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**Teesdale School  
& Sixth Form Centre**

# PAST *to* PRESENT

The Journal of the Teesdale  
History Research Group

**Northern Ireland**

From the Troubles to the Backstop 1969 - 2019

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*The articles in the journal represent the personal opinions of the authors and do not represent the views of Teesdale School as a whole.*

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# Foreword

Dr Connal Parr, Northumbria University

## Author of *Inventing the Myth, Political Passions and the Ulster Protestant Imagination*

**As Brexit negotiations reach their latest critical juncture, the question of what to do about the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland – the only point where the UK will continue to meet the European Union – has proved critical.**

Please forgive the slight complexities of what are about to follow, but the point so many originally missed was that leaving the EU was going to be a complex process! Flash back to April 2017 when the EU adopted guidelines for Brexit negotiations, identifying three issues on which 'sufficient progress' would be required in phase one of the talks, before agreement would be reached to move to phase two regarding the transition period and trade agreement. These three issues, which were accepted by the UK government, are: the financial settlement, citizens' rights, and the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Significant progress was made in relation to the first two, but the Irish border issue remained unresolved. The roughly 300-mile frontier runs from Carlingford Lough in the north east of Ireland to Lough Foyle, which lies in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It is estimated that more than 30,000 people cross the border every day, and Northern Ireland is particularly exposed to any raising of tariffs and imposition of structural barriers to its trade with the rest of Ireland because 25% of all its goods exports go south of the border.

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## Leaving the EU

Dr Connall Parr

**If the UK left the European Union but remained in the single market or the customs union, it would be possible for the border to remain unchanged.**

However, some members of the Conservative Party and Brexit supporters across the board want the UK to leave the customs union (though developments on this are ongoing) and single market, as well as the EU. The status quo is therefore untenable. Northern Ireland will have different trade regulations to Ireland, and the UK's desire to control migration would require a border. The UK also has to honour its obligations to implement World Trade

Organisation rules, which means putting in place a customs border if the UK leaves the EU Customs Union.

The difficulty is that the creation of a hard border would, in the minds of many people in both parts of Ireland, recall memories of the Troubles and severely damage trade. Basic travel would be disrupted with thousands of civilians being checked when travelling between jurisdictions on a daily basis. There is also concern that the erection of manned, visible security posts along the border would be targeted by dissident Republican groups, who at the end of January this year were behind a bomb in Derry/Londonderry.

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## The Irish Backstop

Dr Connall Parr

**Policing a border, incidentally, is expensive, requiring cooperation from both sides. The Irish government in Dublin is reluctant to invest in border infrastructure for what it regards as a political disaster not of its making.**

It wants to avoid a hard border and is deeply concerned about the impact a potential border would have on the Northern Ireland peace process, cross-border cooperation, daily border crossings and trade. Ireland was always the EU member state most economically exposed to the impact of Brexit. Tariffs could devastate the Irish food industry and bring all kinds of additional costs and bureaucracy, as well as concerns about illegal activity over the border. The EU will always fall in behind Ireland and protect an EU member as opposed to a country exiting the EU.

The UK government has always said that it wants a 'seamless and frictionless' border, though published proposals on how this might work were dismissed by both

the EU and the Irish government. Overall, therefore, the UK wants to avoid a hard border but lacks concrete ways to do so.

The situation is complicated by the relationship of the DUP to the Conservative Party, who it is propping up in power. While the DUP wishes to avoid a hard border, it has also stated that it wants to leave the customs union along with the rest of the United Kingdom. Numerous commentators have pointed out the contradictory nature of its position, but the DUP believes a 'soft border' can be maintained with technology, including drones and land-based cameras used to track vehicles.

Most of all the DUP is opposed to anything which is seen to give

Northern Ireland 'special status', such as by allowing it to continue to enjoy some of the privileges that come with being a member of the EU. It will not support any arrangement that suggests a border or separation between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. This is despite the fact that 56% majority in Northern Ireland voted, like Scotland and London, to remain in the EU.

Such is why Ireland and the border has emerged as the main stumbling block to Brexit, and there are sure to be more twists and turns in store before this is in any way resolved.



# An interview with Mr Ryan O'Donnell

Geography teacher at Teesdale School, who grew up in Northern Ireland

**Can you just give us a bit of background as to where you grew up in Northern Ireland - and just tell us a bit about your life story to this point?**

**Mr O'Donnell (MD):** Right, Omagh is where I'm from [Northern Ireland's capital city Belfast is 68 miles to the east of Omagh, and Derry is 34 miles to the north]. I lived there for 18 years; went to a mixed gendered but Protestant secondary school.

