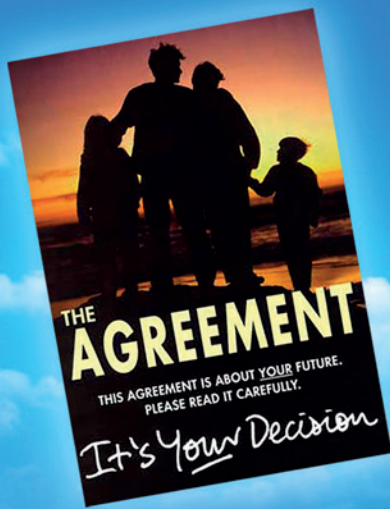


OUR RIGHTS - OUR FUTURE

THE FUTURE OF IRELAND

CANAL COURT HOTEL, NEWRY

THURSDAY 9TH MAY 7PM



MR JUSTICE RICHARD HUMPHREYS • ANNA MCHUGH • PROFESSOR COLIN HARVEY
BERNARDINE QUINN • PATRICIA MACBRIDE • EMMA DE SOUZA • SENATOR FRANCES BLACK
DANIEL HOLDER • SENATOR IAN MARSHALL • PADDY TIERNEY • MARTINA DEVLIN • NIALL MURPHY

A CONVERSATION ABOUT OUR RIGHTS AND OUR FUTURE

THE IRISH NEWS

Pro fide et patria

Irish passport office needed

EVIDENCE, if it were needed, of the increased demand for Irish passports ahead of the UK's withdrawal from the EU can be found in the fact that some post offices in Northern Ireland have run out of application forms.

A number of post offices put up signs saying it could be the end of February before they receive new stock, which cannot be viewed as an acceptable situation.

Among the outlets affected is the main Belfast city centre post office on Bridge Street.

Printing additional forms should not be an insurmountable problem and yesterday the Republic's department of foreign affairs confirmed that new forms have been dispatched and stocks should be replenished within days.

However, the fact that there are shortages at all will reinforce calls for the Irish government to open an office in the north to deal with the number of people applying for an Irish passport.

The demand is clearly there. Irish government figures show nearly 85,000 people from Northern Ireland applied for passports in 2018, a 2 per cent increase on the previous year.

The number of applications has grown since the Brexit referendum result in June 2016 and demand is likely to intensify as the deadline approaches for withdrawal on March 29.

The absence of an agreed arrangement for dealing with the immediate aftermath of Brexit and fears of a no-deal will add to the sense of concern many people have about the months ahead.

While the Irish government has correctly pointed out that anyone wishing to renew their passport can do so online, there are plainly large numbers of people applying for the first time for whom additional support would be appreciated.

As well as a practical purpose, a passport office would have a symbolic role, sending out an important message from the Irish government to Irish citizens in the north in what are uncertain political times.

Preserve castle link to our past

COLONEL Edward Saunderson, a prominent political figure who died in 1906, was at the heart of what was once a strong unionist tradition in Co Cavan.

As a leading Orangeman, a staunch opponent of home rule and an MP who played a key role in the events leading to the launch of the Ulster Unionist Party, his thoughts on the subsequent partition of Ireland which left his native county on the southern side of the border would have been intriguing.

His family mansion on a 300-acre estate near Belturbet is on the site of the 14th-century Breffni Castle, and by any standards, as we report today, is a building of immense historical and architectural significance.

It is concerning that, after changing hands on a number of occasions, it has fallen into disrepair. It is essential that the authorities find ways of preserving and protecting an important link with our past.



Prints of Ian Knox cartoons are available to buy from £15 at shop.irishnews.com

Ignorance of Irish government plain

Brian Feeney



Gael to exclude Sinn Féin? Cutting through their platitudes and padding, they both said the priority is to get an executive up and running and that there can't be a border poll. Gutless, futile, infuriating. A merry-go-round with the same cheap, run of the mill musak playing endlessly. The speakers from the south were addressing the wrong conference. They would have been applauded at the

It has not penetrated the miasma of complacency in Dublin that the executive has been in crisis since 2012 with interminable talks sessions every autumn since, each leading nowhere

Conservative party conference because the NIO and British prime minister would have been saying exactly the same. It has not penetrated the miasma of complacency in Dublin that the executive has been in crisis since 2012 with interminable talks sessions every autumn since, each leading nowhere. Look, there isn't going to be an executive until there's a new British government and probably not then either. The infuriating aspect is

the false equivalence peddled by the Irish government. How about telling the truth for a change?

The reason there's no executive is because of the DUP and the British government. Sinn Féin wanted an executive and agreed a bad deal with the DUP to get into one and the DUP ratted on it. Sinn Féin leaked the deal and when nationalists saw how bad it was Sinn Féin realised only then the nationalist electorate was ahead of them in rejection of the notion of an executive run on the basis of a DUP veto on progress on human rights and nationalist aspirations. The British government, supposed to be 'rigorously impartial', backs the DUP to the hilt in this denial of rights and progress. Here's the most telling point. The Irish government doesn't know it was a bad deal and when told, doesn't understand why it was bad.

Worse, northern nationalists aren't allowed to propose a border poll if there's a no-deal Brexit despite that being the only guaranteed route back into the EU. It's also, as Professor Colin Harvey pointed out on Saturday, 'the democratically endorsed constitutional compromise intended to underpin relationships on this island... Are people supposed to pretend there is not an anticipated and agreed solution to a hard border on this island?' In Harvey's words, 'the solution that dare not speak its name?'

A border poll is 'toxic', 'divisive', 'destabilising' and worse, even though it's enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. However, Brexit is OK to push through, even though a majority here voted decisively against it. Is it not toxic, divisive, destabilising and worse? The sad truth is that you're not allowed to suggest a border poll, even in the event of a no-deal Brexit, because the Irish government would have a collective nervous breakdown.

