduction of the Government of Ireland Bill, much political activity in Ireland focused on the local and municipal elections held on 15 January 1920. Contesting 1,470 vacant seats, Sinn Féin ran 717 candidates, while Labour stood 595 candidates and the Unionists ran 436 candidates. A further 588 candidates competed under different banners.<sup>17</sup> In Belfast, the Unionists nominated ‘a good selection’ of Ulster labour candidates under the bannerette of the Ulster Unionist Labour Association (UULA), originally formed in July 1918 as a means of staving off electoral losses in the wake of an outbreak of intense class conflict across the United Kingdom. According to Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, the UULA was utilised by Unionist leaders as a ‘means of initiating a purge from the local trade union movement of ‘Bolsheviks’ and (what it saw as the same thing) republicans’.<sup>18</sup> Under the UULA banner, the Unionists led with a campaign targeting what they called ‘Sinn Féin trade unionism’. 55 unionist candidates were fielded against 22 Belfast Labour Party candidates, 19 Nationalists, 13 Sinn Féin, 10 Independent Labour candidates and 3 Socialists. The outgoing councillors consisted of 52 Unionists and 8 Nationalists.<sup>19</sup> Despite the negative campaign against Labour candidates, the Unionists lost 15 seats, while a mix of 13 Belfast Labour Party and Independent Labour candidates were

elected. As Arthur Mitchell noted, ‘Unionist solidarity was broken in almost every ward of the city.’<sup>20</sup> Labour councillors touted a progressive programme, including calling for the council to hold evening meetings so that working people could attend. This more transparent style of democracy was roundly attacked by the local unionist press, with the *Belfast Newsletter* moving at a brisk clip to smear the Socialists for adopting a collective silence on political assassinations in Dublin. In a cynical move, the Unionist Party also made plans to reverse the decision of the British government to hold local elections according to Proportional Representation. The prospective return to ‘a simple majority system,’ argued Mitchell, ‘reinforced the traditional sectarian rivalries’ and ‘greatly hindered the development of the Labour Party in Belfast’.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the combined total of 97 Labour and 153 Sinn Féin councillors vis-à-vis 329 Unionist seats<sup>22</sup> made them a notable political force for the time being.

While politicians in London debated the kind of new Ireland they wished to see established by the Government of Ireland Bill, tensions rose steadily in Belfast. A meeting was held by Protestant shipyard workers at the Workman and Clark south yard on 21 July 1920 at which 2,000-5,000 workers attended. The speakers headlining the impromptu rally claimed that ‘all aspects of the British administration had collapsed and Sinn Fein was in effective control’.<sup>23</sup> With the prospect of Sinn Fein subversion and – by extension – guerrilla warfare knocking on the door of the six counties, tensions boiled over. The speakers spoke of British duplicity and Catholic complicity, assuring those present that Ulster’s position in the British empire was in peril. A deputation of the Ulster Ex-Servicemen’s Association (UESA) even went as far as to claim that Catholic Sinn Féiners were keeping loyal men out of a job. After the meeting ended, several hundred workers marched through the Harland and Wolff shipyard, in Henry Patterson’s words, ‘ordering out all known Catholic workers and a minority of Protestants who were identified with the socialist movement. Some were beaten, kicked and pelted with stones and rivets; others, to escape, swam to the south side of the Musgrave Channel’.<sup>24</sup> Within 24 hours, the expulsions had spread to other parts of industrialised Belfast and by the end of the week some 5,000 workers were out of work. Traditional accounts of the expulsions see them as the result of sectarian bigotry and ‘the inevitable reaction to the threat to the Protestant’s national existence posed by the republican military campaign’.<sup>25</sup> Writing in 1980, Patterson challenged this conventional wisdom, suggesting that a more structural economic based analysis was

required. He suggested that we needed to understand the real driver as the failure of captains of industry to integrate former soldiers back into the workplace after their absence due to wartime service. 'The position of the Unionist bourgeoisie is assumed to be that of a class which is coolly encouraging the development of pogromist tendencies amongst the Protestant working class,' when, in actual fact, the Unionist leadership, including Carson, and the Unionist press were silent on the expulsions beyond Carson's careful intimation in a speech at the Twelfth celebrations when he 'warned against the 'insidious' tactic adopted by Sinn Fein of tacking on the 'national question' to the 'labour question' to try and bring about disunity amongst the loyalist population'.<sup>26</sup>

Whatever the cause, the Belfast violence did not operate in a strategic vacuum and must be seen in the context of the IRA's guerrilla campaign, which, in 1919-20, claimed the lives of 236 soldiers and police officers.<sup>27</sup> It was perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the outbreak of sectarian conflagration in Belfast from July 1920 onwards met with a muted response by the IRA leadership in the city, at least initially. According to Robert Lynch, they 'remained aloof and resolutely opposed to any kind of participation in what they called "the usual fratricidal strife," fearing that their involvement would detract from their elitist perception of themselves as members of the key revolutionary force in Ireland'.<sup>28</sup> Understandably, there was even growing hostility towards IRA volunteers in Belfast at this time.<sup>29</sup> In the pension records, some of these IRA men described open hostility directed towards them from among the nationalist community, with some estimating how 70-75% of the local population was against IRA activity. This is curious given the myth that later grew around the role of Republican defenders; in reality the roots binding the IRA and the community were much shallower than the myth implied.<sup>30</sup>

For these reasons and more, David Miller reminds us that IRA attacks in the six counties in early 1920 were still quite rare, yet, Ulster Protestants still felt vulnerable, organising defence committees and vigilante patrols. 'In Belfast and several smaller towns,' writes Miller, 'working-class Protestants responded in their traditional way, by rioting, which in their eyes was a form of defence'.<sup>31</sup> Many Loyalists were also deputised as Special Constables and, simultaneously, steps were also taken to reactivate the UVF.<sup>32</sup> However, some Special Constables were ill-disciplined. In February 1921 one platoon of Special Constables in Newry had had to be disbanded following an official inquiry, with a number of men awaiting trial for theft. A military

court of inquiry decided that one other Special Constable should not face punitive action for the deaths of two internees in Ballykinlar who were shot by a guard for getting too close to the wire.<sup>33</sup> By early April 1921 the numbers killed in the IRA's revolutionary war had climbed to 363, the vast majority of those killed (270) were members of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), with only 99 civilians killed in the same period.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Northern Ireland Parliamentary Elections of May 1921**

