

Fall in abortion trips to UK 'due to online pills'

MORE women are accessing abortion pills online, resulting in fewer heading to Britain to get abortions, new figures from the UK Department of Health suggest.

Last year, 3,265 women gave Irish addresses at abortion clinics and hospitals in England and Wales – a drop of almost 200 on the previous year and down from 6,673 in 2001.

It was also revealed that 240 teenagers travelled from Ireland to the UK to have an abortion last year. This was a drop from the previous year, when 263 teens made the journey.

Health chiefs have suggested the number of women travelling to Britain for a termination

By Shirley Donlon

is declining as more women access abortion pills online.

Abortion pills are illegal in Ireland; however, the HSE said one internet supplier reported 1,438 contacts from women in 2015. The agency also said one in ten women who took the pills reported to their provider that they were experiencing a symptom that required medical advice or treatment.

Helen Deely, head of the HSE's sexual health and crisis pregnancy programme, urged women who have had an abortion, either by taking pills or travelling abroad, to seek out

after-care in Ireland.

She said: 'If a woman takes an abortion pill and has prolonged heavy bleeding, bad pain, fainting, or other complications, we strongly encourage that she attends an emergency department or GP straight away.'

Meanwhile, the UN Committee has ruled in favour of Siobhán Whelan, an Irish woman who was denied access to abortion services here following a diagnosis of a fatal foetal impairment in 2010.

The committee said Ireland must provide Ms Whelan with reparations for the harm she suffered and reform its laws to make sure other women do not face similar violations.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

A taoiseach with that rare quality: grace

THERE was a time when I was virtually alone in singing Enda Kenny's praises. When others decried him as unfit for office, I used these pages to argue that he was a politician in the mould of former taoiseach Liam Cosgrave. Without glitz or glamour, he would get the job done – and he did.

You can't spin people like Liam Cosgrave or Enda Kenny. Both men are proud patriots who knew what their country needed. Mr Cosgrave sought to safeguard the State from the IRA; Mr Kenny brought us back from the brink and restored our sovereignty.

They weren't manufactured politicians in the style of Tony Blair or David Cameron, but real people who put country before career.

When, for example, Mr Cosgrave was defeated by Jack Lynch in the general election of 1977, he immediately resigned and was rarely heard from again. As the oldest living former prime minister in Europe, he is an example to all the rest.

And now, for the first time in my life, I shall be governed by someone who is younger than me. The political baton has passed to a new generation, many of whom have lost touch with real life. Perhaps they need a youthful leader to have them re-engage with life beyond 'Cyberia'.

The facts, however, suggest a different story. Jeremy Corbyn is a radical Marxist who has spent his life repudiating the country he seeks to lead. When elected leader of the Labour Party, he refused to sing his national anthem. His economic policies would go down well in Cuba and his support for Britain's enemies is no secret.

And yet, in last week's election, he spectacularly defied his detractors. He did not win but he achieved something few expected: the British public grew to like him. They got to know a man who is both passionate and personable, someone who reminded them of the way politicians used to be – of the way they ought to be.

Having grown up in an age of genuine political personalities like Cosgrave, Haughey, Harold Wilson and Margaret Thatcher, I can see the attraction of someone like Jeremy Corbyn.

For the children of Cyberia, he is an extraordinary manifestation of something real and credible. It

doesn't matter that his policies would bring ruin or that he has shared platforms with subversives. What matters to them is that he is a man who speaks the truth as he sees it, and who does so with complete conviction. No sound bites or spin, just that old-fashioned sense of integrity that inspires and reassures.

But there is something else about Jeremy Corbyn that struck a major chord. Like Enda Kenny, he is unwaveringly good-humoured and courteous. Courtesy: what a rare virtue in modern politics.

I remember asking former taoiseach Dr Garret FitzGerald about his personal relations with Charles Haughey. Publicly, they always appeared at odds, especially after Dr FitzGerald accused his old rival of having a 'flawed pedigree'. To my surprise, he said that they never once shared a harsh word, and that Mr Haughey was invariably courteous and polite.

When politicians of any persuasion show courtesy, they immediately distinguish themselves from the rest. This is not to say that, in the course of political debate, leaders cannot display passion or righteous anger. But when they opt to personally smear their opponents, they lose the sympathy and support of the middle ground.

The fact that an old socialist should rise from the ashes to score such an electoral success, is testament to Corbyn's personal charm. In this, our virtual and vulgar world, he proves that people still yearn for courtesy and credibility. More than ever, and because it is so uncommon, they desire their leaders to shun spin in favour of integrity.

IT has been a long time since the Irish left produced people like Corbyn. Indeed, the last time I saw Liam Cosgrave was at the funeral of one such socialist – the former Labour Party minister Justin Keating. He sat chatting about his father with the late finance minister Brian Lenihan.

Politicians like that are now the exception, which is why I shall miss Enda Kenny. I did not agree with everything he did, but he was real and normal and a good person. He connected with people because he was sincere and could smile.

A genuine smile, grace, courtesy and good manners – those are the virtues we long to see in public life.

Learn from that, Mr Varadkar, and you shall succeed.

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