



THE KING: Elvis Presley performs in May 1977. Last Monday marked the anniversary of his death, at the age of just 42

If Elvis was alive, would he support Trump?

THE 50th anniversary of internment went off relatively quietly. It may not be true that "Time heals all wounds" but it can help to alleviate pain.

Much anguish still lingers because of that ill-advised, counter-productive, inflammatory and completely one-sided initiative.

The misguided approach of governments beggars belief at times.

Another catastrophic move five years later was the abolition of special category status for paramilitary prisoners, precipitating the hunger-strikes and an extension of the Troubles by perhaps ten years or more.

Not all anniversaries are grim events, especially when they are birthdays.

Football legend Roy Keane was born on August 10 1971, the day after internment was introduced and let's all wish him many more years of activity in the soccer arena.

But another legend from a different sphere left us some time ago: last Monday marked the anniversary of Elvis Presley's death in 1977, aged only 42 years.

Although Elvis was active at a time of turmoil in the US, he rarely got involved in politics.

I recently read online that he was "a sixth cousin once removed" of former US president Jimmy Carter.

I had the privilege of interviewing the man himself when he visited Ireland with his wife Rosalynn in June 2007.

Speaking in the state guest house at Farnleigh in the Phoenix Park, Mr Carter described the peace process here as "an example for the rest of the world" but was very critical of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians which he described as "in some ways" worse than the former apartheid regime in South Africa, although he didn't support a boycott of any kind.

Elvis died during the first of Carter's four years in office and at the time the president paid tribute to him as

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"a symbol to people the world over, of the vitality, rebelliousness, and good humour of his country".

As for Presley's own politics, I can find no record of any statement he made either for or against the Vietnam War, for example. Indeed, when asked about people refusing to be drafted to serve in the conflict, he replied: "I'm just an entertainer and I'd rather not say."

The singer himself had been drafted in 1958 and served two years with the US military, mostly in Germany.

The most political act Presley is known to have done was a letter he wrote in 1970 to President Richard Nixon, prior to a White House visit, seeking to be made "a Federal Agent at Large" who would apparently use his position to gather information on drug-dealers and radical activists.

Nixon got him an honorary badge and they were photographed shaking hands together.

Indeed, when asked about people refusing to be drafted to serve in the conflict, he replied: "I'm just an entertainer and I'd rather not say"

Four years later, I attended a live, in-person Elvis concert (no Zoom in those days!) in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where our own U2 later performed.

The date was March 1 1974 and I was a student that year at the University of Tulsa (TU).

Preceded by Richard Strauss's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (featured in the film, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*) and a chorus of heavenly voices, he rushed onstage in his glittering white outfit and went down on one knee, arms outstretched in a gold-lined white cape.

The audience was ecstatic and scores of women fans put the stage under virtual siege.

Some of them got close enough to receive a kiss or be presented with a scarf which the King had used to mop his brow.

As well as rock-music numbers such as *Hound Dog* and *Johnny B. Goode*, he performed middle-of-the-road material like *Suspicious Minds* and the Peggy Lee hit, *Fever*.

His voice was terrific and more than lived up to expectations.

The only political note struck was when he sang *Dixieland*, the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy in the Civil War, followed by *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* with a huge star-spangled banner displayed in the background. When it was all over, there was the traditional announcement: "Elvis has left the building."

Three years ago in the White House, Donald Trump awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously to Elvis Presley.

If he were still alive, would he have been a Trump supporter?

Quite possibly, in light of his interaction with Nixon, although I can't imagine Elvis approving of the attack on the Capitol in Washington DC last January which critics of "The Donald" accused him of fomenting.

The King of Rock 'n Roll would surely have walked away, wearing those famous blue suede shoes.

ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 18 1971

'Humiliating and Brutal Treatment'

IN HIS statement on internment on Sunday, Cardinal Conway said there was prima facie evidence that innocent people had been taken from their homes and been subjected to 'humiliating and brutal treatment by security forces.'

Answering the Cardinal's statement, the British Army said that all allegations against it were thoroughly investigated: 'If the Cardinal has clear evidence, it is hoped he will forward it to the GOC immediately'.

Statements taken by the Association of Legal Justice from men who were detained by the British Army in the internment round-up and subsequently released reveal 'a ghastly story of inhumanity, torture and degradation'. In one statement, Mr James Magilton of Clowney Street, Belfast, a diabetic who had already suffered two minor strokes, says that when taken out in a Saracen, he was 'savagely beaten by soldiers and military police with fists, batons, rifle butts and kicked'.

At Girdwood Barracks he was made to crawl on all fours into the corridor. 'I was abused physically while I crawled. My hair was pulled.' Mr Magilton said he was then placed against the wall with finger-tips only giving him support. 'Military police kicked my shins and I fell flat on my face. He was later released.'

Mr John Murphy of Clowney Street, Belfast said he was raced and dragged by soldiers for at least a mile through streets and parkland to a Jeep. 'At one time they put me flat on the ground and made me do press-ups. At the Jeep I was photographed and given electric shocks. In the Jeep with Mr Magilton I was constantly beaten with batons ...' Mr Murphy said he was forced against the wall leaning on finger-tips. He was kicked on the chest and fell on his face.

Mr Joseph Hughes of Butler Street said his door was smashed at 4 a.m.

His wife was butted in the stomach by a rifle and his sixteen year old daughter struck on the head with a baton. He was pulled onto the street by the hair, batoned and kicked. The injuries I received were blisters on my heels and feet from forcible exercise over the obstacle course between Girdwood Barracks and Crumlin Road Prison. One soldier of the Green Howards described all the detainees as 'All the Pope's bastards'.

AS REPORTS emerged of the brutal ill-treatment of many detainees, nationalist anger and resentment escalated. The moderate Cardinal Conway reflected these feelings as plans were laid for a major programme of passive resistance towards a regime which had lost the consent of the NI minority.

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