OUR RIGHTS - OUR FUTURE THE FUTURE OF IRELAND

Canal Court Hotel, Newry
7pm - 9:15pm Thursday 9th May

Clár

19:00 Niall Murphy - Fáilte

19:15 **Panel Discussion - Our Rights**

19:45 Audience Q&A

Chair Anna McHugh

Panel Emma de Souza

Daniel Holder

Padraig Ó Tiarnaigh

Bernardine Quinn

20:15 **Panel Discussion - Our Future**

20:45 Audience Q&A

Chair Patricia MacBride

Panel Mr Justice Richard Humphreys

Professor Colin Harvey

Senator Frances Black

Senator Ian Marshall

Martina Devlin

21:15 Closing remarks

IRELAND'S FUTURE



Niall Murphy



Anna McHugh



Emma de Souza



Daniel Holder



Padraig Ó Tiarnaigh



Bernardine Quinn



Patricia MacBride



Richard Humphreys



Colin Harvey



Senator Frances Black



Senator Ian Marshall



Martina Devlin

BREXIT

Play your part in helping to shape our country's future

WHEN over 200 Irish citizens from the north signed an open letter to An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar in December 2017 it came at the end of a tumultuous and politically defining year. That January, the Good Friday Agreement political institutions collapsed amidst the political and financial scandal of RHI. It served to confirm the growing view of northern nationalists that political unionism was not committed to proper power sharing. The disrespect for the Irish national identity and repeated mockery of the Irish language by DUP elected representatives, the punitive scrapping of the Liofa bursary scheme by a DUP minister, and then insults from that party's leader during the March assembly election mobilised the nationalist and republican electorate: in turn the unionist political majority in the assembly was ended. Increased unionist belligerence continued, and then, the nationalist constituency sent a stark message during the subsequent Westminster election, that it was turning its back on Westminster. Of course, the political process in the north had already been seriously destabilised due to the result of the EU Referendum in 2016, when a majority of people in the north voted to remain in the EU. The British government ignored that democratic result and the emerging negative implications of Brexit became major talking points. The potential reinforcement of partition, the erosion of citizen's rights, the undermining of the Good Friday Agreement, and the denial of the democratic wish of the north to remain in the EU, all became mainstreamed as profound concerns in daily conversation.

PLATFORM

Niall Murphy



This culmination of events and concerns motivated me and others to make the first direct public appeal to Leo Varadkar to stand up and speak out in defence of Irish citizens' rights in the north. We were not surprised to discover that many from across all sectors in society had no hesitation in adding their names to this initiative. Indeed, in the aftermath of the publication of the letter the only complaint received was from people annoyed that they weren't asked. We felt it was essential that Irish citizens in the north heard reassurance from the Irish government that the reality of abandonment experienced by our parents and grandparents would not be visited upon our generation. An Taoiseach pronounced that northern nationalists "will never again be left behind by an Irish government". And yet despite a series of meetings with both An Taoiseach and Tánaiste, Simon Coveney, and further statements from both, the deep discontent which we helped to highlight throughout 2017 has remained intact. As a result of the increased political disarray at Westminster, the in fighting within the British Conservative Party and British government, and the destructive influence of the DUP on both;



■ GROWING DISCONTENT: Despite a series of meetings with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and Tánaiste Simon Coveney, a deep discontent among Irish citizens in the north has remained intact



coupled with the continuing political crisis and denial of rights and democracy in the north, our civic initiative decided to write to An Taoiseach again. This time, in November 2018, over 1,000 citizens endorsed another direct appeal to An Taoiseach and his government to act in defence of the Good Friday Agreement and citizens' rights. Most significantly, between December 2017 and November 2018, the nationalist discontent to which we gave popular expression has not only grown, in fact a seismic shift has occurred within wider nationalist opinion. Having turned its back on Westminster in June 2017, nationalism is now looking beyond the parameters of what was the northern state.

Brexit has changed everything. Old certainties have gone. Conversations about the future, and future constitutional change, are happening in unexpected places. Citizens who once looked to Westminster are now considering new scenarios. New arrangements and new relationships are being considered. Ireland has changed dramatically over the course of the past 20 years. The north has been left behind. British government policy has turned it into a political and economic back water. The veto of the DUP and others in political unionism has blocked the development of a shared, secular society based on rights, civil liberties and anti-sectarianism. It is within this context that the Beyond Brexit – the Future of Ireland conference has been

organised. We seek to provide a space for a discussion to begin. It has to begin somewhere. We believe this is the right time to have a conversation about the future. Failure to encourage and embrace that potential would be reckless and irresponsible. Our children and new generations deserve a better future, better than our past. So come along and have your say this Saturday. Play your part in helping shape the future of our country. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/beyond-brexit-registration-49981301418>. The event will commence sharp at 11am, with registration desks open from 10am. **■ Niall Murphy is an organiser of Beyond Brexit – the Future of Ireland conference.**

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Fears over growing risk to children's health

Jane Kirby

BREXIT poses a real risk to the health of children in the UK, with concerns over recruiting specialist doctors and access to research funding, according to a new report. The study, from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), welcomed a government shift towards prioritising child health through initiatives such as tackling obesity and poor mental health but warned of problems ahead. The report also called for more to be done on child poverty, saying cuts to early-years services and public health funding were causing damage. It also pointed to the UK's poor breastfeeding rates – some of the lowest in the world – which are no longer measured after the UK infant feeding survey was scrapped in 2015.



■ REPORT: The study from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health said progress on child health in Northern Ireland has been poor

The study is made up of a scorecard on how much progress has been made towards recommendations contained in a 2017 RCPCH report. It commended the Scottish government for its plans to tackle child poverty, obesity and poor mental health, and said Wales had introduced measures to cut obesity

and protect children from alcohol. But it said progress on child health has been poor in Northern Ireland. In England, there has been "substantial investment" in community-based mental health services to ensure children can get specialist care. On obesity, the report welcomed

restrictions on junk food marketing and more help for overweight children. But it said no progress has been made on extending the smoking ban to schools, sports fields, playgrounds and NHS premises. There has also been little progress in medicines for diseases that only affect children and there remains a real concern that Brexit will mean "the framework and standing in the UK in relation to children's medicines development will be lost". The study added: "We are entering a period of change and uncertainty. The UK's exit from the EU raises concerns about ongoing access to important EU funding for child health and potential detrimental impact with respect to access to medicines and other forms of treatment."

► Editorial ► P20

BREXIT

Organic movement is culmination of hard work by everyday people

As civic nationalism gathers at Belfast's Waterfront Hall to assess the impact of Brexit for northern nationalists, political correspondent **John Manley** talks to some of the main protagonists about the conference's aims and expectations



TOMORROW'S 'Beyond Brexit' event represents the culmination of months of work by people who are busy elsewhere in their everyday lives. Yet the lawyers, teachers, entrepreneurs and sports people who have got behind this organic movement believe too much is a stake to leave this unpredictable process solely to the politicians. For the organisers, the event is essentially about safeguarding the rights and interests of those in the north who identify as Irish.