Against this backcloth of violence, the Unionist leadership faced the uphill task of building a new centre of power in Ulster. As the geographer Emyr Estyn Evans observed, 'Lacking the rich Anglo-Irish inheritance of the old metropolis, the northerners had to create in Belfast not only the machinery of government and administration but the cultural centres necessary for a capital city.'<sup>35</sup> Luckily, the British Government in Ireland had already sensed the shifting of the political tectonic plates and had moved, in September 1920, to appoint a tax inspector, Sir Ernest Clark, as Under Secretary to the Chief Secretary of Ireland in Dublin.<sup>36</sup> Clark was to be based in Belfast with the task of planning for self-government in the North. By the end of the month, he had ensconced himself in the Scottish Provident Building opposite Belfast City Hall. Given the threat posed by the IRA, the local police erected steel shutters and posted an armed guard outside.<sup>37</sup> Clark consulted regularly with Sir James Craig, the organisational brains behind Carson's very public leadership of Unionism, about the British Government's plans for assisting in the creation of a new Belfast administrative centre.<sup>38</sup> Given Carson's reluctance to assume the mantle of leadership in the new entity, Craig was duly elected leader of the UUC on 4 February 1921. Later that month Clark shared his plans for self-government with Craig, particularly in the realm of creating civil service departments to support a new administration.<sup>39</sup>

By May 1921, Clark and Craig had adjudicated in the political architecture of the new Northern Ireland state and all eyes now turned to the inaugural elections for a local Parliament. On 5 May Craig travelled to Dublin to meet with Eamon De Valera, displaying what the Chief Secretary in Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood, called 'magnificent courage'.<sup>40</sup> 'Craig's reputation was enhanced by the episode,' St John Ervine later wrote. This was reflected in contemporary newspaper reports where Craig was greeted enthusiastically by supporters wherever he went on the electoral campaign trail. In an address at Hillsborough a few days after returning from Dublin, Craig told

the gathered crowd that they were ‘engaged in a great historical campaign.’ He continued. ‘Never before in the history of their dear country had so much depended, not upon the leaders, but upon the people, and he was endeavouring by attending as many meetings as he possibly could himself... to bring home to all the people that the whole future of their Six Counties depended upon them receiving their votes on 24<sup>th</sup> of this month’.<sup>41</sup>

The elections held on 24 May 1921 were famously the first time in Europe such a body was elected using the Proportionate Representation Single Transferable Vote method.<sup>42</sup> Out of ten constituencies – five were in Belfast, one in Londonderry, Antrim, Down Armagh and Tyrone and Fermanagh – they elected between four and eight MPs. There was only one major issue in the election, D.G. Pringle reminds us, and that was the constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.<sup>43</sup> The Ulster Unionists, Sinn Féin and the Nationalists contested the poll. While the Belfast Labour Party did not field candidates, five independent Labour candidates did run in four Belfast constituencies and one in Down; all of them lost their deposits, winning less than 1% of the total votes cast. ‘The 1921 elections, therefore, provide a fairly clear-cut indication of the wishes of the Northern Ireland population on the border issue,’ argued Pringle.<sup>44</sup> Out of an impressive turn-out of 89%,<sup>45</sup> the Unionists won 40 of the 52 seats, with the other two parties winning six each. Anti-partitionist candidates duly boycotted the first parliament.<sup>46</sup>

According to Graham Walker, the 1921 election was ‘fought against a background of violence and intimidation,’ with the communal divide merely accentuating the outcome.’ Intriguingly, there had been a degree of acrimony over the selection of candidates for certain seats,’ yet the Unionist bloc ‘held together in the manner of their pre-war Home Rule struggle; class, denominational and regional divides were transcended,’<sup>47</sup> as Protestants voted overwhelmingly for Unionist candidates. However, the violence and intimidation were severely constraining and debilitating for those Labour candidates who had been brave enough to stand in the election. At Westminster, the Labour Party whip, Thomas Griffiths MP for Pontypool, asked Hamar Greenwood if he could confirm the circumstances surrounding the allegation that shipyard workers had gate-crashed a rally at the Ulster Hall a few days before the election and threatened three Independent Labour candidates – James Baird, Harry Midgley and John A. Hanna – with revolvers. As Greenwood told Parliament:

I am informed that the meeting in question, which was organised by the

Labour Socialist party, was advertised as open to the general public, and that a procession of shipyard workers, availing themselves of the general invitation to attend, occupied the hall before the commencement of the proceedings. When the speakers arrived they were offered a fair hearing, provided that no disloyal or seditious utterances were made, but they refused to accept this condition. The shipyard workers delegates and the police then advised them to withdraw as disorder appeared to be inevitable if any speeches of a seditious character should be made. This advice was not accompanied by any suggestion that the shipyard workers were armed and no revolvers were produced by them at any part of the proceedings.<sup>48</sup>

Whether a revolver was present or not, the three Labour candidates, one of them a former soldier, would hardly have departed so easily had intimidation and threats not been issued. The reality was that Loyalist mob rule had descended upon Belfast.