**How typical was it for people to be in separate schools, Protestant and Catholic?**

**MD:** Oh very...

**Were there any mixed schools?**

**MD:** Well there was one mixed secondary school, and it was quite progressive at the time; very competitive on places because if you didn't want to raise your children in a segregated environment you would want to send them to that school. In comparison there were four segregated schools, so one mixed school and then four segregated schools. So, it was probably not typical to have integrated schools, it was quite common to have segregation.

**Did you play sports**

**against the other school? Would the Catholic schools interact with the Protestant schools on any level?**

**MD:** No, I went to a Protestant grammar school, we played sports with other Protestant grammar schools; and that would be similar with the Protestant high schools, and the Catholic high schools, and the Catholic grammar schools. So, yeah, there would be no mixing in sports. And, they would play different sports as well, so we would have played sports that are common here, like rugby and football; Catholic schools would play Gaelic football and hurling - I don't know if you've ever seen Gaelic or hurling? But, it's interesting.

**I just wondered with that upbringing, did it have any cultural effects when you were younger... I ask because my dad grew up in a Catholic neighbourhood in Port Glasgow, west Scotland, which is quite sectarian as well. He said that for a long time he just wouldn't wear blue [Rangers' colours, Glasgow's Protestant team]. If anyone wore blue you know, you'd suddenly get picked up on it. Were there any kind of**

**equivalent things, cultural influences?**

**MD:** Well, it's a difficult question... yes, there would be lots of things that I would be affected by culturally that I wouldn't necessarily have noticed at the time, it would've just have been normal. So when you meet people in the world and they ask you 'where do you come from?', 'what's your surname?' back home there's always connotations behind that type of question. So sometimes you can get quite defensive, if people are asking you 'what school did you go to?'; or, you know, 'did you play rugby?'; or, 'what's your surname?' because back home people are trying to work out if you're a Catholic or if you're a Protestant. Most of my friends were Protestants, whenever I was growing up. Only until I got maybe to about 16-17 years old where I would start meeting people from Catholic backgrounds. I mean, I met people when I was 16 who had never spoken to a Protestant before. I was on an outdoor education course and we had 10 days together and I mean, I would have classed them as really good friends you know, we got on really well, and on the tenth day something came up, and it suddenly clicked that I was a Protestant, and it took them a few days to process that and to think,

'hold on a second, like- I've never spoken to a Protestant before, like I don't know quite how I feel here because obviously they came from a background where they were told very negative stories about Protestants.

### **What about in school? If you were an outsider and you walked into that Protestant school, what sort of things would happen in the school that would make it obvious that it was a unionist, Protestant school? Maybe the syllabus, or assemblies, or something like that?**

**MD:** Oh, yeah! So, definitely assemblies, things like at the end of year assembly we would sing the national anthem and we'd be expected to know all the words; and you wouldn't do that in a Catholic school, absolutely not. I suppose the curriculum - well we had no Irish, so in a Catholic school they teach Irish, we wouldn't teach Irish; our syllabus is, well very similar to the United Kingdom's schools, with sports as well. It would probably be easier to walk into a Catholic school and recognise that it was a Catholic school. The best catholic schools tended to be funded by the church so they're actually, maybe a little bit like the UK. There's a lot of religion incorporated into the teaching, you would see things like passages from the bible and posters around the room.

### **How were you taught the history of Northern Ireland as a Protestant?**

**MD:** Again, this is just my personal experience, not very well, probably. I had an old history teacher who was a bigot to be honest. In her view the Catholics were to blame for a lot of the atrocities in Northern Ireland. This is her opinion, it was very much taught in a very opinionated way. So, if she was talking about anything to

do with the Troubles she would have to have her spin on it to say how the Protestants were just in what in what they did. So, it's not ideal. Although I'm sure there are good history teachers in Northern Ireland, it's just, mine happened not to be. Which can leave you with a negative, or, a bad taste actually, when you're thinking about the history of Northern Ireland and might have been one of the reasons why I wanted to come over here [England] and wanted to leave.

