



WRONG: Martina Anderson's tweet about the Troubles pension was widely condemned but her party's position is based on an incorrect premise

Sinn Féin's pension message simply false

SINN Féin MLA Martina Anderson has been widely condemned after claiming the Troubles pension will be "mainly for those who fought Britain's dirty war in Ireland". She quickly deleted the tweet and later apologised.

Her original message included a graphic in Sinn Féin colours from republican ex-prisoners group Tar Anall. The graphic is part of a campaign promoted by Sinn Féin that claims the pension discriminates against "25,000 republicans and nationalists" to the benefit of their "torturers and abusers".

This is a daring position for the party to take after being successfully sued last week for blocking the pension by Brian Turley, one of the Hooded Men, who was literally tortured by Britain.

However, the stand-out feature of Sinn Féin's message is that it is simply false. Most injured former IRA members, including those with serious convictions, can expect to qualify for the pension. They will not qualify if they injured themselves but that is an exclusion that applies to everyone.

Perhaps what is driving this persistent misrepresentation of the scheme is that even Sinn Féin realises it cannot justify holding payments up for thousands of victims in order to fight a narrative battle around a handful of extreme cases.

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OUTGOING victims commissioner Judith Thompson has levelled a more serious criticism against plans to deal with the past, saying Westminster's proposed changes to the Stormont House Agreement legacy mechanisms are "completely wrong" and will not comply with international law.

The main change would be taking the 'desktop review' of all Troubles murders, as previously performed by the Historical Enquiries Team, and conducting it before the new historical enquiries process rather than during it, to filter out cases with no realistic prospect of prosecution.

A good argument could be made that this is a pragmatic and effective way to speed up decisions, without altering

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outcomes or treating anyone differently.

However, that argument is obviously not going to be made while the government promotes its changes to the Commons and the wider British public as protecting former soldiers from prosecution.

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A NORTH Belfast woman has been jailed for 20 years for attempting to murder a police officer. The judge said Christine Connor "remains a committed dissident republican... still wedded to violence" but he mitigated her sentence on the grounds of ill health making her vulnerable to contracting coronavirus in prison.

It seems unlikely that someone who does not catch coronavirus during the next 20 years will benefit from an earlier release. Later imprisonment would be the rational verdict.

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CUMBRIA Constabulary, brought in by the PSNI to investigate June's IRA funeral scandal, is referring media questions to the PSNI, which is refusing to answer them because Cumbria is investigating.

This will be familiar to journalists who

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followed the 2018 arrest of documentary makers Trevor Birney and Barry McCaffrey by Durham Constabulary, brought in by the PSNI to investigate a leak of documents as 'theft'. Both forces even referred freedom of information requests to each other, for which Durham Constabulary lost an appeal to the Information Commissioner's Office last month.

It would be unfortunate if the practice of bringing in external forces for contentious investigations ended up being seen as just a circular buck-passing exercise.

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THE British Museum has moved a statue of its founder, Sir Hans Sloane, due to his links to slavery. The story is bad news for the Co Down village of Killyleagh, where Sloane was born in 1660 and spent the first 19 years of his life before becoming a prominent doctor, botanist, collector – and slave owner, via a Jamaican plantation acquired through marriage. Killyleagh had made surprisingly little of its connection to this notable figure until last year, when residents began fund-raising for a 'Sir Hans Sloane Education and Visitor Centre', to function as a combined community hub and museum. Now they will have to name it after someone less embarrassing. Perhaps they will consider the current Baron Killyleagh, better known as Prince Andrew.

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CONCERNS in Britain that the National Trust is 'dumbing down' to a progressive agenda may cause amusement in Northern Ireland, where its best known act of dumbing down was installing a creationist exhibit at the Giant's Causeway at the behest of the DUP.

The *Daily Mail* certainly expects more conservative agendas on this side of the water. The newspaper expressed surprise that "fashionable experimentation" has not been stopped by the trust's director general since 2018, Hilary McGrady, who it described as "a robust Ulsterwoman".

ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 29 1970

Farewell to Peacemaker Rev Roy Hill

CATHOLIC and Protestant people united last night to say farewell to one of Belfast's men of peace. Rev Roy Hill is leaving his Broadway Presbyterian Church next week with his wife and three children to minister in Forfar, Scotland.

The farewells came when St Paul's parishioners from the Broadway and Iveagh areas gathered in a local hotel to hand over a presentation to mark Mr Hill's outstanding services to community relations. In his three years at Broadway the clergyman showed the people the way to reconciliation in this tiny area between the Falls and Donegall Roads. And last night Catholic and Protestant people responded by uniting in their thanks to a man of wonderful sincerity and toleration.

The parish priest of St Paul's, Very Rev Gerard Montague led the Catholic community in presenting Mr Hill with a Prince Charles Regent cut-glass set. He wished Mr Hill, with whom he had patrolled the riot-torn streets of Belfast, a fruitful mission in his new ministry. Mr Hill, he said, had sowed the seeds.

But Mr Hill leaves Belfast with a heavy heart. Like many others who tried to bring peace to a strife-torn city, the tall, handsome and patient minister is giving up almost in despair. For as he confessed in a recent press interview: 'The awful thing is – I just don't know where we're going at all. I see no answer. I cannot see one glimmer of hope on the horizon of Ulster.' What disturbed him most, he said, was that 'the bitterness and intolerances had found their way into the souls of a new generation'.

Mr Hill's church lies in a sector of Belfast where there are about 90 Catholics to every 10 Protestants. The trouble broke out last August. Once things settled down again, a lot of Protestant people were still afraid and decided to move. We are a church of 300 families and we lost 40 of them. Then the other thing happened – their houses were occupied by Roman Catholics who came up from areas where there had been shooting and burning. They were of a different type ... All my efforts have been towards living together – towards conciliation. But I am giving up. ... A man can contribute so much ... When you are trying to be a Christian, it is hurtful to find yourself being constantly misrepresented.

In his efforts to work with Catholic clergy and community leaders in the Broadway interface after the violence of August 1969, Rev Hill was undermined by Rev Ian Paisley who openly fomented unrest in the mixed area. Rev Hill's historic Broadway church is now the Culturlann.

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