Ahead of Brexit, when devolution was operational, they felt their identity was protected and the political process, while flawed, was endeavouring to acknowledge their aspirations.

But in little over two years, the political landscape has been transformed by the EU referendum result and the collapse of Stormont. Relative stability has been replaced by uncertainty, while political progress, albeit sluggish, has been usurped by inertia and heightened animosity. When the increased possibility of a hard border is added to this toxic mix, it's easy to see understand growing nationalist anxiety.

Conor Patterson is chief executive of Newry and Mourne Cooperative and Enterprise Agency and among 1,000 signatories to November's letter to Leo Varadkar, calling on the

taoiseach to fulfil his promise that northern nationalists "will never again be left behind by an Irish government".

In recent decades he has seen the border city transform from an unemployment black spot to an economic powerhouse, where high value-added businesses like First Derivatives, MJM Group and Norbrook have thousands of skilled workers on the payroll. Mr Patterson, pictured, regards himself as an "internationalist" rather than a nationalist but easily identifies with the concerns voiced by fellow signatories.

"I feel privileged to be part of the generation that saw this area transform and that change was facilitated by EU-backed infrastructure – the motorway, the rail links, Warrenpoint Port," he says. "If ever there was an example of a successful Keynesian investment model this is it, because the private money soon followed, but now Brexit threatens to turn back the clock."

Pat Cullen, the former director of nursing at the Public Health Agency, pictured, is foremost worried about the consequences that severing ties with Brussels will have on the health sector.

She says the



impact will be manifold, affecting funding, staffing levels, access to treatment abroad, cross-border co-operation, and the ability to combat communicable diseases.

"Brexit will be catastrophic for a health service that is already at total breaking point, with waiting lists the highest in Europe," she says.

Ms Cullen hopes tomorrow will ignite a debate that will continue in earnest long after the 1,000-plus expected at the Waterfront have gone home.

Belfast-based entrepreneur Gerry Carlile, pictured, says the movement that has coalesced around concern about Brexit came about through "conversations on the sides of football pitches, in school car parks and in coffee shops and bars". He stresses that there's no ambition to turn the project into a "capital P" political vehicle.

"With the exception of John Finucane, none of the core organisers is involved in elec-



toral politics – it's a civic approach," he says.

"To a degree, we want to move it away from political parties, because that way we may have a better chance of succeeding in our aims."

When asked about the

event's discussions about the shape of a future, united Ireland, Mr Carlile is unapologetic, believing Brexit is a catalyst for the unity project and that all of those who subscribe to the idea must start working towards a shared vision.

"Increasingly people, including those from a traditionally unionist background, are asking questions about a united Ireland," he says.

"We believe it's up to the Dublin government and others to provide answers to these questions."

The event has faced criticism from Irish News columnist Tom Kelly, who while welcoming the conference's focus on Brexit, believes political unionism should not be excluded.

"We need more compromise, more conversations across communities – not within them," he wrote earlier this week.

Commentator and event co-organiser Chris Donnelly doesn't accept the criticism,

saying he has been involved in many debates and discussions involving those with diametrically opposed views on Brexit and on the constitutional question, but that tomorrow's conference isn't one of them.

"This is a forum primarily to explore issues of concern and interest for Irish citizens in the north resulting from Brexit, with input from policy experts and commentators on these themes," he says.

"It is also a platform for pro-unity political figures to outline their plans for meeting the challenges arising from those concerns and interests, and to continue the discussion about how we credibly advance a united Ireland agenda into the future."

He adds, that everyone is welcome to attend: "Not least because we are very conscious that many of the Brexit-related concerns are shared by people across all sections of the community in the north of Ireland."

Lightbody says hard border 'worst thing possible'

SNOW Patrol frontman Gary Lightbody has said a hard border as a result of Brexit would be the "worst thing possible".

The rock band's lead singer, pictured, said it was "extremely worrying" as Northern Ireland is still recovering from the Troubles.

Lightbody, from Bangor in Co Down, said: "We are still recovering from the events of the thirtysomething years of the Troubles, and all our history of our tumultuous



island in the years before that. "It's not a time to put that hard border back up again, it's really not. It would be the worst thing possible. It's really bad. Whatever scenario we end up in I hope there is no border that goes back up again."

Lightbody, whose band were yesterday announced as headliners of Latitude festival in England this summer, also said he feared Brexit would complicate the group's international touring commitments. "Of course it will affect

every touring band with British passports, of course it will. I have this hope that something happens that gets resolved and we don't go into Brexit," he said.

"At this point it is such chaos and it is so disorganised that any kind of scenario seems like it is going to affect people negatively, and if it doesn't happen then there are negative connotations for that too.

"Personally, I voted to remain – I'm going to wear that on my sleeve. I didn't want Brexit to happen but it looks like it might."

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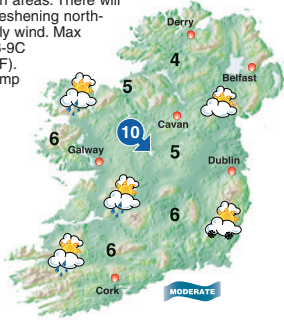
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Weather 

Today in Ireland

A few showers during the morning. However, brighter later on with showers mostly across western areas. There will be a freshening north-westerly wind. Max temp 6-9C (43-48F). Sea temp 10C (50F).



Sun & Moon

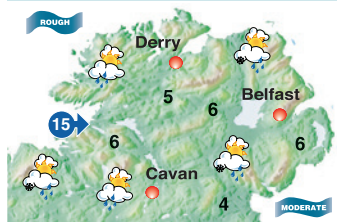
Sunrise	8.16am	Sunset	4.59pm	Lighting up:
Moonrise	1.28am	Moonset	11.48am	4.59pm to 8.14am

Air Pollution

	Rural	Cities	Roadside
Belfast	2 (Low)	2 (Low)	2 (Low)
Dublin	2 (Low)	2 (Low)	2 (Low)
Galway	3 (Low)	3 (Low)	3 (Low)

Low (1-3) Moderate (4-6) High (7-9) V. High (10)

Today in Ulster



A rather cloudy day with showers, particularly across western areas during the afternoon. There will be freshening westerly winds. Max temp 3-6C (37-43F). Sea temp 9C (48F).