### **The Rebirth of Militant Loyalism**

Contemporary reports indicate that it was the UESA who had routed the Labour candidates. The UESA was but one of several Loyalist groups active at the time, particularly in the shipyards. Another group, known as the Ulster Protestant Association (UPA), had been formed a few months earlier in the autumn of 1920. New life was breathed into the organisation two months after the Northern Ireland Parliamentary elections when, as one RIC intelligence report put it, ‘serious disturbances commenced’.<sup>49</sup> According to the police, the UPA attracted ‘a large number of the lowest and least desirable of the Protestant hooligan element.’<sup>50</sup> The report continued:

For twelve months after that the city was in a state of turmoil. Sinn Fein was responsible for an enormous number of bombings, shootings, and incendiary fires. The work of the police against them was, however, greatly hampered by the fact that the rough element on the Protestant side entered thoroughly into the disturbances, met murder with murder, and adopted in many respects the tactics of the rebel gunmen. In the endeavour to cope simultaneously with the warring factions the police efforts were practically nullified. They were quite unable to rely on the restraint of one party while they dealt with the other.<sup>51</sup>

Sectarian assassination may well have raged between warring factions but there was also a three-pronged fear amongst senior Unionists – particularly in the country areas – that local ‘hotheads’ might take matters into their own hands, that the threat of IRA raids was rising and that some people in Ulster might turn to Sinn Fein.<sup>52</sup>

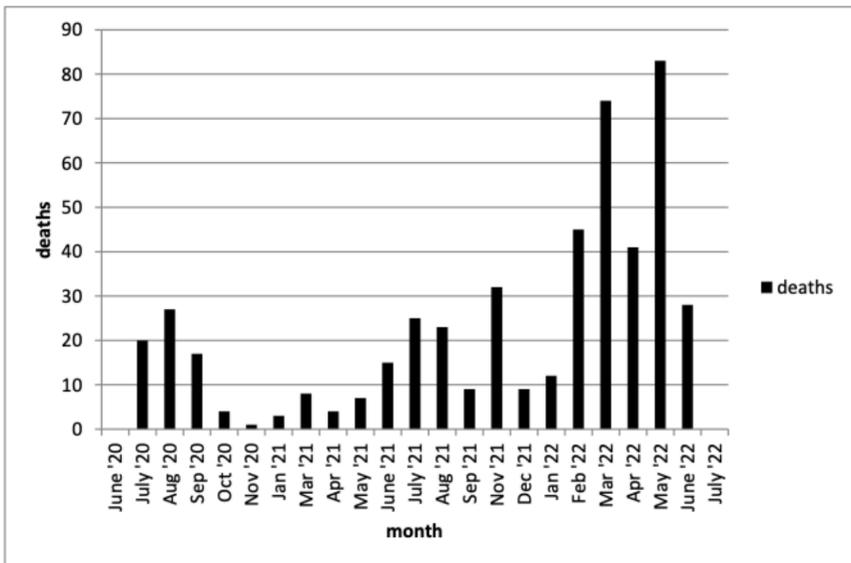
Despite the formation of the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC), the UVF’s reformation continued, to use the language in one *Northern Whig* newspaper report, ‘apace’ where between 30,000 and 50,000 men were enrolled and ‘ready to meet the menace which is confronting them now, just as the original members of the organisation nine years ago were prepared to meet the menace which confronted them then’.<sup>53</sup> In the previous 12 months, the USC and UVF competed in the same space for recruits, with other groups like the Ulster Imperial Guards probably outnumbering the UVF’s membership at the time. Other vigilante-style groups operated across the North at the time, ranging from the UESA and UPA in Belfast to Fermanagh Vigilance, raised by future Prime Minister Sir Basil Brooke, and the Protective Patrol led by shopkeeper John Webster in Armagh. Tim Bowman suggests that the Northern Ireland government’s ‘relationship with Loyalist paramilitary groups was not entirely unlike the relationship between the Weimar government and the *Friekorps*’.<sup>54</sup>

The Troubles of the 1920-22 period have been characterised as a ‘pogrom’ against Catholics,<sup>55</sup> though this has been challenged by scholars like Robert Lynch who has pointed to the ‘problematic’ nature of this assertion, arguing that a ‘more sophisticated understanding of the conflict’ is necessary.<sup>56</sup> Since Lynch published his work, Human Geographer Niall Cunningham has used advanced geo-spatial sequencing techniques to evaluate the deaths of individuals down to place of residence and where they died. Out of the 491 deaths in Belfast between the first fatality on 21 July 1920 and the last on 29 June 1922, he found that 83% of the victims were male (with 78 females killed) and that of 95% of those deaths, some 56% were Protestant and 39% Catholic. 30 of the victims were children up to 16 years of age. One of the worst days of violence came on Sunday 10 July 1921 when 16 people lost their lives in Belfast. Although the events of that day have been well-recorded, it is important to recognise the character the violence took. Thomas McNally, the Quartermaster of the IRA’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Northern Division, was one eyewitness to events as they unfolded over the summer:

During this period there were some gruesome happenings on both sides. If a trusting Protestant passed through a Catholic area and if there were no Volunteers in the area at the time, he was liable to be murdered and

brutally butchered. The Volunteers took no part in these butcherings but acted purely in a defensive capacity for the protection of the area.<sup>57</sup>

According to McNally, IRA volunteers played a purely defensive role in 1921, eager, he said, to protect the Catholic community rather than to go on the offensive against Protestants. When we place testimonies of this period in a broader context, argues Cunningham, we see that Belfast ‘represents by far the most intense period of ethno-national or sectarian killing in its history, a significance which is generally understated’.<sup>58</sup> Cunningham’s analysis helps us to place the violence in its proper context, going some way to replacing evocative terms like ‘pogrom’ with a more accurate critical analysis that places ethno-nationalism centre stage.



Source: Cunningham, *The Social Geography of Violence During the Belfast Troubles*, p. 7.

