

A ludicrous idea that will ruin the capital

ACCORDING to Dublin Labour councillor Rebecca Moynihan: 'The people who spend the most amount of money in the city are actually people who come in and use public transport. There are very few people who come in and do their big shops in the city centre.'

And that, she feels, is a suitable justification for Dublin City Council's latest attack on motorists, which comes in the form of a plan to 'eliminate' (their word) all on-street free parking.

Ms Moynihan does not accept the argument put forward by small firms' representative group ISME, which points out that the more you discourage motorists from driving into Dublin city centre, the more people will head to out-of-town shopping centres, thereby killing off city-centre retailers.

All of which makes you wonder what planet such people live on. For anyone in business, the idea of actively discouraging any potential customers from getting to you – whether by car, hang glider, unicycle or anything else – would be anathema. Yet Ms Moynihan seems content to want to stop everyone from driving into Dublin, remaining hopeful that high-value shoppers on the Luas will make up the difference.

At least in that regard Workers' Party councillor Eilis Ryan was a little more straightforward, confirming that the council's aim is to 'discourage people from driving in'.

The reality is that yet again, the message will be sent to all those families who do drive into Dublin – whether to do a 'big shop', buy a few clothes or just to take the children to feed the ducks at St Stephen's Green, stopping off to eat in a restaurant or café – will be given a simple message: 'We don't want you.'

And those families (along with people from outside Dublin, or those who don't live near a commuter stop) will get the message, and go elsewhere.

All of which is the prerogative of elected councillors like Ms Moynihan.

They should just remember that in years to come, as more of the city centre withers and dies, as more 'pound shops' spring up and more urban decay sets in, that it was her, and people like her, who made it happen.

CCTV debate needed

THE stabbing to death of taxi driver Martin Mulligan from Dundalk has shocked an entire community – but it has also reopened a debate about whether all taxi drivers should have CCTV cameras installed in their vehicles. The policy is supported by many drivers, who feel it would enhance their safety and that of passengers.

It is, however, opposed by others, who argue it would infringe on their civil liberties (and, one has to suspect, provide an unwelcome insight into the manner in which they operate their vehicles). But this latest tragedy demonstrates that in the interest of everyone, proposals for universal taxi CCTV should be put forward as a matter of priority. The security of drivers, and of their passengers, must come first.

A nation mourns

SINCE his death yesterday morning, tributes to playwright Brian Friel have poured in from arts lovers in this country and around the world. From the Taoiseach and the President to theatre directors and friends, the message has universally been one of profound sadness at his loss – and profound gratitude for the work he gave us.

A nation's sympathies go to his family: we hope they will be comforted to some small degree by the knowledge that, through the simple gift of words, he made the lives of so many millions so much more fulfilled.

IN 1999, when Bill Clinton was at the height of his political power, author and polemicist Christopher Hitchens published a book that was entitled *No One Left To Lie To: The Values Of The Worst Family*.

Hitchens, who died in 2011, was not a conservative but a liberal atheist. That is why his book, which sought to expose the real Bill Clinton, was such a devastating critique.

Hitchens's thesis was simple: Bill and Hillary Clinton had lied their way to the top and had spun a web of deceit in order to remain there. They were career politicians with a ruthless streak, people who would do and say almost anything to retain power.

He cited the moment, in 1994, when Clinton stood at Richard Nixon's graveside and delivered this line: 'May the day of judging President Nixon on anything less than his entire life and career come to a close.'

Here was a sitting president eulogising a predecessor who had been driven from power because he had lied. For Hitchens, Clinton's appeal on behalf of Nixon was, in reality, an appeal on behalf of himself. This master of spin would subsequently be impeached by the US House of Representatives for perjury.

Clinton inaugurated a politics for this age of the image.

It was a politics of slogans, sound bites and spin, a way of governing that prioritised optics and oration above reality and truth. This era of spin did not usher in a new period of political integrity. If anything, politicians became even more dishonest than their predecessors.

LATELY, however, we are witnessing a dramatic rejection of this type of politics. Electorates across the Western world are in revolt against a form of governance which does not directly answer to their needs. We are in the process of repudiating a politics that favours insiders over outsiders and superficiality over authenticity.

In many ways, the Irish electorate is at the forefront of this movement. Having borne the brunt of austerity for the best part of a decade, we are tired of politicians who make promises only to break them. We are fed up with a political culture that ignores the problems of real people while squandering a fortune on advisers, media handlers and spin doctors.

I realised the gravity of this situation when, some years ago, I was asked to write a speech for a senior politician. Instead of meeting with that politician to discuss the content of the speech, I dealt with a string of advisers whose job it was to stage-manage and control her every word and public appearance. Each adviser was earning a handsome six-figure fee.

Even then, I remember asking why such people were required when we have a highly skilled civil service. Why, in other words, does the Taoiseach need to spend €1million a year on 'special' advisers, assistants and secretaries, especially when the rest of us are so financially squeezed? Why does Joan Burton require two special advisers, a chief of staff, an economic adviser and a press secretary, all of whom cost the taxpayer in excess of €500,000?

This wanton waste of scarce resources is the reason why our political system is now held in such contempt. Even with so

Just why are voters worldwide rejecting politicians?

In America, all three Republican front-runners are non-politicians. Britain's new Labour leader is an anti-establishment maverick. Here, Independents are the country's most popular electoral group. What, then, has led us to turn against the political classes?

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many special advisers and spin doctors, our politicians still can't manage to give straight answers to simple questions.

