DARK TIMES: A big-name casualty of Golfgate was Dara Calleary who resigned from the post of Agriculture Minister and later from deputy leader of Fianna Fáil PICTURE: Mal McCann

Coalition needs to hang together or they might hang separately

Deaglán
DE BRÉADÚN

MEMBERS of the ruling elite need to bear in mind that their actions and behaviour are more visible now than at any other time in history.

I have no concrete information on how the affair known as "Golfgate" was leaked to the press but, in this era of mobile phones and social media, virtually everything is potentially on the record.

Anyone with an interest in southern politics will surely have been mesmerised by the events of the past seven days. The idea that a dinner of 81 guests would be organised by the Golf Society of the Irish parliament at a time when, because of Covid-19, such gatherings were restricted to 50, went down very badly. We are told that the 81 guests were divided into groups numbering less than 50 and placed in two rooms separated by a substantial partition, but that hasn't served to reduce the level of anger among ordinary citizens who are weary and frustrated after months and months of coronavirus restrictions, with no end in sight.

Anger turned to fury at the news that the participants in the gathering included a minister in an Irish government which only the previous day had issued its latest list of measures in the fight against the pandemic. The story was broken online by the *Irish Examiner* and must surely rank as Scoop of the Year – so far at least. Minister for Agriculture Dara Calleary of Fianna Fáil, who is well-liked and respected in political circles, issued an apology for his involvement but that wasn't enough and shortly afterwards he resigned, having spent only 37 days in the job. There were also three senators from the same political party at the dinner but about the only stroke of luck for Fianna Fáil was that three Fine Gael senators also attended, including Jerry Buttimer, who resigned as vice-chairman or leas-chathaoirleach of the upper house of parliament as a result (all six senators lost their party whip as well.)

The attendance also included European Commissioner for Trade Phil Hogan and Supreme Court Judge Seamus Woulfe. At time of writing, both men are still in their jobs, although subject to a torrent of criticism. Calls for the commissioner's resignation are understandable but seriously misguided during such a critical time at EU level. The Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association has said that forcing him out would be "cutting off our Brexit nose to spite our Covid face".

It's not a good development either to have a clamour demanding that a senior judge step down from his position. Both men have apologised for their attendance at the dinner. A police investigation into the hotel gathering was launched and the Dáil is being recalled early from its summer recess, although not early enough for some opposition members. Who knows where it will all end?

No Sinn Féin members are on the guest-list: republicans don't play golf it seems. The controversy is grist to the party's mill: a gift from the gods. Golfgate has revived criticism of Sinn Féin's role in the Bobby Storey funeral last June and Fianna Fáil Taoiseach Micheál Martin has accused Mary Lou McDonald's party of hypocrisy, but events in Belfast don't always register with southern voters, some of whom regard the north as another planet.

In the last general election to Dáil Éireann, Sinn Féin secured the highest number of votes – well over half-a-million – and it could garner even more support if the three-party coalition in Dublin falls apart any time soon. The government parties need to remember the words of Benjamin Franklin in 1776 at the signing of the US Declaration of Independence: "We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

In the old days, this time of year was known in media circles as "the silly season" and the poor unfortunate journalists were at their wit's end to come up with stories. The most dramatic exception to the rule up to now that I can recall occurred in August 1994 when it emerged that the IRA was about to call a ceasefire.

Thankfully the days of the bomb and the bullet seem to be over but there's no sign of a verbal or political ceasefire on the southern side of the border at least.

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ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 26 1920

Mobs in East Belfast

YESTERDAY was the wildest day experienced in Ballymacarrett [East Belfast] since the commencement of the pogrom. From one o'clock until 6.30 pm it was the scene of desperate riots which broke out promiscuously all over the Newtownards Road, Short Strand and Mountpottinger area. It culminated in a further dastardly attack on St Matthew's [Catholic] Church by a mob of several thousand strong.

The vicinity of the church was the scene of a desperate conflict which raged for over half an hour in which the defenders put up a heroic fight and saved the building. Catholic dockers sitting at their dinners along the Coal Quay were savagely beaten and chased from their employment and the shipyard mob of 700 or 800 made another desperate onslaught on the Foundry Street district.

The disturbance commenced shortly after one o'clock when a youth named Hughes standing at Short Strand was struck on the head by an iron bar wielded by an engineering employee. The youth was severely injured. Following this, attacks were made on employees of the Sirocco Works and shipyard men on their way to dinner down the Mountpottinger Road. The stone-throwing was fierce until a detachment of military and police arrived and took up positions at the street corners. The attackers were chased down the side streets by the police. The Sirocco and shipyard workers returned mainly on tramcars and indulged in yelling and other provocative conduct.

The house of Mrs Ryan of Chadolly St was set on fire by the mob and completely destroyed. One of the children is missing and the worst is feared. Mrs Ryan's son was one the first Nationalists in the city to enlist for service in the war.

Rector's Good Work

THROUGHOUT the night, Rev John Redmond, rector of Ballymacarrett and his curate, Major Rev FC Chesney, did useful work in endeavouring to reason with sections of the Orange mob. These gentlemen, at considerable risk, succeeded in saving Catholic property which was about to be destroyed, including a Catholic lady's furniture which was about to be placed on a bonfire in Templemore Avenue.

Southern Protestants' Condemnation

IN A letter to the press, Colonel Sir Nugent Everard, HML for County Meath, and the Protestant Bishop of Meath state that they were approached by Protestants in that county to voice to their disapproval of acts of religious intolerance in some industrial centres of the North of Ireland. The resolution expresses abhorrence of every form of religious intolerance and disapproval of the introduction of sectarian animosities into the industrial life of Ireland. It pleads for tolerance and equality between Catholics and Protestants.

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