Four-day Outlook

Day	Icon	Temp (C)	Temp (F)
Tuesday		4C (39C)	-2C (28F)
Wednesday		5C (41F)	-2C (28F)
Thursday		5C (41F)	0C (32F)
Friday		6C (43F)	0C (32F)

Ireland yesterday

	C	F	C	F	
Athlone f	5	41	Kilkenny f	5	41
Belfast s	5	41	Newry sh	4	39
Birr f	5	41	Rosslare f	6	43
Cavan sh	4	39	Shannon c	7	45
Cork r	6	43	Tralee c	8	46
Derry sh	6	43	Valentia c	8	46
Dublin s	5	41	Westport sh	6	43
Dundalk f	5	41	Wicklow s	5	41

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CIVIC NATIONALISM EVENT

Hardening of border ‘bolsters case for unity poll’

John Manley
Political Correspondent
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SINN Féin and the SDLP are at odds over the timing of a unity referendum with republicans arguing that any hardening of the border will reinforce the case for a border poll.

The leaders of both parties were among a number of speakers who addressed an audience of around 1,500 at Saturday's Beyond Brexit conference in Belfast's Waterfront Hall.

The event was organised by the group of civic nationalists who last November wrote an open letter to Leo Varadkar, calling on the taoiseach to protect the rights of Irish citizens after Brexit.

It was signed by more than 1,000 lawyers, business owners, teachers and sportspeople. The conference also heard from Fine Gael education minister Joe McHugh and Fianna Fáil deputy leader Dara Calleary, as well as a range of nationalist commentators.

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald, who last year was forced to row back after saying a border poll should be delayed, said crashing out of the EU with no deal would lead to a hardening of the border, prompting increased demand for a vote on Irish unity.

She called on the Dublin government to convene a forum in a bid to begin planning for reunification.

Mrs McDonald said the British Brexiters' "policy of isolation" would not be tolerated.

"A crash means a hardening of the border and the loss of rights and continued uncertainty and instability – a hardening of the border is inconceivable and will be met with the demand for a unity referendum," she said.

She highlighted how Ireland was facing uncertainty and that its fate currently lay "in the hands of a minority Tory government in London".

Mrs McDonald said it was "irresponsible and arrogant" for the Dublin government to dis-

But Sinn Féin and SDLP at odds over timing of referendum

miss any prospect of a unity referendum.

She issued a direct message to the unionist community, saying they would "have a home in a united Ireland".

"You will have a place at the table, a place at the centre of political life and not [be] left in the margins of Westminster," she said. "The Protestant, loyalist and unionist community are part of the fabric and diversity of our nation and they must be part of the discussion in shaping the new Ireland and be partners in building a new Ireland – our shared and often troubled history can be reconciled."

However, SDLP leader Colum Eastwood said now was not the right time for a border poll.

He said some unionists were "willing to engage and explore new possibilities" and that they should have nothing to fear from a conversation about Irish unity "based on persuasion and consent".

"My appeal to unionism is this – try to convince us of your vision for the future and we'll try to convince you of ours, and then in time let the people decide," he said.

The Foyle MLA said any hardening of the border would be a "deliberate violation" of the political process by the British government.

Donegal TD Mr McHugh said it was "imperative" that the peace process was protected.

"The impact of Brexit will of course be felt across this island in



SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR: Mary Lou McDonald and Colum Eastwood at the Beyond Brexit event at the Waterfront Hall
PICTURES: Mal McCann



GOOD TO TALK: Professor Jim Dorman, Kevin Meagher and Frances Black; Alasdair McDonnell and former Irish presidential candidate Peter Casey; Irish language campaigner Katy Rose Mead; and Clare Bailey

many different ways," he said. "We are doing everything we possibly can to prepare for and mitigate those impacts."

Mr Calleary said Brexit had "consumed" the political systems on both sides of the Irish Sea, meaning other issues had been "minimised and forgotten about".

"The issues about health, homelessness, infrastructure, are all relegated. Those are the issues that people's lives are dependant on, yet the energy of politics, the energy of the civil service, has been consumed by this political process," he said.

Event co-organiser Niall Murphy criticised the DUP's opposition to an Irish language act, saying the party had a "sneering contempt for parity of esteem".

Queen's University's Professor Colin Harvey said Arlene Foster's party was "running around Europe" attempting to self-harm the north.

He also defended the event's organisers for not inviting unionists to speak at the conference.

"Let me absolutely clear, we apologise to no-one for being here today and having the conversation about the rights of Irish citizens," he said.

Irish News columnist Brian Feeney told the audience that Irish citizens living north of the border had been "left behind" by the Dublin government.

"We hear all these promises [from the Irish government], we are told: 'You won't be left behind, we are totally committed to this' – warm words – that's all we get," he said.

LOTTERY RESULTS

Irish Lotto:.....06,12,13,23,31,34 Bonus:15
Lotto Plus 1:.....02,03,11,26,27,36 Bonus:41
Lotto Plus 2:.....06,08,27,30,33,47 Bonus:16

UK Lotto:.....29,40,42,47,51,56 Bonus:45
Thunderball:.....14,21,26,32,38 Thunderball:08

CIVIC NATIONALISM EVENT

Groundswell movement learning from Brexit mess



SATURDAY'S Beyond Brexit conference surprised a lot of people, both by the numbers it attracted and the diversity of opinion represented on stage.

As has been pointed out previously, political unionism was excluded, with the organisers making it clear that, initially at least, this is an internal conversation aimed at developing a consensual vision of what Irish unity might look like.

The inadvertent consequence of a growth in English nationalism, as manifested in the EU referendum result, is to have triggered a corresponding resurgence of Irish nationalism.

But whereas the recent tide of English nationalism can be characterised as xenophobic, evoking the Dunkirk spirit and pining for the lost days of the British empire, its more mature Irish counterpart is increasingly seeking to be inclusive and outward looking.

The groundswell movement that has emerged across Ireland in response to Brexit has been quick to learn lessons from the shambolic, cack-handed manner in which Britain has sought to extricate itself from the EU.

The lack of preparation for Brexit and the absence of a clear vision of what the post-EU landscape would look like has ingrained division and thwarted any agreed outcome.

