



CONSISTENCY: The DUP met Chief Constable Simon Byrne, pictured with First Minister Arlene Foster during a press conference last month, to detail alleged republican breaches of Covid-19 regulations **PICTURE:** Pacemaker

If laws apply equally, why does the DUP focus only on Covid breaches by 'the other'?

"THE laws should apply equally to everyone."

So said Arlene Foster last week after a meeting between a delegation from her party and the PSNI chief constable, where the DUP presented a dossier of alleged breaches by republicans of Covid regulations.

Many of these incidents related to funerals as well as other gatherings.

The dossier did not include the hundreds of people who gathered on the Shankill Road and in Sandy Row on the Twelfth of July last summer in contravention of Covid guidelines to celebrate the pinnacle of the loyalist marching season. These events were covered extensively in the broadcast and print media, so we can only assume that the omission was deliberate.

Nor did the dossier include the funeral of prominent south Belfast Apprentice Boy, Herby Hutton, who was buried with a guard of honour formed by members of the Sandy Row Mitchelburne Apprentice Boys' Club last September. Hundreds of mourners gathered for the funeral in south Belfast in contravention of the Covid restrictions. In a Facebook post relating to the funeral, the Boyne Bridge Defenders flute band – of whom Mr Hutton was a member – commented that "the restrictions did not prevent many people gathering for the funeral".

It is not hard to surmise as to the reason why these specific breaches were not included within the DUP's dossier.

Those perceived to be involved were not of the 'other' tradition and, therefore, not deemed worthy of bringing to the attention of the PSNI.

Early last month Arlene Foster's party colleague Christopher Stalford was made to look foolish when he erroneously claimed a "major republican funeral" had taken place in Tyrone breaching Covid restrictions.

The comments were rightly slammed by the priest involved in the funeral of the deceased former member of the Irish Army as portraying both "ignorance and bad manners" on the part of the DUP figure who later admitted to being "mistaken."

Chris DONNELLY



It was another DUP elected representative, Edwin Poots, who thought it wise to introduce a sectarian element to Covid-breaching discussions when he clearly implied that Catholics were to blame for spikes in positive test cases in spite of overwhelming evidence that neither religious denomination nor political affiliation were factors in the spread of the virus.

Of course, Poots's more senior party colleague, Sammy Wilson, could be the subject of a dossier all on his own given the number of breaches that he has been responsible for and the contentious comments attributed to him which have not been consistent with a party serious about giving advice and guidance to the public.

To date, Sammy Wilson has faced no sanctions by his party leader, for whom laws, lest we forget, should apply equally to everyone.

Whilst speaking in the House of Commons

The Loyalist Communities Council serves the purpose of inflating the sense of self-importance of senior loyalists as opposed to working towards the dissolution of these groups, which have now remained in existence for a longer period of time post-ceasefire than the conflict itself lasted

last November, the DUP's East Antrim Member of Parliament slammed Covid restrictions being introduced that would "deny people the right to earn a living", claiming they would "drive millions into poverty, and will still instil fear".

Around the same time, his party were proudly boasting that they had vetoed plans supported by other executive parties to extend restrictions at a critical moment when so doing could have left us all in a much better position heading into what has proven to be a dark winter of co-existence with the deadly virus.

Two weeks ago, Northern Ireland Office figures held a meeting with the Loyalist Communities Council to discuss Brexit matters.

The council represents a range of loyalist paramilitary organisations still in existence in the year 2021, 27 years since loyalists first declared a ceasefire.

As an umbrella body it serves the purpose of inflating the sense of self-importance of senior loyalists as opposed to working towards the dissolution of these groups, which have now remained in existence for a longer period of time post-ceasefire than the conflict itself lasted.

The loyalist groups represented by the council continue to be involved in murder, regular shootings, drug-dealing, extortion and other criminal affairs, yet the meeting brought

not a whimper of protest from the DUP leader for whom the consistent application of the law is apparently sacrosanct.

Now ask yourself what her reaction would have been if the NIO were meeting representatives of still active dissident republicans to discuss Brexit-related affairs.

After his meeting with the DUP to discuss their dossier of Covid breaches associated exclusively with the 'other' community, the PSNI Chief Constable Simon Byrne issued a statement declaring that he would "reflect" on unionist criticisms of the PSNI policing of funerals.

He would be better advised to reflect on what was omitted and why that should compel him to tread carefully.

ON THIS DAY

FEBRUARY 1 1921

District Inspector's Fate

A MILITARY Court of Inquiry was held at Longford to inquire into the death of District Inspector Thomas McGrath of Ballinalee.

A witness, giving evidence on oath, said that he went on patrol with deceased on January 7. As they approached the house of Miss Anne Martin, the district inspector was in front and when within a few feet of the door witness saw John McKeon (late known as Sean MacEoin) rush to the door from inside the house and fire at the deceased with a revolver. The inspector fell forward on his face.

The Court found that Thomas McGrath was wilfully murdered by John McKeon and that another man, unknown, was an accessory to the act.

Liberal Attack on 'Tans'

SPEAKING in Sunderland [Sir Hamar Greenwood's constituency], Sir John Simon [former Liberal Minister] said that the policy of 'reprisals' was one that could not be adopted without bringing the British name to shame. The Black and Tans were allowed to have their way too much to the discredit of the British people. Not only did the Black and Tans break open private houses, but public-houses and many of them got fuddled with drink.

Sir John spoke of the shooting of women and young people and said a system of vengeance had been established in Ireland and, after what happened there, he begged to hear no more talk about what the Germans did in Belgium. (Cheers.)

Derry Under Partition

A SPECIAL meeting of the Derry Number Two Rural District Council [County Donegal] was held in Derry to consider the question of the amalgamation of the rural district with Letterkenny rural district in view of the Home Rule Act. Mr Joseph Mitchell (Unionist) said that the amalgamation with Letterkenny would be a very serious matter for the ratepayers in Derry.

Mr John O'Donnell (Nationalist) said that the portion of Donegal known as Derry Number Two District had been thrown into Derry. The fat of Donegal was sent to help the rates of Derry while the people on the mountains and rocks in Donegal had to carry on as best they could.

A motion to send a deputation on the issue was passed by six Unionist for to two Nationalist votes. (As the IRA campaign continued, British Liberals denounced the Black and Tans. Sean MacEoin (1893-1973) led a successful IRA attack on the Tans at Ballinalee, Co Longford in 1920. Nicknamed 'the Blacksmith of Ballinalee', he was sentenced to death for the murder of DI McGrath and saved from certain execution by the Truce of 1921. Meanwhile Derry City Unionists protested the loss of loyalist East Donegal due to partition.)

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com