



**NEGATIVE OUTCOME:** The Dublin protest was a violent answer to the question: what happens if you spend too much time on the internet and don't bother to verify any information?

# Lockdown protesters oppressed by their own conspiracy theories

**W**HAT did you do at the weekend? Dress up for that exciting weekly trip to the supermarket? Do some gardening? Or did you pop down to Dublin, have a party outside the GPO and tell everyone who'd listen that lockdown is a grand conspiracy dreamt up by a shadowy but powerful group of reptiles?

In pre-pandemic times, if a couple of hundred people roamed around Grafton Street on a Saturday afternoon to protest against "the reptilians" and RTE, you'd think, fair enough, everyone needs a hobby. Anyone who's ever walked between Henry Street and Grafton Street on a Saturday knows that many people love to spend their weekends waving placards and asking people to sign petitions. It's a day out, if nothing else.

Public demonstrations have a slightly different complexion, however, when they're organised, for no good reason, in the middle of the greatest global health crisis in over a century. Three gardai were injured and 23 people were arrested in Dublin city centre during protests against Covid-19 restrictions on Saturday. Gardai have said those involved were a mish-mash of "anti-vaccine, anti-mask and anti-lockdown protesters, far right groups, and those intent on trouble and disorder".

The weekend protest wasn't, unlike the Black Lives Matter demonstrations last year, a cry against systemic injustice and centuries of institutionalised oppression. It wasn't like most protests, which usually pass fairly peacefully. Instead, it was a violent answer to the question: what happens if you spend too much time on the internet and don't bother to verify any information?

The conspiracy theories posited by several of the people who attended Saturday's protest – organised through anti-lockdown Facebook groups and on

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the Telegram messaging app – were certainly intriguing. One woman and her friend claimed that babies are being killed and harvested for "adrenochrome" and their bodies are buried under Dublin's new children's hospital. Apparently adrenochrome is used to keep RTE celebrities "looking young". That would explain why Zig and Zag haven't aged a day since 1987. I thought their fur looked suspiciously bright on *The Den's* Christmas special last year.

As bizarre as the adrenochrome conspiracy sounds, it's similar to one which has been spread by lunatics in the US for years and is essentially a rehash of a Middle Ages conspiracy which falsely accused Jews of murdering Christian children and using their blood as part of religious rituals. If you're going to make something up, at least make it credible. There's no way that any RTE celebrity is famous enough to get in on an

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elite blood-harvesting conspiracy.

One headline described the protesters as "conspiracy fans", which made them sound like they were queuing up to attend a Flat Earth conference or get selfies with Oliver Stone. If the protesters are "fans" of anything it's disinformation. Some protesters on Saturday claimed the pandemic was a "plan" to depopulate the world and create a "high-tech totalitarian world". I'm not sure if any of the demonstrators read or watch their hated mainstream media but given that Ireland alone has two administrations which can't even agree on how to cooperate during a pandemic, the chances of them formulating any grand plans are remote.

One of the many odd things about anti-lockdown protesters is they seem to assume most of us are actually in favour of lockdown.

We're all anti-lockdown. No one actually wants to sit in their homes staring mournfully out the window, or in my case, watching an alarming number of documentaries about Stonehenge. We all want to see our loved ones and friends. None of us want to worry about standing too close to someone in the park or fret that our friend's children are struggling with home-schooling. The reason that we stay at home is because we want to protect the people we love.

Conspiracy theorists are rarely able to explain the actual conspiracies they harp on about. Instead they usually defer to internet videos in which someone, invariably an angry American man, explains the most absurd notions with great confidence. That disinformation gets given an Irish flavour – RTE presenters replace Hollywood celebrities – and is passed on to the disaffected or gullible.

The only thing Saturday's protesters are oppressed by is their own profound need to believe any old rubbish, no matter how far-fetched.

## ON THIS DAY

MARCH 3 1921

### 'Lynch Law in North'

The Manchester Guardian writes editorially under the heading, 'Lynch Law in Ulster': The election for the Northern Parliament of Ireland will be upon us soon. Already there are ominous reports from Tyrone and Fermanagh, the two counties with Nationalist majorities that are to be brought under the Unionist Ascendancy. Electoral divisions are being re-cast with the object, Fermanagh County Council declares, of gerrymandering them to create Unionist majorities. But more serious still is the question of the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC). In Ulster the RIC is now supplemented by the Special Constabulary, armed and drilled at the public expense and drawn almost exclusively from the ranks of the Orange Lodges and the Unionist 'Volunteers', organised by Sir Edward Carson for his experiment in rebellion. The embodiment of this partisan force was an act of folly. But Carson had his way. The Special Constables police Ulster and last week burned down eight or nine houses of Catholics because some unknown men attempted to murder a Unionist shopkeeper in a Fermanagh village.

This was bad enough but a Unionist paper, the *Impartial Reporter*, suggests a deliberate reprisals campaign of which the Specials are to be executors. It was well known, said the paper, that 'the resolve of the county was three for one – three lives to be taken if one were taken and three houses to be burned if one were burned ... The Sinn Feiners may understand that in Fermanagh reprisal will be prompt and vigorous for any of their misdeeds.'

The Special Constabulary are nominally raised to protect life and property and to maintain order, not to become a force of terrorists exercising powers of death over their Catholic neighbours... We can conceive of nothing more likely to lead to civil war in Ulster than Government toleration of such a programme. [Protestant] Ulster's case against a single Parliament for Ireland has always rested on its alleged fear of persecution. It will be a bad beginning for the Ulster Parliament if its establishment coincides with the dragging of the Catholic minority in the Six Counties by an armed Protestant force administering a sort of lynch law.

**IN THE run-up to partition the partisan activities of the Specials in Belfast and on the border were condemned both by Devlin and the British Liberal press. Britain's decision to 'arm the Protestants' enabled the new force to carry out sectarian murders with impunity during 1920-22. While Craig regarded the USC as the new state's 'secret weapon' against the IRA, General Ricardo, a B Special commandant in Tyrone, could describe them as 'sowing blood feuds which would last for generations.'**

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