### **So you said that your friends had this experience of, 'oh, this is the first time I've spoken to a Protestant person', did you have the same experience with the Catholic community. Do you have a particular memory of, 'oh my god, this is different to-' something like that?**

**MD:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So, my parents didn't want to teach me about their upbringing in the Troubles, so they never told me I'm a Protestant or I'm a Catholic. My surname's obviously O'Donnell and most O'Donnells in Ireland would be Catholics; it's quite an Irish name, it originates from Donegal, which is an Irish county. So, I remember just going into secondary school- so, like year 7, year 8, and we were at a summer camp and all the kids trying to work out if I was a Protestant or a Catholic, they didn't know, because I couldn't tell them; and- so I was branded a Catholic for the first few years of my school life because I didn't know what they were asking me, and- I probably should have just asked my parents, to be fair. And my church was the Church of Ireland that I went to, as well, or what I got baptised in, that has connotations of being part of the Catholic religion, even though it's not, actually, it's not Catholicism, or Roman Catholic, it's Protestant. But that name, Ireland, if anyone ever

mentioned Ireland when they were in Northern Ireland they would assume that you were a Catholic, if you would have to say Northern Ireland- the Protestants normally would say Northern Ireland, the Catholics would normally just say- well, the Nationalist Catholics would normally say Ireland. Same with towns, like Londonderry, you know, I would've been corrected before, because I say Derry, because Derry's shorter, and that I've been corrected on- like, getting a bus ticket, by the woman behind the counter, she was like 'sorry, is that Londonderry?', I'm like- just give me the ticket, there was really no need for that.

### **Have you been back recently?**

**MD:** Yeah, I go back...

### **And has it changed, do you think? Since you were...**

**MD:** It's hard to say if the school environment has changed, certainly my experience of it has changed, because now I'm not forced to socialise with people in school that maybe are single-minded and can't see past religion; and obviously over time, I've made my own friends that are more like minded, like myself. So, I think my experiences are more positive upon returning, but it would be hard to say if the experience in school has improved for current students, I'd like to think it has.

### **You are what, like mid 20s? So, you were born just before Good Friday agreement? Sort of like mid '90s, yeah?**

**MD:** Well, early '90s.

### **Early '90s so do your parents talk about the difference between their experience before Good Friday and how Northern Ireland is after it?**

**MD:** They actually wouldn't talk



much about Good Friday, it wasn't seen to them as a turning point. They would've just talked about their experiences leading up to the process and during the Troubles where they were very, very strict as well when I was growing up, about what places I could go in town and even if I was 16 and had friends and we would want to go to a community centre to play football, it wouldn't have been allowed by my dad because he would see that as a republican part of the town, back in his day, and there was no telling him that times have changed and I can just go and play football, it was too unsafe for him - he couldn't get past that.

**So, did one or both of them have any personal experience of seeing a bomb, of being in a bomb scare, seeing any sort of atrocities that were linked to them personally?**

**MD:** My dad actually was in the British army for 27 years, he

worked in Omagh, so he would have a very different experience than most people, and to be fair to him, it must have been difficult for him not to put his own opinion, like the fact that I didn't know I was a Protestant until I was 12-13. I always think that must have been hard for him to do; because he was obviously working solely on trying to stop terrorist attacks in his own town; and my mum had an uncle who she lost in a bomb attack. Again, my parents are positive people and they don't want to talk about that, you know, they prefer to look to the future, and they want to see change.

**We've been talking about Brexit and the Irish back-stop and border - why do you think, from the Northern Ireland perspective, that it is such an important issue? Especially for the unionist community that they wouldn't in any way be seen to be under some sort**

**of different arrangement to the rest of the UK?**

**MD:** Well, I think for the unionists, if they see themselves as part of the UK, I don't think they would like to be treated differently. On the other side, though, how are you going to implement a border, I'm not sure how people would feel if the British government started controlling the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland again, because that's the way I think it would be interpreted. As in, 'we need a border now, or this hard border', I think it would be a very negative process. I think it wouldn't on both sides I don't think the unionists, or the nationalists would like that.

# An interview with Shannon McKeown

An A level student living in Belfast

## Do you feel that your religion is more than just your faith?

**Shannon McKeown (SM):** I think that in many cases your religion is a determining factor in your values and morals, so yes it is in that sense more than just my faith. I also think that Catholicism is linked very strongly to the Irish Nationalist culture and community, however, I don't think it is necessary to be a Catholic if you identify as Irish or Nationalist.

## How big a role does religion play in your life?

**SM:** Personally I am religious but I wouldn't say that it dominates my life to the point I can't accept or see the points of view of other religions. I find my own religious experience quite personal rather than being part of a larger religious community and therefore it doesn't hugely influence other parts of my life.

