

Orange Order bigotry must be opposed



By Tom Cooper, Irish National Congress

For just how much longer must the beleaguered nationalist community in the north be expected to succumb to unwanted loyalist bonfires and being forced to indulge unwelcome, uninvited anti-Catholic Orangemen who have been purposely routed through nationalist areas to display the sectarian power of the ‘conqueror’ over the ‘conquered’?

The new draft parades’ bill which was expected to usher in a more acceptable system of dealing with contentious parades to replace the Parades Commission, has been rejected by the Grand Orange Lodge. The proposed legislative change which has been rejected will now be shelved and the British government appointed Parades Commission, which has also been rejected by the Orange Order, will be reappointed.

For the assembly to continue to bow to the bigoted and undemocratic demands of Orange Order bullies is tantamount to permitting the state to be governed according to the principles of sectarian mob rule. Neither the nationalist community nor the rule of law should acquiesce to threats and intimidation, nor should they be subservient to Orange Order demands.

Confederate and Nazi flags adorn streets in Antrim. Israeli flags flown by loyalists from lampposts in Belfast, Nazi flags flown by loyalists in Carrickfergus while other loyalist hoods in Belfast threaten to crucify all Catholics. Like Orwell’s image of the future in 1984 of a jackboot stamping on a human face, forever, loyalists will always be on the side of the jackboot while nationalists will always be on the side of the human face. Councils refuse to take down offensive loyalist paramilitary flags because they fear reprisals. The PSNI refuses to remove Tricolours from loyalist bonfires because the Orange Order says it’s part of their cultural heritage. Yet last August the PSNI did remove a republican bonfire in Belfast.

When former President McAleese tried to point out this trait in loyalism a few years ago saying that some people in Northern Ireland transmitted to their children an irrational hatred of Catholics she was castigated by the media north and south.

The Orange Order has fought a 200-year rearguard action against democracy in Ireland by opposing every progressive reform from the repeal of the anti-Catholic and anti-dissenter penal laws to the Patten Report on the RUC. Any proposal (whether it be the Act of Union, Home Rule or power sharing) which they perceived might weaken loyalist hegemonic domination in Ireland, was vigorously opposed, often with threats of violence, and if the violence and division this island has endured for centuries is to be overcome, bigotry must be challenged, exposed and vigorously opposed at every opportunity, preferably from within.