



History repeats itself as Covid lockdown rows continue

HERE'S a headline in satirical newspaper *The Onion* which reads: 'History Sighs, Repeats Itself'. The sight of Boris Johnson and various reactionary commentators trumpeting about 'Freedom Day' in England made me so weary I had to lie down and stare at the ceiling for a good half an hour.

Freedom Day is really for people who strongly object to the indignity of wearing a mask and insist that they have an inalienable right to breathe on other people's necks in the self check-out queue in Tesco.

First Minister Paul Givan's claim that a "very high level of personal responsibility" will be the best way to live with Covid was utterly meaningless.

One person's idea of responsible behaviour is often very different to another's.

A quick look on social networking app Nextdoor will tell you that people get very angry when others don't behave in ways they think they should, even over issues as minor as bad parking and overgrown hedges.

If rogue cat poo in gardens can provoke angry exchanges then I'm not sure if any of us are ready for months of rows about masks.

As Covid cases continue to rise, we need clear public health messaging, not vague statements.

Mr Givan's description of our restrictions as "draconian" was unhelpful to say the least.

There's an odd insistence among some politicians that everything must get back to normal as quickly as possible, regardless of infection rates.

It's the equivalent of saving a family from a burning building, then making them go into it again and sit on their sofa before the flames have been put out.

While my interest in football is roughly on a par with King Herod's interest in affordable childcare, the tournament is clearly contributing to growing infection rates.

After Scotland played England, Public Health Scotland released data about infections.

The health body said that 1,991

Claire
SIMPSON



Scottish fans who later tested positive for Covid had attended one or more Euro 2020 events during their infection period and "may have unknowingly transmitted their infection to others".

Only 397 of those who tested positive had attended the match at Wembley - but they represented 15 per cent of Scotland fans who were allocated tickets.

This year's Euros is really last year's Eat Out to Help Out scheme, which helpfully contributed to the spread of Covid and probably did more damage to the restaurants it aimed to help.

The same pattern has repeated itself several times over the course of the pandemic - an initial slowness to act leading to a strict lockdown, then pressure to relax restrictions too quickly.

While it must be said that Stormont has been much more cautious in its easing of restrictions than the authorities in England,

This year's Euros is really last year's Eat Out to Help Out scheme, which helpfully contributed to the spread of Covid and probably did more damage to the restaurants it aimed to help

our health service, which was already under severe pressure years before the pandemic, is at breaking point.

Some surgeries at Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry have been postponed due to Covid.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has been operating at full capacity for weeks, meaning long waits for some patients.

The Ulster Hospital in Dundonald warned that its emergency department is "experiencing significant pressures, similar to those expected in mid-winter".

The last thing the health service needed was a highly-infectious Covid variant to sweep across the country. But with the Delta variant, that is exactly what has happened.

Now nothing can stop a fourth wave of infections.

Modelling by the Department of Health suggested there could be up to 3,000 new Covid cases a day and 400 extra hospital patients by the end of the summer.

Hospitalisations could be cut by half, if 90 per cent of adults in Northern Ireland are vaccinated.

But there are still question marks over how we can proceed, even after a successful vaccination programme.

Because Covid-19 is a new disease, scientists still don't know how long immunity from either vaccinations or infection will last.

Booster vaccinations are expected to be given to the most vulnerable people and healthcare workers in the autumn.

Yet it's still unclear whether booster vaccinations may eventually be given to everyone, or if we may need yearly jabs.

There is so much about the infection that we don't know. But it seems pretty obvious that a mass relaxation of restrictions, with healthcare staff already under so much pressure, is a demonstrably terrible idea.

No one wants lockdown to last forever. However, surely some common sense is needed.

Just because we're all bored of lockdown, it doesn't mean that the virus has gone away.

ON THIS DAY

JULY 12 1971

Opposition – We Quit

UNLESS the Stormont Government agrees by Thursday to set up an impartial inquiry into the killing of two young Derry men by British troops, the SDLP will withdraw from Parliament and set up an alternative assembly to deal with the problems of the minority.

This ultimatum was given to Mr Brian Faulkner, the PM and the British Government following a meeting in Derry of the SDLP Parliamentary Party. A statement issued by Mr John Hume, MP said events in Derry had outraged their constituents.

Minutes after the SDLP statement, Mr James O'Reilly (Nationalist) said he, too, would withdraw from Stormont if the demand was not met and added that he could not see many Opposition MPs remaining.

The men who died – Seamus Cusack (28) and Desmond Beattie (19) – were shot by British Army marksmen during disturbances in Derry last Thursday.

Nine Hurt in Midnight Blast

NINE persons were injured, city centre stores and a restaurant were wrecked, a telephone kiosk was demolished and an Army Land Rover was blown off the road by a landmine in a series of explosions that rocked Belfast soon after midnight. Several of the casualties were in the city centre, the other two in Bryson Street in the East End. One of two explosions in Pomeroy wrecked the telephone exchange, another damaged an electricity sub-station at Finaghy and one, untraced, was reported from Newry.

The British Army post at Bligh's Lane in Derry again came under a long siege yesterday and last night. Troops used rubber bullets and blue dye from a water cannon against the stone-throwers.

MR BRIAN FAULKNER, the Stormont

Lynch Renews Call for Unity

Premier, last night described as "quite extraordinary" the unification speech by Mr Jack Lynch, the Taoiseach.

In his speech to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Truce in the Anglo-Irish War (in 1921), Mr Lynch called on Britain to gradually run down her military and financial guarantees in the North and to encourage the eventual reunification of Ireland. The Taoiseach said that the decision that could lead to a united Ireland rested with Britain.

THE decision of the SDLP and Nationalists to withdraw from Stormont in protest at the Derry shootings came as a bolt from the blue. Only days earlier the SDLP had given a guarded welcome to Brian Faulkner's belated offer to involve the minority in a new committee system. Once again, history repeated itself, recalling the old Nationalist Party's final abandonment of Westminster in 1918 over Conscription. John Hume and his colleagues would never return and within six months the Unionist Parliament had been dissolved by Westminster.

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com