## How segregated is your life nowadays?

**SM:** I feel it's hard to determine how segregated my life is because I've never known any different but there are definitely clear instances where divisions are obvious. I live and go to school in the most mixed and integrated part of Belfast however, the city is clearly divided in other parts. I also especially notice the segregation on days such as St Patrick's Day and the 12th of July when groups are celebrating their culture and identity.

## How much education have you had on the Troubles/ how much is it talked about?

**SM:** I haven't ever learnt about the

Troubles in school however it is an option for GCSE history and other schools do study it. It is discussed fairly often as it still comes in close conjunction with politics nowadays, for example legacy issues are often a topic of discussion. This was recently shown in the decision to prosecute Soldier F after Bloody Sunday.

## Is it normal nowadays to have a mixture of Catholic/Protestant friends when growing up?

**SM:** Yes I would say it is extremely normal to have a mix and in fact this is why my generation doesn't hold the same prejudices as we have lived our lives in a much more integrated way.

## How much do you think things have improved since the Good Friday agreement?

**SM:** As I have only lived my life in post conflict Northern Ireland, I've only been able to see Northern Ireland and more specifically Belfast growing and developing after the Troubles. Firstly, Northern Ireland has benefited massively from economic development as more and more companies decide to open, with Belfast city centre changing significantly during my life time. In the last 5 years, chains that may seem essential to those in Great Britain have come to Northern Ireland for the first time - Greggs, Stradivarius, Kiko to name a few (still no Morrison's or John Lewis). One of the major improvements is the increase in integration, especially amongst my generation. People don't feel the sectarian divide as much as our parents and grandparents and a majority wouldn't have the natural prejudices about religion. However,

divides do still exist and the certain Catholic or Protestant areas, schools and National days e.g 12th July clearly show that. The political improvement after the GFA was extraordinary with Nationalist and Unionist parties working together for the best part of a decade. However, as people began to vote for the less moderate Sinn Fein and DUP, compared to the initial SDLP and UUP, we have seen the collapse of the Stormont Assembly which just demonstrates that NI has not fully moved on from the past.

## Do you have any personal connections to any incidents during the troubles, and has that affected your outlook? How has the violence of the troubles affected your family?

**SM:** I am lucky in that no one in my immediate family was killed during the Troubles, however I have grown up hearing stories of bomb scares, police violence and simply the everyday segregation and this has been a factor in my Nationalist opinions.

## Do you think Northern Ireland will consider uniting with Ireland to remain in the EU?

**SM:** It has been a topic that has frequently been discussed since the results of the EU referendum and some Nationalist parties have used Brexit as a catalyst for a border poll. However, whether or not NI really considers a United Ireland is based almost entirely from what the conditions of leaving the EU actually are e.g. the border, the single market etc.

# The Impact of the Troubles on Education

Niamh Linsey, Year 9

**The Troubles had a significant impact on education in Northern Ireland before the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. In my opinion, there are a variety of ways education was impacted including the segregation of Protestant and Catholic schools and the religious beliefs that they taught. Additionally the divided communities of Northern Ireland impacted on pupil's education and their schooling prior to the Good Friday Agreement.**

The Troubles impacted schools in Northern Ireland because of the different religious beliefs, the curriculum and schools being divided. I know that schools were divided into five groups including; Controlled Schools, Catholic Maintained Schools, Other Maintained Schools, Voluntary schools and finally Grant Maintained Schools.

Controlled schools were mostly Protestant schools as they were owned by Education and Library Boards however, they were controlled by their boards of Governors as well as Protestant churches being represented on the Board of Governors. Another group was Catholic Maintained schools' these were Catholic schools that were owned by the Catholic Church but managed by the Board of Governors although, the Education and Library Boards financed recurrent costs and the employment of non-teaching staff. This helps me to understand how segregated schooling and education was and that also the Catholic Maintained Schools got financial assistance. Other Maintained Schools were Protestant schools due to being owned by a Protestant church and being managed by a board of Governors. On the other hand, they received funding from the Education and Library Boards like Catholic Maintained Schools for the recurrent costs.

Schools were segregated like this as there was a religious divide in Northern Ireland which encouraged political tension that then further impacted on schools to be divided. Voluntary Grammar schools were owned by school trustees and also managed by the board of governors.

The final school is the Grant Maintained School which were mixed school for children who were both Catholic and Protestant; the school is partially owned by the trustees and managed by the board of governors, with recurrent costs that are helped by the Department of Education.

In Northern Ireland with the schools being separated into the five categories most Protestants went to state-controlled schools where as Catholic children went to Catholic Maintained Schools.