Observing this chaos from across the Irish Sea and noting its potential impact on the border has led to the realisation among nationalists of all shades that simply achieving a numerical majority in the north favouring unification is a clumsy route to take and one that is unlikely to result in an agreed Ireland.

As SDLP leader Colum Eastwood noted, the vision of a new Ireland

ANALYSIS

John Manley
Political Correspondent



needs "definition and detail".

Belfast-based solicitor and conference co-organiser Niall Murphy opened Saturday's proceedings by drawing parallels between the unexpected appearance of his "beloved" St Enda's GAA club in an All-Ireland final next month and the circumstances that have reignited the widespread desire for Irish unity.

"I have seen how history and identity, timing and preparation and the taking of opportunity can reshape history and positively define and improve lives," he said.

But Mr Murphy also highlighted the unwelcome inconveniences that Brexit may yet give rise to, and how he is keen to avoid a scenario where his children would have to "endure the ignominy of being stopped at Newry or Derry, when travelling to Croke Park for a match, or to Donegal for a holiday".

His address clearly illustrated how the issues UK's exit from the EU with Northern Ireland as a reluctant passenger are both micro and macro but ultimately require the same solution.

Fine Gael education minister Joe McHugh, right, stressed how Dublin had ensured the concerns of northern nationalists were the



■ **CENTRE STAGE:** Clockwise from top, Niall Murphy addresses the audience, Paul Gosling, Prof Colin Harvey, Brian Feeney, Joe McHugh and Dara Calleary
PICTURES: Mal McCann

fore in the EU's negotiations with the UK and how he's determined to provide more certainty around the future arrangements for northern students studying in southern universities.

However, the Fine Gael government's Brexit record to date was criticised by Irish News columnist Brian Feeney, who said a "fixation on the backstop and trade" meant the rights of Irish citizens in the north had been left behind.

"Warm words butter no parsnips," Mr Feeney said.

Elsewhere, in an event that was arguably too heavy on speech-

es at the expense of dialogue, we heard how Brexit had moved north Down obstetrician Jim Doran from a position of "soft unionism to soft nationalism" and how those who aspire to a united Ireland were more than capable of having internal conversations while at the same time talking to unionists.

Where this project moves next remains to be seen but it's clear that its strength lies in the broad range of voices contributing to the debate. That inclusiveness needs to prevail if momentum is to be maintained.

As Fianna Fáil deputy leader Dara Calleary stressed, the conversation must continue "in the community halls and around the kitchen tables" and the more people who speak the greater the validation of their voices.

Simply achieving a numerical majority in the north favouring unification is a clumsy route to take and one that is unlikely to result in an agreed Ireland

■ **SHOW OF APPRECIATION:** Former Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams was among the audience



DUP brand wall demonstration 'amateur dramatics'



■ **HARD-HITTING:** Mary Lou McDonald and Michelle O'Neill help demolish a mock 'hard border' wall at the protest in Newry
PICTURES: Mal McCann

Allison Morris
Security Correspondent
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THE DUP has criticised a protest event close to the border on Saturday involving people dressed as soldiers and a mock wall as "amateur dramatics". Sinn Féin president Mary Lou McDonald attended the Border Communities Against Brexit event, having first addressed a packed audience at the Beyond Brexit conference in Belfast's Waterfront Hall.

At the Waterfront, she said: "There are no 'little Irelanders' here and we will not tolerate the narrowness of the Brexiters or policy of isolation imposed by Brexiters."

"A crash means a hardening of the border and the loss of rights and continued uncertainty and instability."

"A hardening of the border is inconceivable and will be met with the demand for a unity



■ **STOP AND THINK:** Actors dressed as a soldier and a border guard

referendum." Afterwards she attended the protest in Newry, with actors dressed as soldiers and a wall built across the road. The wall was later knocked down.

Protesters recreated a checkpoint on the old Dublin Road at Carrickcarnon, in front of hundreds of supporters who took turns using a sledgehammer to demolish the concrete-block wall. DUP deputy leader Nigel Dodds said the suggestion that there

Such amateur dramatics do nothing to make progress and only play on people's fears

—Nigel Dodds

would be troops back on the border "did not hold water". He referred to the Newry demonstration as little more than "amateur dramatics". "By talking about troops on the border, Leo Varadkar is being as irresponsible as those building wooden customs huts, dressing actors in trench coats and smashing concrete brick walls on the border," he said. "Such amateur dramatics do nothing to make progress and only play on people's fears. 'It's complete and utter nonsense.'"



Chris Donnelly

Let a hundred flowers bloom for Unity

The Waterfront Conference in January was a tremendous success, with more than 1,500 people in attendance on the day to hear contributions from a range of political parties and prominent civic voices on the themes of Brexit and Irish unity.

The level of interest generated in the conference was indicative of the heightened concern and frustration felt by many as a consequence of the continuing uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the collapse of our political institutions due to a denial of rights. More than three months on, these same issues remain unresolved.

In the intervening period, Brexit has continued to dominate the political agenda, and the central concerns articulated at the conference have continued to be raised and addressed by representative voices of civic nationalism and others, in Ireland and beyond.

During her trip to Ireland three weeks ago, the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, publicly ruled out any prospect of a US-UK trade deal if the Good Friday Agreement was damaged as a consequence of Brexit. Mrs Pelosi has been supported in this assertion by many other key political figures in the United States, including Congressman Richard Neal.

In another welcome development last month, the Tanaiste, Simon Coveney, gave a public commitment to all citizens residing in the north that the Irish government would, if necessary, meet the cost of continuing provision of the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) after Brexit. Along with continuing involvement in the ERASMUS programme (and its successor), this was a key demand highlighted through the civic nationalist initiative at both the Waterfront Conference and in the public letter to An Taoiseach, published last November.

The appalling murder of Lyra McKee has concentrated minds on finding a way to decisively clear a path for the return of the political institutions locally which have been suspended for more than two years. The two governments have initiated a talks process, and we will find out in the weeks to come if there is to be any breakthrough.

The Good Friday Agreement provided a template for establishing a rights based society, and the issue of rights continues to be central to the political discussions today.