By October 1921 the British Government had agreed to hold talks with Sinn Féin representatives in London. Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith led the delegation, which would agree a new Treaty on 6 December 1921. The arrangements fell short because, amongst other concessions, they did not include the six counties of the fledgling Northern Ireland state. Dominion status fell short of full independence demanded by Eamon De Valera. Although the baton of leadership had been passed from Carson to Craig earlier in the year, the former continued to take a close interest

in developments from the House of Lords. He attacked the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiated between Griffith and Lloyd George. For Carson, there was little of any merit in the Treaty's provisions. He went on to tell Peers that they were:

passed with a revolver pointed at your head. And you know it. You know you passed them because you were beaten. You know you passed them because Sinn Fein with its Army in Ireland has beaten you. Why do you not say so? Your Press says so, and you may as well confess it. There may be nothing dishonourable in it.<sup>59</sup>

Carson believed that the Treaty had been forced on the Government by the IRA's guerrilla campaign and was not afraid to say so:

But when we are told that the reason why they had to pass these terms of Treaty, and the reason why they could not put down crime in Ireland was because they had neither the men nor the money, nor the backing, let me say that that is an awful confession to make to the British Empire. If you tell your Empire in India, in Egypt, and all over the world that you have not got the men, the money, the pluck, the inclination, and the backing to restore law and order in a country within twenty miles of your own shore, you may as well begin to abandon the attempt to make British rule prevail throughout the Empire at all.<sup>60</sup>

Drawing attention to the strategic circumstances that delivered the outcome of the Treaty was one thing; explaining Unionism's continuing angst amidst the challenges of building a new state was quite another. And even Carson struggled to explain the persistence of a 'siege mentality'.

According to Graham Walker, Irish Nationalists were inclined to be dismissive of the Unionist situation at this time. Walker argues that we must see matters from a British Government perspective where it would have been difficult to countenance removing a section of their citizenry from the United Kingdom without their consent. 'Any such action would have raised all sorts of questions about the nature of UK membership and citizenship, and would have had possible knock-on effects,' argues Walker. 'Such was the ambiguous nature of the unwritten British constitution which nonetheless commanded such emotional allegiance from so many'.<sup>61</sup> That Unionists were as emotionally attached to the union with Great Britain as they were economically, politically and culturally had long been in evidence. The English writer

and Home Ruler Sydney Brooks suggested as early as 1909 how, ‘With all their hard-headedness and practicality, the men of Belfast and Ulster... true to their Scottish origin, are a singularly emotional people.’<sup>62</sup> Brooks was no fan of Unionism. ‘Their political creed is really a political cult, a compound of fears, instincts, hatreds and suspicions in which facts are metamorphosed out of all semblance to reality,’ he complained. ‘Discussing Irish questions with them was, I found, very much like attempting to argue the race question with a Southern planter of the old school.’ Brooks thought Unionists little more than an ‘English garrison’ in Ireland and could be dismissive of them when writing about the Sinn Féin cause, which he said aimed to ‘make the Irish politically virile, united and constructive was the essence of Sinn Féinism.’<sup>63</sup> By 1916 Brooks had come to see much to admire in a political creed that appealed to the individual citizen’s ‘native instincts and genius’<sup>64</sup> and like many sympathisers of Sinn Féin’s ‘Ourselves Alone’ cause, he argued that ‘Ireland will never be at peace and content until she controls her own government and her own destinies’.<sup>65</sup> This underestimated the alternative belief of Unionists that they would be better off within Britain’s imperial orbit and led them to accept the challenge of self-government, albeit it on a six county basis.

## **Conclusion**

In its early months the new Unionist regime was hamstrung by the need to pour available resources into strengthening its security forces and protecting an as yet unsubstantiated border. A real and viable threat existed from the South whose politicians indulged in rhetoric designed to heighten tensions and weaken their political opponents. The Unionist government that took hold of the reins of power in 1921, therefore, had a mammoth task ahead of it: To build a new state distinct and independent from its neighbour in the South. Although it would later be characterised as a “Protestant state and a Protestant people”, the words spoken by Northern Ireland’s first Prime Minister Sir James Craig in 1934, this mantra understates the internal divisions facing Unionists as they sought to lay the foundations of a new state-based identity. The narrative of ‘Protestant Supremacism’<sup>66</sup> also does an injustice to the memory of those Protestants who were more Socialist than Unionist in their political outlook and who rejected parochial bigotry and elitism.<sup>67</sup> A closer inspection of the historical record reveals a Unionist state facing perpetual threats from physical force Republicans, left-leaning Protestants and Independent Unionists, which prompted the

Stormont government to construct a cross-class alliance around the Orange Order secret society and a security apparatus from the embers of the paramilitary UVF and associated Loyalist groups.<sup>68</sup> This curious mix of attraction and coercion – directed at times between those deemed loyal or disloyal - ran throughout the foundations of the new local state, meaning it forever risked having to reconcile these with the aspirations of its divided people.

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## Zoom discussion chaired by Deirdre Mac Bride

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Thank you, Aaron, that was fascinating – and also extremely bloody! And it was very textured in terms of what was happening in Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland at the time, and the underlying politics. Can I invite questions now.

[**Jim McDermott**] I listened with great interest to what you said, Aaron; I am very familiar with the period myself. And it struck me: ‘how far is it from here to Dublin?’ Well, it depends where you’re standing. And people’s outlook at the time was very much predetermined by the development of Belfast in the previous century as against the development of Ireland generally. Belfast itself was so new, it had grown to seventeen times its size from 1801 to 1901. Its development included industries which were not similar to anywhere else in Ireland, around Belfast and the Lagan Valley. They paid a lot into the British Exchequer; far more than the rest of Ireland contributed. But to say, as John Ervine says, that the violence around Partition is all the result of this new-fangled Sinn Féin coming along is to totally ignore what had already been happening for one hundred years; to pretend, for example, that there wasn’t a Plantation. You can’t say it was a united community. And when you say “the papers said...” it depends on which papers. The nationalist papers, like the *Irish News*, and the unionist papers – the *Northern Whig*, the *Belfast Telegraph*, and the *News Letter* – if you read them they each give the same events with such a slant you’d think you were looking at two different events; so you have got to be very careful of such ‘evidence’.

But certainly from the perspective of nationalists... and remember that, at the start, republicans – and you actually made this point from Seamus Wood’s letter – weren’t well liked, there was only 10% support for them. Wood wrote that people only “flocked to our standard as a consequence of the defence we gave them”. He wrote that letter in 1922. He said that by the time of the Truce they *did* get people’s support. Even Joe Devlin, the nationalist leader – who himself got elected at Westminster for Belfast, beating De Valera overwhelmingly by 8000 votes to 3000

votes – acknowledged that the nationalists were completely overwhelmed by Sinn Féin. And this turnaround was largely due to the activities of the northern state.