**In 1974 an organisation called the All Children Together was established, composed of parents in favour of children being educated together.**

Changes to segregated schooling was slow. In 1974 an organisation called the All Children Together was established, composed of parents in favour of children being educated together. This shows some people did want to see a

change in schools and education. However, the organisation opened up arguments and debate which led parents to establish a new school which was Lagan College in Belfast in 1981. This was an integrated school which led to the opening of 44 new integrated schools in 1999.

To conclude, political and religious divides because of the Troubles had a significant impact on education in Northern Ireland. I think this meant that it was hard for pupils to be able to interact with those of another religion with a small percentage getting the opportunity to be able to meet others within a school project. For children in Northern Ireland compared with other areas of the UK there was a distinct deficit in cultural capital because politicians and the government were focussed over the Troubles rather than their attention being drawn to learning in schools and developing a better curriculum to address social deprivation.





# The Troubles and Society's Mental Health

Keira Scott, Year 9

**The Troubles now started nearly 60 years ago as Britain sent troops into Northern Ireland in 1969. This conflict lasted over 30 years and claimed the lives of over 3500 people. Trauma like this can have huge impacts on the mental health of a community, and this is often looked over as we reflect on times of conflict. I will be looking at how decades of fighting left its mark on the lives on those who lived through it.**

It's very important to remember that children were living on the streets where the fighting took place, their lives changed because they grew up around violence and hate; their mental health was massively affected because of the Troubles. With their recent publication, some interviews of children in the Troubles revealed the horrors that they faced and the impact it had on their later life; especially those who had lost a family member: as they felt to blame for their deaths. This led to changes in behaviour, for example extreme aggression, depression, and insomnia. There are even cases of young people turning to drugs and alcohol in an attempt to fight these problems.

As some saw loved ones and friends dying in front of them, they felt helpless, when growing up children shouldn't have had to face such horrible situations which will never leave them, marking them with a scar that only they can see.

When faced with distressing situations, afterwards some are faced with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and as you can imagine the Troubles were damaging times for people. According to a major international report Northern Ireland has the highest PTSD rate in the world – others who completed this survey were war-torn countries such as Israel and Lebanon. The World Mental Health survey showed that around 18000 people had mental health issues triggered by violence, and 40% of the population had faced a traumatic experience related to conflict. In total around 231000 people in Northern Ireland were faced with PTSD as a result of the troubles – this does not include those with Troubles related complicated grief, stress, depression and other anxiety disorders or those who became dependent on alcohol or drugs. As a result of these statistics a new research pro- gram (Victims

and Survivors' Service) was put in action in August 2012, to "provide significant new information about experiences of traumatic events and the level of mental health problems among members of the public adversely affected by the Troubles". Showing that the Troubles have been identified as a cause of the mental health problems faced, but steps towards helping those who are suffering, are yet to be taken.

To conclude, the Troubles left a mark on Northern Ireland that we will never be able to comprehend, leaving communities in a state of turmoil which they are yet to recover from. Northern Ireland's mental health was hugely impacted by the Troubles, yet we overlook the importance of mental well-being in the healthy functioning of society.



# The DUP, Brexit and Ideology Cal Baker, Year 12

**Since the 2017 general election, the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) have been brought centre stage of British politics. This happened almost by accident – they have a stronger position now only because of Theresa May’s disastrous decision to hold a snap election, in which she lost her majority – but has already had large ramifications.**

The Conservative party is now a ball-and-chain slave to the maniacal, fanatical, prehistoric DUP.

So, how did we get here? Because the DUP only have one motivator: ideology. Unlike in England, sectarianism is an all too recent memory to the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland. As the main right-wing, Protestant party of this sectarian divide, the DUP have one central issue with the backstop which is a purely ideological one: the ‘threat’ to Northern Ireland’s position in the UK. Thus, there is no way they will agree to Northern Ireland having a different customs arrangement to Scotland, England and Wales, which was the initial suggestion by the EU. This having been noticed by May, the backstop in the withdrawal agreement (staying in a customs union with the EU until the future trading relationship was agreed) was changed to apply to the whole UK rather than just Northern Ireland. This still was not enough – when the full legal advice that the government received over the backstop was published, the DUP were quick to pounce on the fact

that it stated ‘NI alone could end up in a customs union with the EU under the terms of the backstop’, and the Attorney General Geoffrey Cox said entering into it would be a “political decision”.