Why, for example, did EU Agriculture Commissioner Phil Hogan recently declare that the setting up of Irish Water was not a mess of his own making, but something he was required to introduce 'under the Troika'?

In saying that, he was directly contradicting the Taoiseach who recently admitted that serious mistakes were made.

George Orwell denounced communist propaganda as 'Newspeak', by which he meant

the distortion of language to serve the purposes of the ruling elite. Democracies are not supposed to have their own version of Newspeak.

That, however, is exactly what the political culture of distortion and spin amounts to. And while citizens might be prepared to tolerate it in times of affluence, they certainly won't countenance it when times are tough.

That is why, in openly admitting (albeit with some prodding) that he wishes to lead Fine Gael, Leo Varadkar distinguishes himself from those like Agriculture Minister Simon Coveney who,

when asked about his leadership ambitions, refuses to give a straight answer. In simply answering the question, Mr Varadkar shows he clearly understands the Irish electorate's desire for authenticity.

It is a similar desire which has fuelled the rise of political outsiders in the race to succeed Barack Obama as president of the United States.

Why, for instance, is Hillary Clinton straining to pull ahead of Joe Biden – a gaffe-prone vice-president who isn't even running yet – and committed socialist Bernie Sanders?

Undoubtedly, the recent controversy surrounding the use of her private email address while serving as Secretary of State was deeply damaging. Her contention that she used her account exclusively for personal emails has been widely ridiculed. People simply don't believe her.

There is also the fact that she is



Trumping the old guard: Donald Trump shakes up politics in the US



Some Independent spirits: Carly Fiorina in the US, Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and Mick Wallace here

one element of a powerful political dynasty described by Hitchens as the 'worst family'.

A former First Lady and Secretary of State, Hillary is the quintessential Washington insider. She is a career politician in a system that many now believe is broken.

The anti-politician feeling is even stronger among Republicans. The top three contenders for their presidential nomination are all outsiders who have never held elected office.

Donald Trump is the straight-talking billionaire businessman known for his risk-taking ventures in property, media and the hospitality sector. Carly Fiorina is a former CEO of Hewlett-Packard and is currently chair and CEO of Carly Fiorina Enterprises, a charitable and business foundation. Lastly, Ben Carson is a retired neurosurgeon who, at the age of 33, became the youngest director of paediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.

What these three candidates have in common is their ability to succeed

in the real world. They are outsiders who appeal to ordinary Americans because they have actually lived the American dream. And when they are asked a question, they don't need a train of special advisers to give them the answer.

The same is true of the new Labour leader in Britain, Jeremy Corbyn. He is an unreconstructed communist, someone who still believes that Marxism is a credible political system. Despite the untold damage it caused throughout the last century, this man still longs to return to the time before the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

Why, then, did so many join the Labour Party simply to see him become leader?

Most who supported his candidacy know that he has virtually no chance of leading Labour back to power.

So why plunge the party back into the wilderness years of Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock, to a time before Tony Blair and New Labour smashed the false idols of Marxist ideology?

The word that kept coming up among those intending to vote for Corbyn was 'authentic'.

Again, when asked a straight question during the leadership campaign, he gave a direct answer. He also dressed and spoke, not like a Blairite, but like the voters to whom he was appealing.

Whatever your opinion of him, you cannot spin Jeremy Corbyn.

He may have no chance of winning an election, but his supporters would rather a truthful socialist than a dishonest democrat. They would rather authenticity, even when it cannot succeed, than someone who can win through spin.

It is likewise in Greece, where Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has just been returned for a second time to power.

Prior to his victory, pundits and pollsters were certain that Tsipras and his Syriza party would lose to the pro-EU New Democracy opposition group.

I was convinced he would retain power simply because Tsipras won

the trust of the Greek people by telling them the truth.

He may have been mugged by reality during his turbulent first term, but the fact that Tsipras was prepared to defy Syriza rebels and confront the Greek people with the harsh facts regarding their fiscal future, gave him the mandate he required. Even those who previously opposed him now see Tsipras as someone who did not let either spin or ideology mask the truth.

He won their trust simply by showing courage rather than hiding behind a smokescreen.

It is for these reasons that Independents and those on the fringes, such as Catherine Murphy or even Mick Wallace, may well hold the balance of power in Ireland after the forthcoming general election.

Once again, it comes down to the question of honesty and trust.

Who do voters trust more: an Independent who will get things done and stay in touch after the election, or a political insider who can't give

an answer that hasn't been spun by a special adviser? Of course, governing is very different from sitting on the opposition benches, as Alexis Tsipras now realises.

However, it seems that, one way or the other, the Irish electorate has had enough of 'nod and wink' politics, of politicians who appear only at election time and who make promises only to break them.

THE Greek philosopher Plato once said that, for politics to be effective, people had to be sold a 'noble lie'. Truth was often too hard for them to handle and had, therefore, to be suppressed in order to sustain the system.

In a modern democracy, however, there is nothing 'noble' in politicians resorting to dishonesty or spin.

There is nothing noble in them saying one thing and doing the other. And it is this spectacle of broken promises and shattered hopes, which citizens here and elsewhere are finally rejecting. In effect, our political insiders have, as Hitchens so pointedly put it, no-one left to lie to. Politics has become a parody of itself.

Perhaps this is why, in Italy, a man named Beppe Grillo has set politics alight. In 2010, Grillo set up the 'Five Star Movement' to advance his core values of honesty and integrity in public life. Despite being branded a dangerous demagogue by his adversaries, Grillo's movement is now the largest party in Italy's Chamber of Deputies.

Beppe Grillo isn't a professional politician either. What's his real job? He's a comedian.