

the IRISH NEWS

Pro fide et patria

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A lesson in vulnerability

PERHAPS the most remarkable aspect of the massive power failure which paralysed major cities in the US and Canada is something that did not happen.

Here were 50 million people deprived of electricity, transportation, air conditioning and cold water.

Tens of thousands were stranded miles from home in sweltering heat amid widespread confusion, fear and disruption.

All normal modern life ground to a halt in cities which simply do not function without electricity.

But, unlike the power cuts which hit New York in 1977, there was no widespread crime spree or outbreaks of violence, or people generally taking advantage of the difficulties facing law enforcement during this emergency.

Looting appeared confined to some minor incidents in Ottawa and Brooklyn, New York, while stories were emerging of people helping to direct traffic or just taking the opportunity to party.

Most importantly, there were no reports of loss of life or serious injury as a result of lifts and underground trains coming to a sudden halt with people trapped inside.

It could all have been so different, but perhaps this positive situation could be attributed to a change in attitude since September 11.

Initial fears that the blackout was caused by a terrorist attack were quickly assuaged, which was important in maintaining calm.

Perhaps, having already experienced the worst, New Yorkers are better able to deal with a non-terrorist catastrophe which did not result in loss of life.

Nevertheless, this was a power failure of immense proportions which has caused disruption and chaos on a massive scale.

The search for a cause of the blackout sparked blame and denial between Canada and the US.

However, many people will find it incredible that a single failure could have such far-reaching consequences, particularly in a technologically advanced superpower.

The reason for the great blackout of 2003 must be discovered quickly and steps taken to prevent anything like it happening again.

The events of the past two days also remind us of how dependent the modern world is on electricity and how ill-prepared we are for any unexpected and widespread loss of power.

No Irish failte for the boo boys

SUPPORTERS of the Republic of Ireland football team are renowned all over the world for their good humour, sense of fun and above all else their exemplary behaviour.

At World Cup finals in Italy, the USA and Korea/Japan – and European championships in Germany – those fans were applauded and welcomed wherever they went.

But in the past season or two sections of the crowd at home games have besmirched that wonderful reputation by booing visiting internationals who also happen to play for or have formerly played for Glasgow Rangers.

At first this phenomenon was simply embarrassing and many hoped that it would be a one-off. Unfortunately that was not to be.

Internationals who played for Scotland were abused, as was a Norwegian and most recently Shota Arvaladze of Georgia.

This has gone beyond embarrassment. Manager Brian Kerr saw fit to condemn the booing of Arvaladze and more recently Uefa investigated the match.

Yesterday the Football Association of Ireland called for an end to it, saying it had led to a warning from Fifa with a ban on fans at home games being a possibility.

The best description of this nonsense is bad sportsmanship, the worst is downright sectarianism. The vast majority of those who follow the Republic do not deserve to be tarred with this brush.

Australia are the next visitors to play Brian Kerr's side and there is the possibility of a number of Rangers players turning out.

Hopefully those who booed in the past will have learned their lesson – and if they have not then perhaps all genuine Irish supporters will let them know what they think of them.

Everyone deserves a Cead Mile Failte – apart from the boo boys.

Quote of the day

Slowly but surely we are coping with this massive national problem

US president George W Bush attempts to reassure the American public after massive power-cuts blacked out the northern United States and southern Canada



Vatican's language is confusing the faithful

WHEN *The Irish Times* describes a Vatican document as displaying "an intolerance bordering on hatred", it is fair to say that there is a growing gap between many Irish people and the teachings of the Catholic Church. It is certainly a far cry from 50 years ago when staff in the *Irish Independent* stopped work daily to say the Angelus.

What has so annoyed *The Irish Times* is the Pope's contention that same sex unions are "gravely immoral" and that gay couples seeking to adopt children are "doing violence". The Church argues that it is not their teaching – it is God's, as interpreted from Scripture. St Paul (Romans, 1:27) condemns gay men (like Queen Victoria, he does not appear to have thought of lesbians).

But he also writes (Corinthians 2,11:6-7) "If a woman will not cover her head (in church) she may as well cut off her hair". Man does not have the same obligation because "he is the image and glory of God".

None of the latter is taken seriously any more. Even the clergy now smile at many of Paul's ideas. But if gay people are wrong, why are women not having their hair cut for turning up at Mass without a hat?

In the Old Testament, Leviticus (18:22) castigates gay men. It also states (25:44) that having slaves is acceptable provided they are from the nations round about you but the Church is hardly suggesting that God would agree to our having a few English slaves about the house.

