

## **Under Dark Shadows: Peace, Protest, and Brexit in Northern Ireland** by Roz Goldie

As Peter Shirlow comments in the foreword, *Within this book we encounter the realities of situations in which civic best provides for meaningful social outcomes when Northern Ireland's political parties cannot locate 'discernible political gains or losses...'. In essence, when votes do not matter the role of inter-community partnership thrives. It is that level of sharpness that is located throughout this account in which we encounter cold, hard and sober comment. Whether it is the Home Office, the Democratic Unionist Party or Sinn Fein, Roz steers us through their gaffes, ideological confrontation and the immiserations their actions and policy failures. Yet Goldie reminds us that these various machinations cannot unravel the embedded nature of what has changed post 1998. ... After decades of peace-building the shaping of space and place is held tightly by a political elite in order to reproduce their own power, place and even electoral privilege.*

The seeds of this book began when the National Democratic Institute in Washington asked me to revisit my work from the early years of this century. In late 2019, at the end of an extensive interview with Lauren Van Metre of the National Democratic Institute, I recall saying *The shadow of Brexit is the footprint of the constitutional struggle*. As with many off the cuff remarks it now seems appropriate, although that was just where our conversation led. It was a short contract, but it led me to review the rest of my work, after some years of absence, which began a journey - interrupted by the pandemic - that restarted in April 2021.

That month saw riots in Lanark way - a notorious sectarian Belfast interface - which the world's press and media represented as the re-ignition of the Northern Ireland conflict. This book is a view from those places where peace in Northern Ireland has not reached, starting with a tour of the Belfast 'peace walls' that still serve as a magnet for violence. It proceeds to question why they remain despite plans for their eradication by 2023, and why urban planning has made no impact on ethno-political places and spaces. The urban development plan for Belfast was mired in a bureaucratic and procedural marsh for six years - raising questions about the entire planning system, the working of public administration and spurious narratives on interfaces.

The backdrop to the peace process has been constant violent protest from wide sections of the Unionist-Loyalist community - producing a sad indictment of the benefits of power sharing for peace-building. Indeed, why, after a quarter century are flags,

culture, 'identity' and rights still so controversial, and why was the Commission to address this such an abject failure?

The legacy of the conflict is that those seeking redress for state and other violence in Northern Ireland would wait 50 years. Describing phenomena like the 'hooded men', the Ballymurphy massacre, and Bloody Sunday demonstrates the long wait for truth. Investigations and inquiries took place. There were public apologies, yet even with truth established there has been no justice in the courts. So, the 'Legacy Bill' currently going through Parliament is regarded by almost everyone on the island of Ireland - and many elsewhere - as a denial if not a betrayal of the past.

The legacy of the conflict is estimated to be over 3,700 deaths and more than 40,000 injured. Many were left with life-changing psychological as well as physical damage. Survivors and their families have lived with the traumatic and painful consequences - not some abstract 'legacy' - for decades. They were on the wrong side of 'drawing the line' and were forgotten as others 'moved on'. For the seriously injured the 'Troubles pension' 13 year campaign would require what can only be described as heroism, leadership and the tenacity of a remarkable group of people.

Discussion on Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol relies heavily on reported statements by officials and politicians engaged in negotiations and the exceptional analysis by editor Christopher McCrudden and contributing authors in *The Law and Practice of the Ireland-Northern Ireland Protocol* - a volume of considerable importance. Whether this is a constitutional issue remains contested on the streets although not in the courts or by expert legal authors.

The Belfast Agreement was based on key principles and a rights-based agenda - bringing the much-heralded legal duty to promote equality. This was more than anti-discrimination and an advance on other equality legislation in Britain and Ireland in 1998. However, the various and often hostile interpretations of 'equality' were and remain mired in sectarian ideologies. As importantly, the duty on 'designated public authorities' was not well understood, had no precedent in practice and sat somewhat at odds with the anti-discrimination brief and culture of the Equality Commission for

Northern Ireland - which already faced antagonism on many fronts. Was it too big an ask?

The chapter entitled *Stability, terrorists and inertia in peace* demonstrates how the past and its actors are interwoven in the fabric of twenty-first century Northern Ireland and Westminster politics. The 'pig ignorance' of London, as Lord Putnam described it, permitted active Loyalist paramilitary representatives access to the highest political groups, as Protocol protests continued. The arrogance of Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party, and their personal connections and relationships indicate the enmeshed nature of politics with paramilitarism, security forces and public administration - hardly the tabula rasa for a clean start in the peace process. This is perhaps the crux of the matter because peace building is not a neat, mechanical process. It is messy, emotional, difficult and challenging.

Nonetheless, the book concludes that even under dark shadows there is more than a glimmer of hope for peace in Northern Ireland.