Resolving the on-going political impasse at Stormont and alleviating the concerns over the impact of Brexit in Ireland must entail affording respect to the place of the rights of individuals and of groups in our divided society. It is no longer acceptable that rights available to people in the rest of Ireland and in Great Britain are denied to people residing in the north of Ireland due to either a refusal of the British government to deliver on their promise at St Andrews regarding the Irish Language Act, or due to the DUP's enduring hostility to the LGBT community.

Developing and fostering a rights based society is consistent with the visions of Irish unity articulated at the Waterfront Conference by prominent figures from pro-Unity parties and civic society across the island.

It is no exaggeration to say that there has been an explosion of interest in Irish reunification over the past two years. The issue has been the focus of many lectures, debates and publications, and a number of social media accounts and podcasts have been set up facilitating and encouraging conversations. Our initiative aims to advance the Irish unity agenda, letting a hundred flowers bloom and broadening participation in the unity discussion amidst a backdrop of significant political and cultural change which brings with it tremendous opportunity, as well as risk, for all interested in shaping a new Ireland.



Brexit has changed everything

By the standards of Daniel O’Connell’s ‘monster meetings,’ the ‘Ireland’s Future’ event at the Waterfront Hall last Saturday was a modest affair.

Judged by the yardstick of modern political campaigning, however, this was the most important political gathering in Ireland for two decades.

In coming years, ‘Beyond Brexit: The Future of Ireland’ will be remembered as an inflection point. O’Connell may have pulled in hundreds of thousands, but a combination of print, broadcast and social media coverage has carried the message from Saturday even further.

My Twitter feed has not stopped pinging for the last 48 hours with people tweeting and retweeting snippets about the day. There was also blanket media coverage across Ireland and everyone who attended this remarkable event – around 2,000, according to the BBC – left energised with a real sense of possibility.

Everyone felt it. Three party leaders, a senior Irish government minister and the deputy leader of the main southern opposition party is quite a haul. Notwithstanding the fact they are usually at each other’s throats. Yet here they were, the cream of Irish politics, sat in this cavernous space, many of them mere delegates, clapping and retweeting each other’s points.

Something has changed, with Brexit catalysing Irish politics into a renewed purpose. I’ve been to scores of political conferences over the years, but there was something different about Saturday’s event. I remember campaigning in the Good Friday Agreement referendum with young members of the SDLP, Sinn Féin as well as Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. I would class Saturday’s event in that vein, with a similar sense of goodwill and shared endeavour.

Clearly, the day served as a focal point for the rising anger among nationalists and political progressives about Brexit and the various failings of the DUP and the fact that devolution is mired – but there was no rancour and little rhetoric.

Instead, we heard a series of speakers make telling and entirely valid points about the economic dangers of Brexit, the slow progress in obtaining civil and human rights and about how we must uphold the Good Friday Agreement settlement.

I mentioned a couple of years ago the need to ‘deshinnerise’ the issue of Irish unity in order to broaden and deepen its appeal, particularly among Irish political elites. Well, Saturday showed this is well in hand, as speaker after speaker either called for it, mentioned it, or touched on it.

As I said at the event, the day bookends, for me, the first part of the journey toward a united Ireland: We are all now talking about it. There is no more sidling around the issue.

Finally, in no particular order, here are my other quick takeaways from the day:

1. The involvement of the southern establishment. Dublin, no doubt inspired by the unfolding disaster around Brexit, is now much more serious about its all-Ireland responsibilities. The message was clear: the Irish Government will not leave people in the North behind.

2. Middle-class nationalists are now in play. The striking tone of the day came from a succession of speakers from the constitutional nationalist tradition, who, while not politicians, brilliantly articulated the frustrations that have developed in recent years – particularly around the struggle to get Unionism to accept parity of esteem. One of the event’s organisers, solicitor Niall Murphy, summed up the feeling when he said that nationalism ‘is looking beyond the parameters of the Northern state.’ Brexit, he said, ‘has changed everything.’

3. Brexit, the failures of the DUP – and Irish unity – are now part of the same core narrative. The first is, in part, caused by the second, while the third is the answer to being relieved of both. Irish unity is the way out of the Brexit quagmire and a release from the need to formally share power with a party whose better angels most people at the event have now given up trying to locate.

THE IRISH NEWS
Pro fide et patria

Welcome words from US visitors

AMONG the most ludicrous claims made by prominent figures on the Leave side before and after the 2016 Brexit referendum was that the UK was facing a wonderful opportunity to create new trade pacts across the EU and other key regions.

Boris Johnson publicly declared that he strongly favoured an outcome which involved remaining in the Single Market, only to later contradict himself, while the international trade secretary Liam Fox infamously declared that the arrangement finally reached with Brussels "should be the easiest in human history".

A particularly striking quote was provided by the then Brexit minister David Davis, who said: "There is no reason whatsoever to expect that most countries in the world would not actively want a free trade agreement with the UK."

The US was close to the top of the target list for the Brexiters, who managed to convince themselves that Donald Trump could not wait to open the door to all sorts of transatlantic economic benefits.

A cold blast of realism was provided on Monday night in London by the US Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, who confirmed previous Irish News reports on the issue by saying there would be "no chance whatsoever" of a post-Brexit trade deal between America and the UK if there was any weakening of the Good Friday Agreement.

She was due to meet Taoiseach Leo Varadkar in Dublin last night, before crossing the border for a series of high-profile engagements with leading northern politicians.

Mrs Pelosi's cross-party delegation included Congressman Richard Neal, who firmly endorses her position on the agreement and, as chair of the house ways and means committee, has the responsibility of overseeing future US/UK trade measures.

The arrival of the US group is timely and sends out an unmistakable message to the British government that the Good Friday Agreement is going to be protected and that the insurance policy offered by an Irish backstop must be at the heart of any EU withdrawal proposal emerging at Westminster.

**Holy Week reflection
Christ never betrays
His faithfulness**

EMOTIONS were running high as arguments over Brexit could be heard ringing out around Westminster. You could hear the word "traitor" being used among the demonstrators.