I think you gave Craigavon quite an easy ride. I am fairly familiar with the book on Craigavon written by Sir John Ervine and he talks about his bluff character, his broad-mindedness. Craig actually said quite openly, it's on record, that he supported the shipyard expulsions. "Do I agree with the job you boys done? I say 'yes'." He played populist politics, and that's okay if you happen to be on the same side as the unionists. But if you are on the opposite side, if you are in the minority, and never wanted an 'Northern Ireland', then you are going to resent that deeply. And the figures speak for themselves. In the violence the nationalist community suffered much more, perhaps four-to-one proportionally, in relation to Protestants killed. The state was born in blood, and sustained by threat, from the nationalist point of view. And to retrospectively go back and say: oh, the soldiers came back from the Great War and there were no jobs for them. So what would they do? Put all the nationalists out, and unionists in? Effectively this happened during the shipyard and industrial expulsions.

It is a complicated, difficult period, but memories are made more difficult by interpretation. I don't subscribe to Henry Patterson's interpretation, that this was largely the consequence of economic forces. To me, it was as much a consequence of the naked, sectarian nature of Belfast. The shipyard expulsions were not a rare thing; they happened in 1886 and again in 1912. So it's a complicated picture. The danger is that to try and say that one side was as bad as the other is a poor misreading of history, it is bad history, and I am not saying that as some sort of nationalist.

Also I would make one last point. The 'rotten Prods' of Belfast, the socialists, who were also put out of their workplaces, the old labour movement, they, remember, were not republicans, they wanted Home Rule within the Empire for the most part. But a Protestant political economy was a prerequisite for the establishment of a Six-County state, and it was also the reason for the abandonment of unionists in Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal.

[**Aaron Edwards**] Jim, thank you for that. I agree with you. My paper is really a first draft so there is a lot more that I need to go back and read. The labour book on Partition by Morgan I haven't read in a long time, and when I was writing about the

labour movement many years ago it was a key text, because it helped to explain exactly what was taking place, as well as, I guess, your point about Joe Devlin. I read lots of speeches in preparation for this that he made in the House of Commons, and he is unshakable in his attempt to set the record straight in terms of what's happening to the nationalist community; but he is not given the time, the space to elaborate. I think that the press, particularly the *News Letter*, is quiet about shipyard expulsions and these murders that are taking place late at night, in parts of Belfast. I mean, it really opened my eyes to see that talked about openly in the House of Commons, and what I would like to do is go back and go into the newspapers and try and match them up and see if we can get a better idea of what went on.

But there is another deficit there which is that there is not a lot of oral testimony. There is oral testimony from IRA members, which you will be familiar with, which was given in order to be given a pension, in 1950. There are recollections from years previously and they are good, but that's really all we have to go on. People knew what had happened in the 1920s, because when I was writing about a later period, in the fifties and sixties, they didn't want to return to that period, because it was such a dark time. And I think if we look at the nature of the killings I don't think we are going to see anything too dissimilar to what happens later on. I think that the territory and space in which these things happen – Cupar Street, Kashmir Road... – are in particular parts of Belfast where they happened again later on. And, as you pointed out, these things have happened in earlier times as well, such as with the shipyard expulsions.

So, thanks for your comments; perhaps I need to be more critical of Craigavon and the unionists, but I certainly need to go and look at the nuance, because it is a complicated picture, although I think the dynamics are all very similar in our history here. I mean, events outside also play a role – for example, the end of the Great War and the influx of those ex-servicemen – it bolsters that group, it enables them to then 'rout' – using the term of the *News Letter* – these socialists from their meetings, to prevent them from actually talking to people about what they stand for. This is an old version of 'no-platforming' and whether or not a gun is produced, intimidation is enough to prevent people from articulating an alternative. And so that's what I saw when I looked at the historical evidence.

[**Peter Bunting**] Just in relation as a follow-up to Jimmy's exchange with Aaron, I recall in 1958 when my father was elected as an Independent Labour councillor for Smithfield Ward, which incorporated the bottom of the Shankill Road, Browns Square, and over to the Loaney. And in those days when you won an election you had what was called a 'victory parade', which was just the winning candidate standing on the back of a lorry accompanied by a pipe band. But I remember there was a mass of old women wearing shawls throwing rotten fruit at my father. And who were these people? They were all Devlinites. So the fact was that there was that existence of the Devlinites in the Lower Divis Street, Loaney area, even up into the 1950s. And the other thing I want to say, in relation to Henry Patterson's focus on economic factors... I also read from that *Irish News* column that there was a march by ex-servicemen from the Falls Road – there was something like seven or eight hundred of them – down to St Mary's Hall for a meeting, where again they were all unemployed, and looking for jobs. And if you go as far as the 1926 trade union strike across Britain, the TUC strike, that's also in relation to those who returned from World War One and still were without jobs, so it might well be economic factors there. And also, of course, it pertained to *both* Protestant and Catholic people who were veterans of World War One.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] I have a question around that. Is there any information about what those trade unionists and independent councillors that stood on the labour side, and those who were ex-service... what do *they* say is happening, what is *their* take on events?

[**Aaron Edwards**] It's difficult to get an idea what they were saying when they were being 'routed'. The press is almost mostly against them, universally, but I would imagine that having... I mean, there were ex-servicemen there as well, their flag is red rather than red, white and blue. And if we look at the Labour members that were elected in Belfast in 1920 it is 'gas and water' sort of socialism, it's around everyday working-class issues at the municipal, corporation, or council level where their impact would largely be felt. In terms of their transformational politics, I think it wouldn't be as all-encompassing. I think the Unionists are able to keep them out of their parliament and deny them a voice until much later, when they start to become

elected, certainly by the 1940s. But at the time of Partition they are not in any position to influence matters. I think that they do *have* a programme but it is not articulated very clearly, because of Partition. As soon as Partition comes in that then cuts off their options. You are either for the new state or you're against it. And I think that the labour movement has always suffered from that Partition settlement. So I would say their capacity really for making change is limited and their influence is restricted to everyday 'gas and water' socialism.

