



RUBBISH: A council worker cleans up a Holylands street earlier this month

PICTURE: Mal McCann

Behaviour of Covid whingers, naysayers and party animals mortifying

I STOOD in my garden last Thursday afternoon watching an iconic Second World War Spitfire circle low above the local hospital in tribute to our gallant NHS workers.

Such a fragile, moth-like little thing it looked, yet it played a pivotal role in the history of a war ended before I was born.

Ironic that it should be airborne again to honour those fighting a new and pernicious enemy, all the more deadly because it's invisible. There's been no precedent for this pandemic since the Spanish flu in 1918, which carried off my aunt Nora who died on Christmas Day aged 17, in a village where almost every family lost at least one member. This on the heels of the First World War which wiped out nearly a whole generation of young men.

Crisis brings out the best – and worst – in people. On one hand, those willing to make personal sacrifice for the greater good; on the other, those peevishly complaining of sanctions upsetting the even tenor of their days and the inconvenience of it all and, of course the hardcore, maskless, unsanitised deniers, still encountered in every corner shop, heedless of their own or others' safety.

The situation isn't helped by our political masters' insistence of protective measures thought up 'on the hoof' in response to rapidly changing



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circumstances, which confuse, irritate or alienate the public because of their deleterious effect on business, trade, travel, employment and leisure.

Most mortifying sight of last week was screen footage of university students partying in the Holylands, blatantly breaking every rule in the book, shaming themselves and letting their parents down. These, ostensibly, are the cream of our academic crop, our brightest and best, future professionals in their fields of study. Impervious to risk or reason, not even the presence of cameras and the likelihood of their families, friends and neighbours watching, restrained them. Never have I sensed the generation gap more keenly.

The egotistical young believe themselves both invincible and immortal, conveniently ignoring the fact they can be symptomless Covid carriers or catch it themselves. They're not the only culprits. Barely a newscast passes without a feature on the arrogant and self-entitled flouting safety rules with

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impunity, knowing it's unlikely there'll be consequences.

Once there was civic obedience as a matter of course. Now it's a matter of argument, plea-bargaining and negotiation. One almost longs for the vanished era when any adult spotting juvenile misbehaviour took the perpetrator to task and sent them home with a flea in their ear. Then there are the whingers, bleating that their lives are made insupportable by the unavailability of a hairdresser or a cleaning lady. (Must admit I'm with them on both!) It pales into insignificance beside those unfortunates desperate to see a doctor, waiting for a cancer diagnosis, a hip replacement, a cataract operation or dealing with a suddenly-redundant wage-earner.

While this contagion persists, we must take personal responsibility for our own protection and that of those we live with and move among on a daily basis. Though not without many casualties, we have survived the first wave, bearing the scars of a society unprepared for our own preservation. I'm intrigued by Boris Johnson's idea of creating a 'circuit break' to halt the recurrence of infection, ie a brief but intense period of lockdown followed by a relaxation of sanctions. Without wishing to appear flippant, it conjures up a kind of Covid Hockey Cokey – "We lock our whole selves in. Our whole selves out..." etc.

In the light of a possible/probable second wave of Covid, social norms must, of necessity, be suspended. Too often we've seen the triumph of sentimentality over sense.

Yes, it's tragic for all concerned that care home and hospital visits and attendance at wakes and funerals are forbidden, weddings postponed and holidays cancelled. And yes, there's a terrible price to pay in terms of stress, isolation, loneliness and depression, but I'd sooner suffer any or all of these than be dead.

What can't be cured, must be endured. In a bitter parody of an infamous political slogan, "It hasn't gone away you know."

ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 22 1920

'Tans' sack village

TWO men were killed, others wounded, a factory destroyed and thirty shops and private houses burned in Balbriggan [Co Dublin] on Monday night following the shooting of District Inspector Burke. He was killed and Sergeant Burke, his brother, wounded. Yesterday morning refugees on their way by road to neighbouring villages presented a pitiable sight. Among them were mill-workers and others, including women with babies in their arms and men and women pushing perambulators and trying to carry such of their belongings as they were able to save from the flames.

After the shooting of the policemen, 'Black and Tans' went through the town discharging rifles and setting fire to houses, shops and other buildings. Details of the outbreak show that the two men were brutally done to death. The town was terror-stricken yesterday and it was feared there would be another outbreak.

It is stated that Smith's Hosiery Factory, the largest of its kind in Ireland, was saved from the fate of the other hosiery factories by policemen stationed in the town who noticed a number of men in the vicinity. They told the incendiaries to stop, that enough had already been done and the Black and Tans then left after breaking a number of windows. A claim for £75,000 compensation was lodged yesterday by the company for the destruction of their factory. The Dublin Evening Telegraph says: It is reported by gentlemen who have arrived in Dublin, having left Balbriggan, that over 200 Black and Tans are in the town. Some of them are driving around, firing indiscriminately into the houses but devoting special attention to those supposed to be occupied by Sinn Féiners.

The Press Association says: When word reached Gormanston where the Black and Tans are stationed, that a senior RIC officer had been killed in Balbriggan, a large body of the men set out in military motor lorries for the scene. They descended from their vehicles and proceeded systematically through the streets, firing indiscriminately and burning selected businesses.

Mystery attaches to the shooting of Mr James Lawless and Mr Gibbons which are supposed to have taken place at 3am Mr Lawless, a barber, was taken out of his house, placed against the wall and shot.

(The sack of Balbriggan by the Black and Tans in direct retaliation for the IRA killing of a policeman marked a major escalation in the war in Ireland, now entering its darkest phase. As the diary of Mark Sturgis, a senior Dublin Castle official, confirms, such actions were authorised by the Lloyd George government at the highest levels in a strategy of 'counter-terror'.)

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