



RESTRICTIONS: People walking along Ferryquay Street in Derry

# Covid moment of truth is almost upon us

**T**HE moment of truth has arrived for Northern Ireland's second wave, with an exponential rise in Covid cases that has horrified Stormont's ministers and their scientific advisers.

Months of enhanced restrictions lie ahead. The implications for Christmas are being openly discussed, while the head of the British Medical Association here is already warning of a third wave next March or April.

For everyone who doubts these warnings, or who is daunted by the timescale involved, at least there will be clarity soon. Stormont's chief scientific adviser, Prof Ian Young, says hospital admissions will reach or exceed the peak of the first wave in "two to three weeks". If that occurs, the executive's models and measures will be justified. If it does not, they will have to be revised. In the meantime, two to three weeks of compliance is not much more to ask.

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JANUARY'S New Decade, New Approach deal promised a feasibility study into a high-speed rail link between Belfast, Dublin and Cork. The promise was repeated in June in the new Dublin coalition's programme for government. The North-South Ministerial Council has now agreed to extend the study to Derry, at a session co-chaired by SDLP transport minister Nicola Mallon.

This is cute politics but Boris Bridge economics – the sums do not add up between Belfast and Dublin, let alone to smaller cities.

That would change if the study looked at 'higher speed rail', a concept popular in Europe and America, where existing lines are improved step by step to get services up to around 125 mph – still well below high-speed trains but good enough to significantly shorten journeys for a fraction of the cost. Belfast to Dublin would take 55 minutes at 125mph; Belfast to Derry 45 minutes on the current route.

Higher-speed rail was recommended in the Republic a decade ago as part of a national transport plan that was then cancelled due to the financial crash.

If anyone is serious, that proposal would be a great place to start.

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NORTHERN Ireland's sluggish courts are a national security menace,

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EMERSON



according to MI5.

In a report to Westminster's Intelligence and Security Committee, MI5 said "systemic delays in the Northern Irish judicial process" mean cases take "months or even years" to come to trial, creating a "major obstacle" in tackling the dissident threat.

The most damning finding was that there is "no single issue behind this".

In other words, the whole system is hopeless.

Delay was presented in the report as simply holding up convictions but it also allows dissidents to claim they suffer a policy of 'internment on remand', attracting sympathisers beyond their immediate ranks. Although MI5 did not mention this, it is arguably the most damaging aspect of the problem.

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THE Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission have produced a joint report examining whether the international law-breaking UK Internal Markets Bill would breach the Good Friday Agreement, should its offending clauses ever be enacted.

Given that anyone can just make up breaches of the agreement in these exciting

times, the commissions deserve credit for finding the bill merely "undermines" it.

But not too much credit. The alleged undermining occurs because anyone bringing a human rights claim against the operation of the sea border can only get a judge to rule in their favour, rather than directly order a change in the law.

However, this is the case for all primary legislation and still meets the agreement's terms – just not to the extent the rights sector might prefer.

What would a human rights claim against the sea border look like anyway? Perhaps Sammy Wilson will give it a go.

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CONVICTED killer Garfield Beattie, a former member of the loyalist Glenanne Gang, has been detained by police on suspicion of threatening the daughter of one of his victims.

The threat was allegedly made to Aontú Mid-Ulster councillor Denise Mullen, whose father – an SDLP activist – was murdered in 1975. Speaking in the Dáil, Aontú leader Peadar Kirby said: "The threat was issued in the name of the East Tyrone UVF and specifically threatened the peace process."

Separately, solicitors for other Glenanne Gang victims have called for Beattie's licence to be revoked. Like many Troubles ex-prisoners, Garfield is at liberty at the secretary of state's discretion.

Threatening victims is a line almost never crossed in Northern Ireland. It would be in everyone's interests to see that line robustly defended.

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THE Orange Order has invited Jon Bon Jovi to visit its heritage museum after the US rock star claimed U2 singer Bono had been beaten up by Orangemen as a Catholic child on the mean streets of Finglas.

Bono is Church of Ireland, which is practically Catholic to some Brethren, but otherwise the claim seems unlikely.

If Mr Jovi is unable to visit the Orange museum he should at least consider speaking to Northern Ireland's leading Bon Jovi tribute act, Portadown-based Con Jovi.

## ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 10 1920

### PM Backs 'Reprisals'

IN AN extraordinary speech in Carnarvon, the British Prime Minister defended 'Reprisals', forecasted methods 'however stern' to restore order, rejected Dominion Home Rule, cited Ulster as a fatal obstacle to an Irish Republic, accused the Irish people of complicity in the torpedoing of British ships during the war, and declared that he would give Ireland nothing more than the Partition Bill as his government would not allow themselves to be 'bullied by assassins'.

Mr Lloyd George began by exchanging some observations in Welsh with members of the council which caused laughter. Wales was a well-governed country. He wished the same thing could be said of Ireland. During the past forty years more had been done to address the evils of Ireland than in any other part of the world. Yet attacks were being delivered against the police and military administration for something that was called 'Reprisals'. Let them examine those charges. Policemen did not go out and bomb houses and shoot men down wantonly without provocation (cheers). They must understand how these reprisals had arisen. No fewer than 283 policemen had been shot down in Ireland, 109 of them shot dead. Under those circumstances there was no doubt the patience of the police had given way and there had been some hitting back.

While police murders were going on in Ireland he never heard any protests from Sinn Féin. The defence which is put forward for these murders is that it is a state of war. If it is war, it is war on both sides. Are the policemen in Ireland to stand up to be shot down like dogs in the street without any attempt to defend themselves? It is more than human nature can tolerate and in these conditions the police have reserved to themselves the right of finding out whether a man is armed or whether he is not.

How are you going to put things right in Ireland? Undoubtedly you must restore order there by methods, however stern. You cannot permit a country to be debased into a condition of complete anarchy where a small body of assassins – a real murder gang – are dominating the country and terrorising it ... and, therefore, it is essential in the interests of Ireland that that gang should be broken up. (Cheers).

Lloyd George's astonishing speech was widely seen as giving official government sanction to the reprisals policy in Ireland. Commenting on the PM's remarks, The Irish News concluded: 'He has sunk to the level of a political mental for Sir Edward Carson.... Lloyd George has fallen into a moral abyss from which he never can emerge.'

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