

## Orange Is A Colour On Our National Flag

By Gerry Adams  
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This is July. In the North, July is widely known as the Orange Month.

Since its inception, the Orange has been associated with sectarian triumphalistic behaviour. For a long time, it was a powerful network that united the Unionist ruling class, elements of the judiciary, business and Church figures and working-class unionists. Little wonder the northern statelet was known as the Orange State.

But all that has changed.



Nowadays the biggest parade in the North is for Pride. The Orange Order is no longer the powerful force it used to be. It hasn't gone away, however, and is still embroiled in controversy, mostly in recent years arising from parades and other activities in neighbourhoods where they are unwelcome.

The atmosphere is very threatening at these events. Kick the Pope bands vie with each other, sometimes outside Catholic places of worship. Bonfires built on public highways are festooned with effigies, Irish flags, posters of

politicians to be burned. Huge amounts of alcohol are consumed. On these occasions, the Twelfth is celebrated by hatefests!



Because of this many Orangemen feel they are misunderstood. They do not help themselves by refusing to talk to their neighbours. Or by failing to face up to their responsibilities to bring a halt to anti-community actions. Instead, some present these events as part of their culture. Burning pallets and tyres are hardly cultural activity.

It is true that many Orange parades, particularly in rural areas, are family occasions. A good day out for all involved. Indeed the Orange parade in Rosstown in Donegal is a very good example of this. The Donegal Grand Master once explained very honestly that the Rosstown parade is so successful because it threatens nobody.

The marching band is a tradition which the Orange has kept alive. Many young people are introduced to fifes, flutes, pipes and drumming through

these bands. The world-renowned flautist James Galway started his musical career in an Orange band.

So there is a future for Orange in a new agreed Ireland where it will threaten no one. Orange is part of what we are. Its main organisation is an all Ireland organisation. It always saw itself as Irish. But they were the loyal Irish. The identification with Britishness by some unionists is a relatively recent one, though back in the day they did identify with the Empire. Maybe some still do. But the Empire is no more.

When I was a TD for Louth, while protesting in the North against coat-trailing Orange parades, I encouraged locals to make the Battle of the Boyne site a welcoming place for the Orange Order to visit. This very fine site is one of the attractions of the historic Boyne Valley. Alongside its Neolithic antiquities. It is part of our history.

Of course, the Battle of the Boyne was never about religion. It was about power. It was King Billy supported by the Pope against King James and the King of France.



The Pope paid part of King Billy's expenses and when news reached Rome a Te Deum was sung in the Vatican. The Pope supported the Dutchman William against James after the English Parliament sacked James and invited William to take on the job. James teamed up with the King of France to try and get his job back and he and William fought for it in Ireland. The Pope and the rest wanted to curb the power of France.

The Battle of the Boyne, incidentally, was fought on July 1st and not the 12th of July. That was then. This is now.

Orange is one of our national colours. Its future is with the rest of us of every colour and none. Equality must be our watchword. Everyone has the right to civil and religious freedom.

The Planter and the Gael are the best guarantors of each other's future in our home place.

The working-class loyalist and working-class unionists who celebrate the Twelfth certainly have more in common with working-class nationalists and republicans than they ever could have with the Big House unionists who used to run the place by dividing us.

Our responsibility is to convince them of that. But first, we have to be convinced ourselves. We are not about liberating ourselves alone.

We are for the liberation of those we disagree with. Or who disagree with us. Including those who oppressed us. We are about changing political, social and economic conditions so that they and others will also liberate themselves. That includes the Orange.