**[Jim McDermott]** I wanted to quote Richard [Grayson's] book, *Belfast Boys*. Nationalist soldiers felt themselves very, very excluded from the creation of the new state. Although they had fought in the Great War, don't forget that they had enlisted for the cause of Home Rule, for the most part, *not* to establish a republic. But after the events of 1916, everything changes. For a start they find themselves, their political ideology of Home Rule, no longer contemporary with the republican view which was sweeping Ireland. Frank James Wood, who was a leading officer in the 36th (Ulster) Division, became an MP for Sandy Row and part of Shankill, on the grounds that *all* soldiers should be treated equally; he was actually quite left-wing. There was a sort of groundswell of feeling, on his part, and he did get elected, that there could have been fairer treatment. But it would also be wrong to say that the soldiers fought shoulder to shoulder, and should have been equally regarded. In actual fact there was little mixing between the 16th (Irish) Division, the 12th (Irish) Division and the 36th (Ulster) Division. The problems that existed in 1914 simply came to life again in 1918, but in a more extreme form, with Partition.

**[Richard Grayson]** Just on the point Jimmy was making, the process is a slow one, of exclusion. And you see this even more if you look at what's going on in Dublin at the same time. You've got far more extensive commemoration there than people often realise, it definitely does draw in some nationalists. But perhaps in Belfast it is more visceral, and the nationalists are a minority, so they feel more obviously excluded from what's going on. So the 'Britishness' of the commemoration is more stark in Belfast than it is in Dublin. But I do think there's a really open question, to which I don't know if we'll ever know the answer, as to how much the appropriation of First World War commemoration by the new state, by unionists generally, was

actually conscious, or whether it was just something which they felt attracted to and wanted to express. Or is there a sense in which they felt a way of giving the new state an identity, was to reference service during the First World War? Or did that happen more organically? We will never know, I don't think the records exist, but it seems to me a key question here.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] What, Richard, would you say to David Officer's argument, which was that within days of the Battle of the Somme church people, commentators and politicians were already linking, and bringing into being the imagined 'Ulsterman'?

[**Richard Grayson**] Definitely. In fact, David Fitzpatrick wrote a chapter in a book that I co-edited with Fearghal McGarry, using the phrase 'instant history', which I think is quite a good way of looking at it. The way in which by mid-July 1916 the Somme was certainly being used by unionists, by Protestant churches. But then, of course, that's natural because there were large numbers of people killed in the Ulster Division in the early stages of the Battle of the Somme. What's actually striking is 'the dog that doesn't bark' in a way, to use the Sherlock Holmes phrase: what *doesn't happen* is that Catholic churches don't overtly commemorate the early September 1916 phase of the battle, in which the 16th (Irish) Division, full of Belfast nationalists by the way, is very involved, and although it is described as a success – and relative to other phases of the Battle of the Somme it *is* successful – there are still very heavy losses. So if the Catholic churches had *wanted* to commemorate groups of men in the 16th Division, they could have done, but they didn't, even in 1916. That's a sign of how things are going.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Connal, could I put you on the spot here? Your very interesting book about the Protestant imagination... I think there was a line in it where you talked about how Ulster, or Unionist, or Protestant culture became associated with the Orange, and that that became the predominant, and I suppose that goes to the question: what were ordinary people thinking about at this time?

[**Connal Parr**] First of all, thanks to Aaron for his talk, I really enjoyed it, and I think it's a good opening draft on this. Deirdre, what you asked is a key question. In terms of that culture going Orange, and being immersed in the Orange, it is very much

connected to this period where essentially... what hasn't been mentioned here is that people forget how kind of tenuous Northern Ireland was in the early 1920s. And I think this is coming through in work by Charles Townsend and others, in which you get this sense that with the Boundary Commission, and other issues, many people envisaged Northern Ireland as not lasting very long. And it has now lasted, whether people like it or not – and with perhaps no thanks to unionists over the years in lots of ways – a hundred years. And there are different interesting reasons why that happened.

But one of the reasons Orangeism completely takes over, in terms of dominating the Protestant associations, is because of how people think on the unionist side: we have to do this, or we lose everything. And, when we look at Protestantism and unionism at this time, they feel they are facing a sort of existential threat. Unionists see themselves as being protected within the new Northern Ireland. Even in the late 1920s one of the names which is mentioned in my book, and who I think is an interesting guy, because he is around the shipyard expulsions at Workman Clark yard, is Thomas Carnduff. And even in the late twenties, Carnduff has spoken about how he is at the field with the Independent Orange Order, which again has a different ethos to other Orange lodges, and you get this strong sense that Northern Ireland is not really here to stay. And I think that the reason that people often go around Orangeism is that it isn't a unifying factor to people, and it represents that hardest 'boots on the ground' quality, and in lots of ways it overwhelms the labour spirit that Aaron has talked about today, and I have been talking about for much of my life in terms of the research, and Austin Morgan in his book talks about and other people talk about. Which is again, I am going to emphasise, a Protestant culture. I think that's the main thing you would always want to convey about this. We talk about Protestant culture, the labour movement *is* part of Protestant culture, but with labour and the Orange conflicting with each other Orangeism is always going to overwhelm labour, because Northern Ireland is a place which doesn't appear to have that much time. But again, it's been one hundred years, there's a lot of talk about certain things about unity and about nationalism, but it's still here! And people today can talk about demographics, but they were talking about demographics in the 1930s, but it's still here. And I think that actually tends to increase support for Orangeism, rather than anything.