Hence the Church's challenge: it has apparently dumped some bits of the Bible over the years and kept others.

Many Catholics are left to puzzle on who decides which bits to keep, how do they decide and does the word of God change with time?

It seems to. Eating meat on Fridays used to be wrong. Now it is not. Will the day come when homosexuality is no longer 'evil'?

Maybe it never will and perhaps some fundamental point of doctrine explains this. Or is the Church back to its old ways? For

PATRICK MURPHY



centuries it failed to accept that the earth revolved around the sun, insisting that the opposite was the case long after science had proved otherwise. Is this another case of stubbornly hanging on to an out-dated idea? Or is it such a fundamental issue of Christian teaching that to budge on it would somehow undermine the foundations of Catholicism? Another of the Church's challenges lies in its use of language. Social language now tends to avoid absolutes and negatives – which leaves it difficult to teach

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the 10 Commandments.

Within modern language there is also a subtle change of emphasis in relation to responsibilities. Whereas hurlers, for example, used to simply miss the ball, they are now let down by their first touch.

It's not their fault – modern language suggests they have been let down by something for which they have only the most tenuous responsibility. Society now promotes rights but the Church dwells on responsibilities.

Thereby exists the gap between its teaching and the modern world. So wide is that gap that the Irish Council for Civil Liberties suggests that describing homosexuality as "evil" could lead to the Vatican facing prosecution under incitement to hatred legislation.

For the first time since the Penal Days a teaching of the Catholic Church in Ireland may conflict with the law.

It certainly flies in the face of the Good Friday Agreement's commitment to the promotion of equal opportunity, including sexual orientation, in Northern Ireland's public authorities.

That does not make the Church 'wrong' nor should it be denied the right to express its views. But it does mean that its influence on social attitudes and behaviour is declining.

It also suggests that the Catholic Church is now a Catholic continuum, covering a range of allegiances from strictly orthodox to what might be termed cultural Catholicism. Many Catholics now practice pick and mix religion. Some may wish to believe that *The Irish Times* represents the views of no-one but its editor. But a few days ago in this newspaper a mother expressed a similar, if less trenchant, view on the Church's document.

When a Catholic mother writes to *the Irish News* to criticise the Pope, there is more than a gap between some Irish people and the Vatican. There is a fundamental confusion about the Church which it must address if it is to end its conflict with many of those whom it so fervently hopes to save.

■ James Kelly is on holiday

On This Day/August 16 1934

By Eamon Phoenix

Hibernians on the march in Aughnacloy

ONE of the biggest AOH demonstrations held in recent years in Co Tyrone was witnessed yesterday in Aughnacloy.

Almost 40 divisions paraded the town in a huge procession, which presented a stirring sight as it passed along the crowded street with banners flying and bands playing national airs.

Large contingents came from all parts of Tyrone and Fermanagh, while Monaghan and Cavan sent their divisions across the border.

The town was en fete for the day and arches bearing Irish inscriptions spanned the street, while many houses flew flags.

An outstanding person in the procession was the venerable Mr William Teague of Carnan, Ardboe, Co Tyrone.

He is a well-known figure at all Hibernian demonstrations and has been a member

of the order for 56 years. Mr HK McAleer MP, county president, presiding, congratulated all on the magnificent display. "The outlook", said Mr McAleer, "is bright for our grand old order and our principles are unchanged and unchangeable. As of old, we stand for God and country. We are second to none in our love and devotion towards the land of our birth and, in spite of carping criticism, we will carry on the fight until the happy consummation is reached. We are neither west Britons nor slavish admirers of the ascendancy party. We are organised in our own way, we shall doggedly hold the line and live up to the best traditions of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. "We shall stand solidly together. We are willing to assist and cooperate with any or all parties to advance Ireland's interests, especially the

interests of our own downtrodden people in the northern province."

Mr McAleer continued: "The cross-channel politicians are sick of Northern Ireland. The financial props will soon be removed altogether and then the northern minister will go hat in hand begging for some other government to take them under its care and protection. Let the Protestant people of the six counties have a sentimental affection for Derry Walls, Dolly's Brae and the Boyne. But why not join in a united Ireland for the common good of all? Their Catholic countrymen will give them a real genuine Irish welcome, past differences will be forgotten, the policy of Thomas Davis will be realised and the sturdy northerners will take their rightful place in their country's march to unity, friendship, freedom and prosperity."