A traitor is often referred to today as "a Judas". This relates to Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

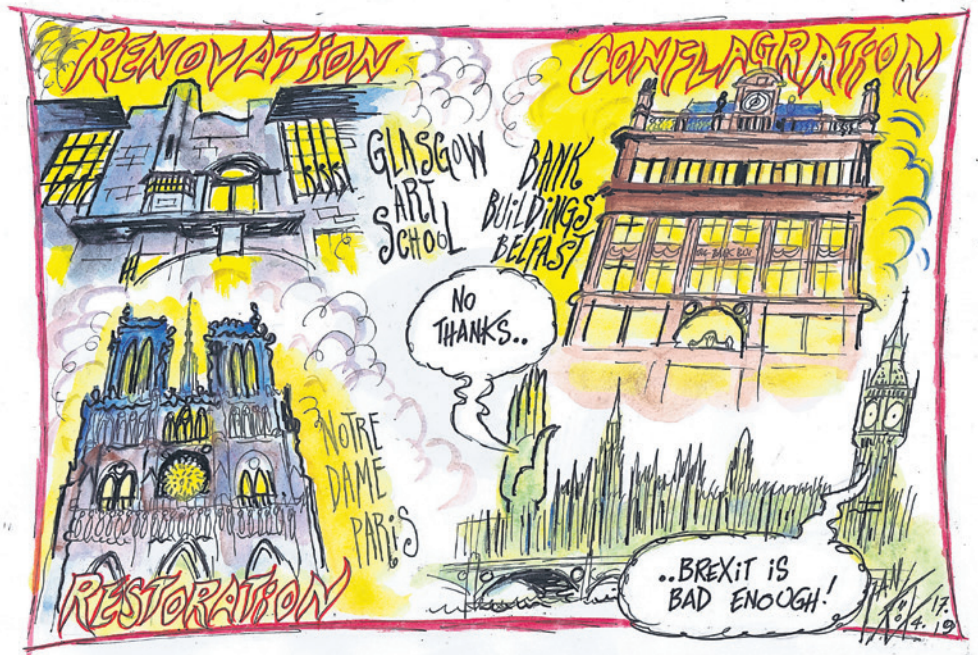
Betrayal is regarded as a particularly wicked act, especially so from someone who was in the privileged position of being among the 12 disciples Jesus called to follow Him. Sadly, Judas hardened his heart against Jesus and surrendered to his own evil desires.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was right: "The battle line between good and evil runs through the heart of every man."

While Judas betrayed Jesus, He never betrayed Judas. He washed Judas's feet, and Judas is among the disciples at the Last Supper. Judas refused God's forgiveness, underestimating God's love.

As the theologian Rev Dr Douglas Milne says: "Jesus is grieved by the failures of His people but His love for them endures." The traitor can still become the faithful servant.

Happy Easter.
**Rev Billy Davison
President of the
Methodist Church in Ireland**



Prints of Ian Knox cartoons are available to buy from £15 at shop.irishnews.com

North will never enjoy normal politics

TOMORROW fortnight we have the local government elections. You already know the final picture because the ethno-political divide here dictates the outcome.

Yet, just as inevitably, you'll hear the wail, "Where is the middle ground?" It's impossible to know whether it's wishful thinking, plain political stupidity or ignorance, or a policy designed in London to pretend this place is like somewhere in England, and that one day, some time around the twelfth of never, 'normal politics' will break out.

Look, it's not going to happen. The hypocrisy of that fraudulent stance is both nauseating and debilitating. The denial of reality that any political scientist in the world recognises, namely that politics here are based on allegiance and identity, wastes the lives of thousands of well-meaning dupes who spend their time chasing a grotesquely highly funded official fantasy.

In the 2014 local government elections Alliance, standard bearer of the getalongers, recipients of inordinate praise from the NIO and know-nothing outsiders, the natural home of the 'nayce' people, got 6.6 per cent, down from 7.4 per cent in 2011. The actual figures don't matter because it's always about 7-9 per cent and it always will be because it's the nature of this place. It's a delusion to think otherwise. Yet after more than 40 years the NIO and British and Irish governments still urge people to support, all together now, 'the middle ground'.

The stupidity of this official position is so dense as to be impenetrable. You may as well go to Belgium and urge Walloons and Flemings to be reconciled and have 'normal politics'. At bottom what the official position means is that it's the fault of people here that they can't get along. Blame the people for electing the

Brian Feeney



'wrong politicians'. Yet the Good Friday Agreement was a successful resolution because it recognised the failure of that official position, overturned the deliberately deceitful presentation of the problem here. The mechanisms of the GFA correctly analysed the problem and gave both communities equality of status and parity of esteem. Then the British government proceeded to ignore its obligations in all vital respects. Instead it returned to the previous

After more than 40 years the NIO and British and Irish governments still urge people to support, all together now, 'the middle ground'. The stupidity of this official position is so dense as to be impenetrable

nonsense, blowing millions on the Community Relations Council, a comprehensive distraction. The Irish government is as much to blame. Their favourite baby is Cooperation Ireland which shelled out €7,223 to fly Ian Óg across the Atlantic to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the GFA which the DUP opposes. Cooperation Ireland receives

the lion's share of the Irish government's so-called Reconciliation Fund which sprays €2.7 million a year on peace and reconciliation across the sectarian divide with no tangible result. More than a 100 groups benefit so they can sit around with cups of tea in their laps and intone, 'Oh aye, we're all cross-community here'. Cooperation Ireland sucks in 14 per cent of the Reconciliation budget – about €375,000. Yet its chair, Sir Christopher Moran, was at the DUP conference last year, obviously a great occasion of reconciliation, where he arranged Boris Johnson's attendance. Johnson thanked Moran 'for helping me secure this invitation'. No doubt Johnson and Arlene Foster were also thankful for the trip back to London in Moran's private jet afterwards. Moran has given the Conservatives around £250,000 in the last few years.

Essentially this flawed official analysis of the north promotes liberal unionism, an animal which was devoured decades ago by Ian Paisley. It seeks to make the north work, flying in the face of the reality that the DUP refuses to allow the north to work if the price is equality of status for Fenians and parity of esteem for the symbols and realities of Irishness. Last November 1,012 mainly northern nationalists published a letter to An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar asking him to live up to his promise not to leave northern nationalists behind. His only response was to turn up and speak at the Alliance party conference in March making crystal clear that he prefers fantasy to reality. His speech was meaningless platitudes, codswallop – what else could it be? Then again, in 2012 Simon Coveney addressed the DUP conference. Obviously it's out of the question for an Irish government minister to address a northern Sinn Féin gathering. That would mean facing reality.



