



NO SURPRISES: Reviews and inquiries commissioned by Prime Minister Boris Johnson have an uncanny knack of coming up with exactly the answer he was hoping for – or being ignored if that's not the case

Another inquiry, another chance for Boris to avoid some difficult questions

WHILE most of us spent last week worried that the north was going to have to endure weeks of violence not seen since the loyalist flag protests, Boris Johnson was preoccupied with doing nothing.

Doing nothing is a speciality of the prime minister. More than a week of rioting wasn't enough for him to agree a crisis summit with Dublin. He wouldn't have even had to be there. The Irish government only asked that Secretary of State Brandon Lewis and Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney meet to discuss the upsurge in violence.

If you ignore a problem for long enough, the hope is that it will go away. If you can't ignore it, and you're Mr Johnson, you can always commission an inquiry which will eventually make the conclusions you were hoping for in the first place.

The much-derided review by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities found that the UK "no longer" had a system rigged against minorities. The review, ordered by the British government in the wake of last summer's Black Lives Matter protests, essentially decided that institutional racism has been solved and now everything is absolutely fine. No matter that the pandemic has seen disproportionate deaths amongst black, Asian and ethnic minority communities, the review suggested we should focus on telling a "new story" about the trans-Atlantic slave trade which would highlight how Africa was culturally transformed. 'Slavery not all bad' seems like an extraordinary conclusion given that dozens of bodies and institutions, including Belfast Charitable Society, are looking again at their links to the slave trade. Mind you, the review also decided that Seamus Heaney, a Nobel Laureate from a rural Catholic family in Bellaghy, Co Derry, was a "Commonwealth" writer "steeped in British cultural traditions".

The review pushed the idea that

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rather than moan about widespread racism, "individuals and their communities could help themselves through their own agency, rather than wait for invisible external forces to assemble to do the job".

It was clearly in that spirit that former prime minister David Cameron's lobbied for Greensill Capital. There's no need to go through any boring formal channels when you can text ministers on behalf of a company which, incidentally, collapsed last month. He was merely helping through his own agency.

After weeks of 'doing a Boris' and avoiding all difficult questions, Mr Cameron finally addressed reports that he had messaged the chancellor, two junior ministers, senior civil servants and a No 10 special adviser. There are "important lessons" to be learned,

The review also decided that Seamus Heaney, a Nobel Laureate from a rural Catholic family in Bellaghy, Co Derry, was a "Commonwealth" writer "steeped in British cultural traditions"

he admitted.

Quite what a review into Mr Cameron's lobbying will discover remains to be seen.

Mr Johnson's official spokesman said on Monday the independent review will "look at how contracts were secured and how business representatives engaged with government".

"There is significant interest in this matter, so the prime minister has called for the review to ensure government is completely transparent about such activities," he said.

The ministers Mr Cameron texted could just answer questions from MPs in the Commons. But why do that, at no extra cost to the taxpayer, when you can commission an inquiry that probably won't report until the government has been overtaken by another disaster?

The other option is to just ignore a report's findings, as Mr Johnson did when a Cabinet Office inquiry last year found Home Secretary Priti Patel had exhibited "behaviour that can be described as bullying" and had broken the code governing ministers' behaviour.

Mr Johnson decided Ms Patel was not a bully, had not broken the code, and should keep her job. Sir Alex Allan, Whitehall's independent adviser on ministerial standards, resigned after the report was overruled. So, again, nothing to see here.

Ex-Home Office boss Sir Philip Rutnam's unfair dismissal claim against the government, amid bullying claims against Ms Patel, just happened to be settled a few weeks ago for £340,000 plus his legal costs.

"The government does not accept liability in this matter and it was right that the government defended the case," a spokesperson said.

That does sound about right. On reflection, it's probably a good thing that Mr Johnson has not got personally involved in any of our recent Troubles. None of us could cope with another inquiry.

ON THIS DAY

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Against Partition

A CONVENTION, representing the National Organisations in Belfast, was held in St Mary's Hall last evening. Over 500 delegates were present. The chair was occupied by the Very Rev Canon Crolly, PP, VF, St Matthew's and subsequently by Mr Joseph Devlin, MP, Mr John Kennedy, Poor Law Guardian and Miss Margaret Magee acted as secretaries.

The following candidates were selected: West Belfast – Mr Joseph Devlin, MP and Alderman Richard Byrne; North Belfast – Mr Frank Harkin, Jun.; East Belfast – Mr Charles Meakin and South Belfast – Mr Bernard McCoy.

At a meeting of delegates held at Castlewellan, County Down yesterday, the following Sinn Féin candidates were selected for the county at the forthcoming elections: Mr de Valera, Dr Patrick Moore and Mr Patrick Lavery. The latter is at present interned at Ballykinlar.

Raid on St Malachy's College

FOR the second time this week – and the third within a fortnight – a raid by military was carried out at St Malachy's College, Belfast. The first indication to the public that the premises were again to undergo a repetition of the ransacking was evidenced by the arrival, shortly before nine o'clock, of about 300 soldiers who took up positions around the College. A large party of soldiers entered the building but their arduous search proved fruitless.

Murders in Dromore

MR Jeremiah MacVeagh, MP [Nat.], having asked the Chief Secretary whether he was aware that, as a reprisal for attacks on policemen, three young men named Charles Slevin, John Devine and Daniel Doherty were dragged from their beds at Dromore, County Tyrone by Special Constables and brutally murdered on the roadside, and what steps have been taken to bring the murderers to justice.

Portadown Man Called to Bar

AMONG those called to the Bar this term is Charles Leo Shiel, LL.B, QUB, younger son of Peter Joseph Shiel, JP of Ulster House, Portadown. His certificate was signed by Mr Thomas J Campbell, KC, to be proposed by the Right Hon. Lord Justice O'Connor.

(Most of the Nationalist candidates in the Partition elections were members of the Catholic licensed trade which had long dominated northern Home Rule politics. Sinn Féin, on the other hand, chose to run its iconic leaders for Northern seats, possibly in a deliberate attempt to silence its Northern wing in the event of controversy over partition. Meanwhile, Charles Shiel was one of the last Northerners called to the old Irish Bar before it disappeared with partition.)

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