[**Aaron Edwards**] Chris Norton did a lot of research on this period, and he said that the Belfast Labour Party carried with it into the new state its internal divisions over Home Rule. Several of the local parties, senior activists, had indulged in anti-Partitionist rhetoric while remaining sceptical about that connection with British labour. And there are interesting historical episodes, such as the meeting of the Connollyite Falls and Smithfield Labour Parties in the wake of the Labour Party's victory in 1924 at the General Election. At the meeting William McMullan observes that the great fault of labour, so far as the north is concerned, is that in the past they have always directed their gaze to Great Britain. That was a grievous mistake, he said. On the other hand there were prominent members who constituted what might be termed the NILP's mainstream – Sam Kyle, Hugh Gemmell, and Harry Midgley – who put the border issue to one side and concentrated on supplying a non-sectarian opposition to the governing unionists, with British labour as their model and ideological base. So I think that what we see is this parting of the way, and I think this is still represented today, because it replicates itself and those strands – those divisions in the labour movement – are very much alive even today one hundred years later.

[**Brian Lacey**] I have to go to a meeting in Bangor at one o'clock so I just wanted to thank Aaron and everyone for a fascinating presentation. I have to address a meeting where people are a bit more concerned about the current issues around the Protocol and stuff, and trying to keep a lid on things, and trying to explain to some people that irrespective of what the political situation is presently it's far from appropriate to even contemplate any sort of violent reaction to what we're going through at the minute. It has been said before: the more things change, the more they stay the same, and unfortunately here, as we celebrate the centenary of Northern Ireland, unionism again, loyalism, is going through a traumatic period. And there are some of us who are attempting to try and steer our way through it in as peaceful a way as we can, and come out the other end and hopefully continue with another hundred years of Northern Ireland being part of the United Kingdom. But I want to thank you all, and no doubt I will see you all again.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] Could I ask Jim a question: was there a similar existential

threat in terms of nationalists or Catholics, do you think? In the way that Connal had talked about, with people's sense that the state of Northern Ireland was very fragile and might not survive?

[**Jim McDermott**] I don't know if there was a mirror image. As Aaron said earlier, history doesn't always repeat itself, but it rhymes. If you look at the main nationalist newspaper at the time, the *Irish News*, it was always on about the 'naked deformity of Partition', it was always on about how unionists of Northern Ireland are going to complain bitterly about how they would be mistreated if there was a United Ireland, because they would be a minority, but the nationalist community also fear as to how *they* might be treated as they are *also* in a minority in political Ulster. And this does of course have broader resonance. Even the republicans in Belfast, unlike their contemporaries in the south of Ireland, their main concern, the issue that most engaged them in the Treaty debates, was Partition, and the avoidance of Partition.

Some commentators at the time ridiculed any talk of civil war, saying such fears would evaporate, but when it actually happened it was like something out of a Dracula film: he actually exists and he emerges! And the violence is a real horror story. The fact is, number one, the beginnings of the birth of the new state were awful, and even the prelude to those troubles of the early 1920s were pretty awful. People are in shock with the outworking of things.

Nationalists never took part in the new state, and were resented for this by unionists, who said: how can you complain when you never even took part in the first place? They never adequately took part of the state, but then again they never felt part of it. The institutions they formed – the GAA, their own communities... the fact that there were segregated communities didn't help. The labour movement, including the brightest and the best, couldn't have done anything against the bigger picture, And they did produce some of the brightest and the best; as indeed, did unionists, nationalists and republicans – very capable people on all sides. But the labour approach, from my perspective, would have been the answer. But the communal divide became solidified when the Treaty came in.

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**] When I was thinking about this topic, and not knowing what you were going to say, Aaron, I was thinking: who stood against all of this? And how

much did this continue into the 1920s? And, also, how much did the ‘hungry twenties’ play into this? But the question, it seems to me, was: in terms of the violence, how was it going to stop?

[**Aaron Edwards**] I think that one thing which struck me in doing the research is that, looking at the Protestant side, there is a clear division between the elites at the top and the people at the bottom, who they see as some kind of wild beast that needs to be tamed – that’s the only way I can describe it. And they are trying to muzzle that attack dog they had done so much to create and this vigilanteism is a real threat for Craig, Dawson Bates and the others. Their fear was that people would take the law into their own hands and this would destabilise the state in the eyes of the British government. They had to do what they could to pull those hooligan elements in, and that meant reaching an accommodation with them. And I think a lot more research needs to be done on how that was. Now, I haven’t looked at this stuff in a long time, but I guarantee you that those records have been destroyed... with regard to such ‘connections’. This was intimated to me by an old UVF man, who had been active in the later 1920s. He had been sworn into the UVF then; it was still alive and well, although very small. And he told me that they worked to an agenda of unionists, a ‘nod and a wink’ from further up, and he also said that ‘Buck Alec’ Robinson† had been a bodyguard of Dawson Bates. Earlier Dawson Bates had signed Robinson’s internment order, and in 1922 he goes to Chicago, but to get out his family lobbied Dawson Bates. Bates releases him, and he comes back in the late 1920s and becomes a bodyguard. So, I don’t think the Unionist leaders are really that averse to having these men around, and we know that throughout the twenties and thirties that sectarian strife is there, Belfast is on tender-hooks. But I see that relationships as being symbiotic, they almost need one another. And so the unionists are struggling

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† Alexander ‘Buck Alec’ Robinson (c. 1901-1955) was a boxer, Ulster Loyalist paramilitary and Ulster Special Constabulary reservist. Born in the Sailortown area of Belfast he was constantly in trouble with the law. He gained wide notoriety for streetfighting, robbery and for owning a pet lion. After being implicated in several shootings and bombings he was interned in October 1922. The RUC Commissioner who recommended his internment wrote: “The respectable and law-abiding Protestants and Unionists residing in the area want to have these men taken from the locality at any cost, as they truly state there can be no peace so long as they are at large.” [Wikipedia]

to keep them in line, and the best way to do that is basically employ them in the forces of the state, the B-Specials, but that stores up a lot of problems for the future.

