

THE
Irish Post

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Democracy must triumph
over violence

THE shooting of a police officer in Omagh last week was a brutal, reprehensible act. Detective Chief Inspector John Caldwell remains in a critical state in hospital.

The PSNI are following a definite line of enquiry that the Real IRA were responsible for the attack. This dissident republican group has little widespread support, mainly because they offer little in the way of any coherent political strategy beyond violence.

At the height of the Troubles the old RUC, the predecessors of the PSNI, were the target of the IRA. But in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement, the Patten Report mounted a wide-ranging report into the policing of Northern Ireland. The entire police force was reformed and renamed the PSNI in 2001.

It is now regarded as one of the most highly monitored police forces in the world, and has established a degree of support in nationalist areas of Northern Ireland.

It is against this background that the Real IRA, with their nihilistic philosophy, mounted the attack on Detective Chief Inspector Caldwell. The fact that his shooting took place in front of his son and other young people at a sports complex has made the attack appear even more callous.

There has been a united response of condemnation for those who mounted the attack from politicians, community leaders and religious leaders.

However, some of those self same leaders need to address the circumstances that have allowed the drift in the governance of Northern Ireland. Disputes over the Northern Ireland Protocol has meant that there has been no Executive for over a year, in other words no meaningful, functioning government.

Sadly we know that in Northern Ireland – indeed anywhere in the world – a political vacuum soon leads to unrest, which can ultimately lead to paramilitary activity.

Nothing, of course, can excuse the callous shooting of a police officer, a public service doing community work. A functioning government in Northern Ireland is unlikely to turn those bent on violence towards peace. But a functioning Stormont that can be seen as acting on behalf of everyone in the Six Counties will inexorably marginalise terrorist activity. The Provisional IRA during the Troubles was able to function so effectively because they had a range of support from significant sections of the nationalist community. That support, and the reasons for it, has now gone.

Those still advocating violence need to be shown that it is a futile strategy. One of the best ways of doing that is to ensure that Stormont is a fully-functioning, democratic institution.

Fast-track needed for president

ON a visit to London before Christmas, the then Minister for the Diaspora, Colm Brophy in answer to my question about the reluctance and delay to convene the referendum on allowing all Irish citizens to vote for the next president of the global Irish nation, replied: “We are dealing with that separately to engage more with the global Irish.”

I presumed he meant the pending Global Irish Civic Forum convened for Dublin Castle in April.

Very soon after that, I hope, a date for the referendum is announced, and a campaign strategy launched.

On foot of the first Irish Constitutional Convention completed in 2013, several issues were aired. Same sex marriage and abortion rights went to referendum. Irish people at home and abroad engaged also with the issue of extending the right to all Irish citizens in future presidential elections with 79 per cent of the convention members agreeing in principle.

Yet ten years later, my worry is that for political reasons, with the presidential election in 2024 and general election in 2025, this could rumble on with further delay and indecision.

With another fourteen-year president a realistic prospect, I will forever be denied my right to vote for the next president.

Since the Good Friday Agreement, people in Northern Ireland can hold Irish citizenship, British or both.

Is this of concern to the Irish government (following a positive referendum outcome) and their influence in the shortlisting and voting for the candidates nominated to run for the Presidency?

Convincing the electorate of the twenty-six counties to extend the vote to the global Irish is also a concern. But all this hesitation is delaying our campaigning time; as the referendum needs to be called this year in readiness for the presidential election in 2024.

Remember that all candidates will have to be nominated by either at least twenty members of the Oireachtas or at least four local authorities from the twenty-six counties. Therefore, that person will have a mandate from many people in the State already.

Taoiseach Enda Kenny promised the referendum in Philadelphia in 2017; it is agreed in legislation by the Oireachtas. It is not the prerogative of the coalition government to delay it any further.

As a campaigner on this all my time as an Irish person in Britain I want to explain my heart felt motivation for this just cause. There is something about the emigrant experience whether chosen or imposed because of



QUESTIONED: Former Minister of State with responsibility for International Development and Diaspora, Colm Brophy TD Picture: RollingNews.ie

economic reasons, which focuses one's identity very clearly and quickly. At least that was my experience, I took my Irishness for granted, but as a young man in London in 1980 embracing British life but alongside that my sense of being Irish was to the fore.

The Irish president acts as a unifying head of the Irish nation at home and abroad, with limited executive powers, and represents Ireland internationally. Since the election of Mary Robinson who defined the presidency as global, the office maintains positive cultural and business links with the diaspora – hence the relevance of allowing citizens abroad a vote.

Ireland will gain much by fully cherishing its “exiled children” (1916 Proclamation). We are a powerful resource for good, encouraging Irish people to reconnect with their country and to return not only makes emotional sense; it makes good business sense for Ireland.

A large, English-speaking, successful diaspora that is invested in Irish affairs is an asset of which many other small nations could only dream of. That two-way bond will be firmly enhanced by allowing Irish people abroad to vote for the head of State. It will be a win-win situation. Personally, I want my right to vote returned to me. For seven years prior to emigrating, I had full voting rights for my nation's president. It has been a

personal crusade for me to have that franchise reinstated. I believe in equality of citizenship: you are an Irish citizen or not. In the words of London-born broadcaster Dermot O'Leary: “I am Irish but not living in Ireland.”

Ironically Michael D Higgins was the only candidate to canvass in the UK before he was elected in 2011. He advised me then: “Engage with the Citizens' Assembly”. We did and they concluded in favour, yet the air is full of confusion and ‘dragging of feet’.

Gerry Molumby
Derbyshire

The view from Ireland
on refugees

WHILE thankfully, we are not yet at the level of bygone days when crowds of Irish people gave fascist stiff-armed salutes to their Blueshirt leaders. Yet we are again witnessing the simmering of racism within the state.

Recent harassment towards those fleeing armed conflict is shameful.

Unfortunately a small number of far right individuals are stirring up racial divisions within our community under the banner of “Ireland for the Irish”.

Many of us are struggling financially at present, but let's be clear: our issues are not the result of refugees or migrant workers. As a people have we forgotten

our own dark history, when we were also looked down upon? Those fleeing An Gorta Mór in the 19th century settled in many cities across the world, only to be confronted with racism and discrimination

Like many I hear the murmurings of undertone racism in daily conversations, and yes the concerns raised are genuine. So let me address some of the concerns I hear and the false claims that our resources are being drained.

“They'll dilute our culture and heritage” Well, for thousands of years new Irish have been arriving on these shores and yet we have a beautiful rich, flux and vibrate culture.

“Our health service will not cope.” Our health service requires root and branch reform and is riddled with mismanagement and privatisation.

“We haven't homes for ourselves.” Our housing crisis has been brought on by consecutive Government housing policies.

“Our schools cannot cope.” The reality is we have schools seeking funding from struggling parents, yet the same struggling parents through the taxes system fund private schools to the tune of €111million a year.

Our issues are not the result of refugees or migrant workers but corrupt corporate businesses, government mismanagement, and decades of council bungling.

Daren Lalor
Buncrana, Co. Donegal