The backstop would not be economically detrimental for the UK, or Northern Ireland alone; a customs union is decidedly good for trade. But this is not the point. Substance is neither here nor there for the DUP. They are a party of fundamentalists, so it’s not surprising that here, as so often, they are fundamentally flawed in their view. Brexit is partly a religious matter for the DUP. To them, the continental papacy carefully constructed a plot to wreak havoc on our holy isle, filling it with the Roman tongue of the devil.

Leaving the EU is the Protestant thing to do, and thus the righteous act.

However, Arlene Foster recently said that she would rather stay in the EU than agree to the Government’s Withdrawal Agreement. To an extent, the

current political situation has stuck the DUP in between a rock and a hard place: they can’t support staying in a Catholic conspiracy (the EU) and they can’t support a Brexit that might make them have slightly different customs regulations than the rest of the UK (May’s deal). So, what’s the answer?

It seems obvious: no deal. The great legacy of the DUP could be to condemn us to crashing out on Halloween, or whenever the new deadline is when this journal is released. And for a party whose sole purpose is supporting the United Kingdom, this could have unintended consequences. For example, the people of Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU; a second independence referendum is surely likely if they are dragged into a no deal against their will. And then there’s the people of Northern Ireland, who also voted to remain – how would they feel if the only representation they have in Westminster decided to favour a scenario for which the Northern Irish public have no appetite? The future is wrought with uncertainty for our United Kingdom.

# The Union and the Backstop

Will Wood, Year 12

**For all the back and forth over transition periods and "divorce bills" and whether regulatory divergence differed from mutual recognition, the Irish border has always been the problem.**

When it became the ultimate sticking point in the Brexit negotiations after the June 2017 election, there were only politically impossible solutions to the problem. The problem was how to leave the European Union while avoiding a "hard border" on the island of Ireland due to the presence of different customs and regulatory regimes. The solutions were not particularly creative but were far from anodyne among the political class. A full-blown United Kingdom customs union would have eliminated any need for a border, effectively maintaining the status quo. Yet the status quo was what voters had definitively rejected in the 2016 referendum. Moreover a deal containing such a customs union would have almost certainly split the Conservative party, and possibly not even passed the Commons considering how politically opportunist the Labour party was feeling. Furthermore, technological solutions were dismissed by the EU as fanciful. Out of this confusing, obfuscating mess came an unpopular solution - of sorts.

The backstop itself would keep the whole of the UK within "a single customs territory" yet keep just Northern Ireland within much of the single market, effectively creating a customs border down the Irish Sea. This would only apply if solutions to the Irish border were not obtained during the transition period. Yet the fatal caveat is that the UK would be unable to unilaterally leave the backstop, despite the flood of guarantees and assurances that followed the final acceptance of the backstop in November 2018. The backstop

would be harder to leave than the EU itself. Perhaps just as important as to why it is so vehemently opposed by Hard Brexit-minded Tories especially is that it would undermine the constitutional integrity of the UK itself.

A sovereign nation state to have internal customs borders that it is unable to unilaterally remove ceases to be sovereign. To the DUP, treating Northern Ireland differently to Great Britain is the utter antithesis of their strongly unionist politics. The backstop's only strength, the only thing keeping it from being put out to pasture, is that it is the only legally agreed solution. To the EU, there are no alternatives. For the future of our Union, the backstop may yet split it irrevocably.

**In the long run, a united Ireland seems highly likely, perhaps inevitable.**

In the long run, a united Ireland seems highly likely, perhaps inevitable. Although nationalism within Northern Ireland is still clearly a minority position, the generation that has grown up with and after the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 are seen to be key. The absence of a border on the island effectively means that if you were not informed as such, you would not be aware of the presence of two sovereign states. Therefore the stroll to a united Ireland would come not from a growth in fervour for Gerry Adams

but rather a view that Ireland is halfway there already.

The backstop would increase this process quite rapidly. Separating Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom in customs and regulation would effectively make Northern Ireland more a province of the Republic of Ireland rather than a part of the United Kingdom. The damage the backstop would do to the relationship between Great Britain and Northern Ireland would be immeasurable. The frictions and pressures within the Union would not be helped by the backstop. Ultimately, the furore over the backstop, a problem of the union, distracts from the nature of the union itself. It is under threat. A yearning for English identity, taking place within our Union but outside the European Union, was a key factor in the leave vote yet has no way to be expressed. All the constituent parts of the UK desire to remain together, for now, yet have an unequal ability to express themselves. The United Kingdom, to survive intact, must recognise that the backstop is an existential threat. To continue as if things will go on as they have is folly - and a possibly fatal one at that.



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