■ UNITED: Sinn Féin president Mary Lou McDonald and SDLP leader Colum Eastwood at the Beyond Brexit event at the Waterfront Hall PICTURE: Mal McCann

Nationalist gathering a demonstration of unity

ON JANUARY 21 the Irish government marked the establishment of Ireland's first national, sovereign, parliament – An Chéad Dáil.

It organised a joint sitting of the Oireachtas, Dáil and Seanad and invited MPs and MLAs to the Mansion House – where An Chéad Dáil met one hundred years ago.

An Chéad Dáil assembled the representatives of the vast majority of the Irish people, under the leadership of Sinn Féin.

The joint sitting of the Oireachtas represented the vast majority of the Irish people: Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, Labour and independents, under the leadership of the Irish government.

Last Saturday in Belfast's Waterfront Hall, a gathering of more than 1,500 nationalists met under the leadership of the civic nationalist group, 'Ireland's Future'.

It provided a very important platform for the Irish government, Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil, SDLP, Green Party – representing, again the majority of the Irish people, and leading figures from the nationalist community: lawyers, columnists, human rights advocates and political activists.

One hundred years of conflicted history separated the assembly of An Chéad Dáil in Dublin and the gathering last Saturday.

The issues facing those who attended all three events was Ireland's independence and the injustice of partition. I have been to conferences of various kinds for over 40 years.

Last Saturday's conference was distinctively different and impressive for several reasons: the subject discussed was 'Beyond Brexit: The Future of Ireland' and the political breadth of those who attended and those who spoke on the platform was obvious.

This was nationalist and republican Ireland under one roof debating one issue: a new Ireland.

In my political lifetime I have never seen an

Jim Gibney



audience like this before debating the issues they did. Nor have I seen such a mood. The loudest applause greeted any speaker who even hinted at a united Ireland, a new Ireland or all-Ireland institutions. There was no applause for anyone suggesting that the north's institutions should be restored or that now was not the right time to call for a united Ireland or a unity/border poll. There was, however, loud applause for speakers calling

This was nationalist and republican Ireland under one roof debating one issue: a new Ireland. In my political lifetime I have never seen an audience like this before debating the issues they did

for engagement with unionists. The mood was upbeat, confident and optimistic with a solution-focused view of the future.

There was agreement that Brexit had fundamentally altered the political situation. That the British government having partitioned Ireland one hundred years ago were trying again, for a second time, to partition Ireland with an economic border – a

British Brexit border.

And it was doing so in exactly the same manner it did in 1919, when it ignored the democratic will of the Irish people and the democratic will of the people of the north in 2016 who voted to Remain in the EU.

In 1919 it imposed British rule at the point of a gun. In 2019 it imposes Brexit rule at the point of a DUP/Tory deal.

The primary issue at the conference was how a new independent Ireland was to be achieved and what practical steps needed to be taken to achieve it. A close secondary issue was the need for legal protection for the rights of Irish nationalists in the north including Irish language rights.

There was a crisis of equality and rights and Irish people risked being stateless – stripped of their Irish identity and legally viewed as British not Irish.

The solutions offered ranged across the national spectrum: a new Ireland based on equality and human rights; a unity/border poll; the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement; the restoration of the executive and assembly on a human rights and equality basis; the formation of an all-island civic assembly; a Bill of Rights and a new human rights treaty and continued EU representation for the people of the north by the Irish government allocating the two extra EU seats arising from Brexit to the north. Take the fear out of the united Ireland debate; have an informed debate now about what a new united Ireland would

look like before a unity/border poll; learn the lesson of the Brexit chaos – pre-plan and discuss the transition to independence. The Waterfront Hall conference came at the end of an important week which saw the welcome arrival of Fianna Fáil in partnership with the SDLP. Fine Gael and Labour should follow and join the rest of us in ending partition and creating a new independent Ireland.

The Irish News
ON THIS DAY JANUARY 30 1969

Wild Scenes in Guildhall

PANDEMONIUM which broke out during the monthly meeting of Derry Corporation yesterday afternoon was the worst ever witnessed there. Wild scenes which marked the concluding stages of the meeting included an uproar which drowned out the voices of members and officials, the singing of *We Shall Overcome* and the invasion of the Council Chamber.

At the end of the meeting a number of demonstrators stood with their backs to the exit doors of the Chamber and placed chairs against these doors and refused to allow members of the Corporation and officials to go out. The Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC), on the preceding day, had invited as many of the public as possible to go to the Corporation meeting. Those in the public gallery included a number of women. Several times when there was applause or shouts from the gallery, the Mayor (Councillor William Beatty) hammered on his desk and called for order and eventually threatened to terminate the meeting.

The storm did not really break, however, until the Corporation, by 12 Unionist votes to 7 Nationalists, rejected a Nationalist proposal to approve of plans lodged some months ago by the Derry Housing Association for housing development at two sites. This rejection was greeted with the stamping of feet in the gallery and the singing loudly of *We Shall Overcome*.

A group of demonstrators then sat on the floor of the main part of the chamber and sang *We Shall Not Be Moved* and others occupied vacant seats. Mr Finbar O'Doherty of DHAC, asked for a vote of 'no confidence' in the Corporation and this was adopted.

Scuffle at Paisley's Residence

THE Rev Ian Paisley was taken to hospital yesterday for a badly-cut hand. The injury was received during a scuffle at the doorway of his home on the Beersbridge Road, Belfast when police officers arrived.

A head constable knocked at the door which was answered by Councillor Mrs Eileen Paisley and the Rev William Beattie. After several minutes' discussion, some other Paisley followers appeared and said that Mr Paisley was seeing no-one. During the struggle a panel in the glass door was broken and Mr Paisley, who was apparently behind the door, received a serious cut to his left hand.

A police spokesman said later that the arrest warrant for Mr Paisley had still not been executed.

Carson's Son Backs O'Neill

MR EDWARD Carson, MP son of the late Lord Carson, said at his Minster, Thanet (Kent) home on Saturday that, if invited, he was prepared to go to Belfast and speak in support of Mr O'Neill.

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If there is any weakening of the Good Friday Agreement accords there should be no chance whatsoever, a non-starter for a US-UK trade agreement.

This is not a treaty only. It's an ideal, it's a value, it's something that's a model to the world, something that we all take pride in.

The GFA was a model and other people have used it as a model and we don't want that model to be something that can be bargained away in another agreement.

”

Nancy Pelosi

The Speaker of the US House of Representatives

