



POVERTY: People deserve to live without the stress of wondering if the pay-as-you go electric meter is about to start bleeping

Poverty has been made worse by lockdown but was not caused by it

WE are living through extraordinary times. I am writing this column from home. My kitchen table has been my desk for the last eight months.

That is something unlikely to change any time soon and although I miss the camaraderie of working in a busy newspaper office I remain grateful that I am able to continue doing a job I love while many others have been robbed of their livelihood.

I do not envy the politicians making decisions about the next step in controlling the second wave of the Covid pandemic. There is no route out of this that doesn't cause pain.

Already elective surgeries at Belfast City and Musgrave Park hospitals have been postponed, leaving people who have been on waiting lists in limbo, many in chronic pain.

The children of 2020/2021 look set to have almost a year of either no school or serious disruption to their education.

The 'shut it all down' fans should try listening to what that's like for some children, those who have struggled without electronic devices or access to WiFi, who have fallen so far behind they'll never catch up.

School is a place of joy and learning for all our children but for some it's more than that, it's a safe haven, a place where they can stop worrying about the pressures of their often disruptive and abusive lives for just a few hours each day.

Where teachers can see if a child is hungry, or dirty, or distressed or bruised.

When people use the argument 'health before wealth' they have clearly never looked at the mortality rates or mental health and educational outcomes for people from economically deprived areas.

Our health and the ability to eat well, to have a warm dry home and to live without the stress of wondering if the pay-as-you go electric meter is about to start bleeping, needing topped up three

Allison
MORRIS



days before there's any money coming in.

I know people who go to bed hungry so they've enough milk and bread to give their children a breakfast in the morning, who live on £1 shop noodles for the last week of every month and who have felt the burning shame but overwhelming need to visit a food bank.

These are not lazy work-shy people as depicted in poverty-porn reality shows, but people who work harder than most of us will ever have to.

Long hours cleaning offices and homes or working in cold warehouses or fast-food outlets for minimum wage, sometimes less.

I am heartened to hear so many politicians show sudden concern for what lockdown means to those living below the poverty line.

A pity they hadn't always shown such compassion.

When people use the argument 'health before wealth' they have clearly never looked at the mortality rates or mental health and educational outcomes for people from economically deprived areas

Poverty, while made worse by Covid lockdown, was not caused by it. Poverty is a product of central government, who play footsie with the CEOs of big business while allowing them to exploit their own citizens for profit.

Poverty is not new to this land. There was always a class left behind by damaging austerity policies and employment practices.

Young mothers trapped on benefits because the cost of childcare makes it too expensive to work.

A shortage of social housing that leaves many families in expensive rented accommodation they risk eviction from if they don't manage to clock up enough hours overtime to make the rent.

The first lockdown was a product of our circumstances as we watched horrific scenes from across Europe and waited for the worst to hit our shores.

While essential, it was also incredibly damaging and indeed life destroying for so many people.

The local politicians making decisions as we go forward must of course put restrictive measures in place to slow the increase in hospital admissions. But they must also be mindful that while this pandemic will not last forever, the damage to people's lives and livelihoods will still be there long after the virus is gone.

Those with privilege must also remember that not everyone's lockdown was as comfortable as theirs.

I have privilege – a job, a warm home, food in the cupboards, family and friends to rely on when needed.

But I didn't always. Teenage parent Allison in a damp flat with \$40 a week to live on would certainly not have coped with lockdown in the same way.

There are plenty of people living now as I was then – and they deserve to be recognised and considered when political decisions are taken that impact their lives and the lives of their children.

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 15 1920

Craig Approves Pogrom

'DO I approve of the action you boys have taken in the past? I say "Yes".' – Sir James Craig, Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty.

'The time had come when Belfast Loyalists had to make a demarcation line and say they would not tolerate the presence of disloyalists in the great shipbuilding industry here.' – Councillor John F Gordon.

The above pronouncements were made at the unfurling of a Union Jack at the Queen's Island yesterday. Councillor Gordon declared that it was now no longer regarded as impossible for a man to be a sound trade unionist and at the same time a member of the Labour Unionist Association.

Unionists in Londonderry shipyards had been driven out by individuals called Sinn Féiners and the men of the Belfast shipyards were then resolved that Sinn Féiners would no longer be allowed to work here. (Applause.)

Sir James Craig said it was a unique meeting when he considered how seldom a member of his Majesty's government could get right down into the midst of the working classes. He referred to the Chief Secretary's announcement of a Special Constabulary, declaring that all loyal citizens should be placed in a position to protect themselves. Ulster was to have a parliament of her own.

They were going to have the right to manage their own affairs... but knowing how the Loyalists of the city had distinguished themselves in the past, he knew they would not fail in the days ahead.

In the past when any progressive movement was put forward, it was blocked by the Nationalist Party in the old days. All that would be changed by the passage of the new [Partition] Bill and the Unionists would be able to take control of education, housing, etc.. Any man who was true to the colours would be safe under the new Ulster Parliament.

The Parliamentary Secretary for the Admiralty then said he thought it only fair that he should be asked a question, and it was, 'Do I approve of the action you boys have taken in the past?' He said, 'Yes.' (Cheers.)

As prime minister-designate of Northern Ireland, with a legal duty of care for all its citizens, James Craig's unequivocal endorsement of the recent brutal expulsion of Catholics and Socialists from the shipyards shocked the Nationalist population. His remarks were a precursor to his later declaration at Stormont: 'We are Protestant parliament and a Protestant state.' Unsurprisingly, perhaps, his Labour Unionist colleague, JF Gordon who sought to justify the sectarian expulsions, would become a Labour Minister in the new administration. The 1919 Workers' Strike Committee were also driven out by the mob.

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