

## THE FAILED PUTSCH OF THE CREATIONISTS

"I would rather have an American Eagle in President Trump than a nationalist parrot in the White House". Thus tweeted the DUP's Sammy Wilson in the run-up to the American presidential election. It didn't seem to matter to this leading member of a rigid Christian party that Trump was a sexual predator, serial liar, racist, draft dodger, tax avoider and bankrupt conman.

The failed takeover of the DUP by evangelical Christians with the election of Edwin Poots as leader in May 2021 moved unionism even further backwards. The removal of Poots and Givan will only make a marginal difference: from wildly reactionary to moderately reactionary. If you are born a Protestant in Northern Ireland the chances throughout the last century were that you would grow up in the midst of a collection of ideas and values that, to put it mildly, lie on the right-wing of the political spectrum. This allegiance has worsened. You will now likely be encouraged to support the UK Conservatives, tax cuts for the rich and austerity for the poor, Brexit, Trump and Israel, and you are probably surrounded by opponents of abortion, same sex marriage and assisted dying. It doesn't seem to matter to Protestant unionists that the British Conservative Party has frequently betrayed them, as Thatcher did over the Anglo-Irish Agreement and Johnson did over the EU Withdrawal Act.

Nor do unionist parties remotely represent the real interests of working class Protestants. They have generally supported the Conservatives' free market, neoclassical economic policies that have hit the poor hardest and increased inequalities. They fully support selection at 11+, a policy which disadvantages working class children. Nor have they any coherent policy to improve the educational standards of working class Protestant children, which are worse than Catholic working class kids. And it doesn't seem to be of concern to them that Brexit will reduce living standards and

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is likely to weaken rather than strengthen the union. In fact, unionism, whether of the DUP or UUP version, appears to be nothing but an inward-looking, exclusive British nationalism out of kilter with the modern inclusive, cosmopolitan world.

The attitude of both main unionist parties to the issue of homosexuality is a classic example of this reactionary mindset. In 2007, Ian Paisley Junior told a magazine that gay people ‘repulse’ him and harm society. In 2008 Iris Robinson told BBC Radio Ulster’s Nolan Show that homosexuality was an ‘abomination’ and made her feel sick and nauseous. She later told a parliamentary committee that gays were worse than pedophiles. Edwin Poots, as Minister of Sport, attacked the formation of a gay rugby team in 2008 on the spurious grounds that he couldn’t fathom why people saw the necessity to develop an apartheid in sport. As Minister of Health, he refused to follow the rest of the UK in relaxing legislation on the donation of blood by gay men.

Nor is it just the DUP that lives in the Dark Ages when it comes to gay matters. On the *Nolan Show* the UUP’s Ken Maginnis called homosexuality ‘unnatural and deviant’ and a ‘rung on the ladder’ to bestiality. He has recently been suspended from the House of Lords for using homophobic remarks which were directed at SNP MP Hannah Bardell and Shadow Environment Secretary Luke Pollard. He was overheard saying: “I am not going to be bullied by queers”. He also sent an email to James Gray, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Armed Forces, with the subject of ‘Discrimination by Homos’. Yet he is not completely alone. In 2015 Andy Allen was the only UUP MLA to vote in favour of same-sex marriage.

Some unionists are climate change deniers. Unlike the rest of the UK and the Irish Republic, Northern Ireland is still lacking a climate change act and the new bill is opposed by Edwin Poots. In

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2020 as Environment Minister he told MLAs that his officials rejected the idea that there was a 'climate crisis'.

Then there is the fact that several prominent DUP members are creationists who have campaigned for schools and museums to 'teach' the bizarre notion that the universe was created 6,000 years ago. When asked by William Crawley on *Sunday Sequence* in 2007 how old the earth was, the DUP leader Edwin Poots replied: "it was 4004BC". Presumably, like Bishop Ussher in the 17th century who came up with this date, he also agrees that it was at nightfall on 22nd October of that year.

For a time, Mervyn Storey successfully pressurised the National Trust to include in its Visitor Centre the Young Earth creationist viewpoint that the Giant's Causeway was formed about 4,500 years ago as a result of Noah's flood. Its audio exhibition stated that the 'debate continues', but it is false to claim that there is still such a debate going on over the origins of the Giant's Causeway, which is about 60 million years old.

It is a sad reflection on the state of modern Protestantism and unionism in Northern Ireland that they still largely adhere to reactionary political and moral philosophies and discredited pseudoscience. And when we add also the charges of corruption over NAMA, RHI, free foreign holidays, and so on, they give Protestantism and Unionism a very bad name indeed. If you were born a Protestant but are liberal, left-wing, agnostic, atheist or humanist, both the DUP and the UUP can be seen as nothing but dinosaurs incapable of furthering a happy, compassionate, fair and just society.

Brian McClinton, May-June 2021