[**Connal Parr**] Aaron, can I come back in there, because I think this is really critical, and maybe this should be your focus for this. In the sense that... somebody like Basil Brooke says ... there is some correspondence between Basil Brooke – the stuff which has been released – where Brooke, in a letter to some British politician, or a British civil servant in 1920, says, “I may not be a politician but I know what the people here think”, these people being the Protestants in the border regions around where he lives in Fermanagh. And this seems to be really critical: ‘Buck Alec’ is in the A-Specials, and these vigilante forces come into being, and they’re all to do with protecting the new state. We kind of know about the violence in 1920 but we’re missing an in-depth study of that critical phase. So the creation of the Specials is really what we should be looking at and focusing on next, and we can do that in a reasonably objective and detached way, without being polemic.

[**Aaron Edwards**] I think D. I. Nixon† is the key figure. I know someone who has been doing research on this, and has as much of the material as he can get his hands on. He tells me that Nixon seemingly kept some kind of letter, as evidence, which shows he had been given written permission – now this could be an urban legend, we don’t know if this letter really existed or not – to essentially carry out extra-judicial killings of people in order to keep those who were opposed to the state, in whatever form, in line. So, once you look into it, it is very, very murky indeed. There’s a lot there that is missing from the broader story.

[**Connal Parr**] You said you think files have been destroyed. Why do you think they were destroyed, Aaron, because I know that the Northern Ireland Centenary Committee is trying to get the files released. But do you think they are all gone?

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† District Inspector John Nixon was infamously connected to a particularly savage atrocity carried out in Belfast in 1922. In what was believed to have been a reprisal for the IRA killing of two policemen the day before, men wearing police uniforms broke into the home of the McMahon family and shot all eight males inside, six of whom died. It was alleged that a group of policemen operating out of Brown Square barracks in the Shankill Road area were behind the killings. This has never been proved, but historian Eamon Phoenix has said there is “strong circumstantial evidence” that DI Nixon was responsible. However, in response to such allegations Nixon successfully sued a local newspaper and a book publisher for libel. [Wikipedia]

[**Aaron Edwards**] Not all of them. I think critical files will have gone ‘missing’. I am only reading back from what I know has happened in relation to the more recent phases of the Troubles. I also feel that the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland are not particularly good at releasing information to the general public, but I suspect these files will have been lost – ‘accidentally’ of course – by those among the unionists covering their tracks. It’s only my guess... for example, in relation to the sixties and the relationship between the UVF and the Unionists, they would certainly have made sure that those files didn’t exist. A lot of this stuff is probably done in dark alleys and back rooms, and I am just inferring from what I know about a later period. Now, they *may* be there, and if they are, this is great. I do know that the Ulster Special Constabulary files are there.

[**Harry Donaghy**] Aaron has again produced and presented a thought-provoking paper, to say the least. I think that when he does prepare draft 2 or draft 3, and there is a final document here, I think it will be very widely read, Aaron, there will be great interest in this. Because you’re not afraid to put a certain perspective forward, and argue for it. Whereas sometimes, as we know by past experience, when we’re listening to tribal scripture repeated time after time after time, the capacity for critical analysis gets diminished if not lost completely. I do think that certainly if these talks can contribute in any way to broader debates then that in itself will be very worthwhile in my opinion, and other talks that we’re planning, other engagements for the rest of the year, including our friends like Jimmy McDermott and Jim Smith and others. I think that we have quite a number of people around us who are not handcuffed to a particular tribal viewpoint; and that they have studied, they have researched, they have sought out evidence, to put propositions forward, and I think the more of that does take place it is only for the better.

I think that Margaret O’Callaghan’s paper is next in line, about Graig and the birth of the new state. Now Craig didn’t stumble into anything here. I mean, the cynicism of himself and other leaders of unionism at the time, they even finally broke Carson. And was it an accident in 1932, when the new Stormont Parliament building was being opened, that Sir Edward Carson’s admonition to the ruling Unionist Party was that if they didn’t start treating their minority community with a degree of civility and equality, they would store up danger for themselves. And that came to pass. The

Unionists seemed incapable of treating their fellow countrymen and women with any measurable degree of sympathy or understanding. Because, as people have pointed out, those in the Catholic community weren't all mad republicans, far from it.

And maybe Pádraig Yeates' paper could be very useful in this regard. He has used the old Connolly quote, that when they were talking about the prospect of Partition back in the time of the great lock-outs in Dublin, Connolly used the phrase: that 'a Carnival of Reaction' would ensue. And Pádraig's paper is maybe going to hopefully elaborate on that broader question: organised labour's response to Partition. So I am looking forward to both Margaret's paper on 'James Craig's quest to secure and imbed Partition' and Pádraig's 'A Carnival of reaction? The labour response to Partition'.

[**Jim McDermott**] Just a couple of points. You see when you get a binary situation, a violent situation... the Irish civil war showed that both the anti-Treaty and the pro-Treat republican forces knew how each other operated. It made the war far more savage; they knew each other's modus operandi in war, and because by the time of the civil war they were an all-class alliance. So too were unionists. The upper echelons of unionism would have known the workings, in a broad way at least, of the different paramilitary groups. What Aaron referred to as the 'black book' of D.I. Nixon... when he was a representative of the Woodvale in the thirties up in Stormont, according to James Kelly's book, *Bonfire on the Hill*, he was ..... he was very successful in intimidating people like Lord Londonderry. In the broad scheme of things, I think they thought 'the end would justify the means', and part of the tragedy was that the end was never successful.

[**Harry Donaghy**] Mention of the Specials, coupled with our quest in these talks and discussions to untangle fact from myth in our history reminds me of one oft-repeated myth: that in 1969 the slogan 'IRA: I Ran Away' had appeared on the gable walls in Catholic West Belfast. The fact is that *never* appeared on *any* wall in West Belfast at that time, it was a pure invention which even reputable historians have continued to repeat. But, interestingly, around about 1958, it *was* written on a bridge by a local platoon of B-Specials when they had bumped

into an IRA unit and the latter had departed very quickly!

[**Deirdre Mac Bride**]

Can I finish by thanking Aaron and asking everyone to give him a round of applause.

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