

Why did Luas strike last four months?

AND so, at last, the Luas drivers' industrial action is over. What began in February with a ludicrous demand for pay increases of up to 53% now has been settled with incremental raises of up to 18.3% between now and 2020.

This is good news for commuters, but the question still needs to be asked: why did the dispute last for almost four months, including 12 strike days that left workers, schoolchildren and tourists stranded; cost operate Transdev a fortune in lost revenue and fines for not supplying the service agreed; and led to bitterness and petty acts of retaliation, by the drivers and management alike?

In their haste to walk off the job, including during key events such as the 1916 commemoration, the Luas drivers very early on lost the support of the public. At a time when many others still wait for austerity-driven pay cuts to be restored, there never was going to be widespread solidarity with any sector looking for massive pay increases.

There is a strong likelihood that other transport workers, and many in the public sector, will interpret the settlement of the dispute as a victory for the drivers, but they would be foolhardy to embark on any similar action.

We are at a difficult point in our economic recovery, and the last thing the country needs is a summer, autumn and winter of discontent. It is understandable that people want more money in their pockets, especially against the backdrop of astronomical rents and increased taxes, charges and levies, but industrial action is not the way forward.

Instead, it now is up to the new Government to stay true to its promise to gradually reduce the hated Universal Social Charge before abolishing it.

Employers could operate in a much leaner and more cost-effective way if the burden of personal taxation were to be reduced. That is the first lesson that must be learned from the Luas debacle.

The second is that the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court must be headed. There are not on anyone's side, but there to look at every dispute and bring reason to the table.

What the Luas drivers settled for was an option weeks ago, but pride, one-upmanship and bloodmindedness got in the way. Employees and employers alike need to understand this is juvenile and counter-productive. A negotiated, fair settlement will always be better than the blunt trauma of a strike that achieves little more than affecting other workers as they too seek to do the best for themselves and their families.

Children need facts

WE have, in a world where children are routinely exposed to explicitly sexual material, perhaps become complacent, thinking they know it all long before previous generations did.

But last year, 42 girls aged 15 or below gave birth, a worrying rise over the figures of 28 in 2013, and 23 in 2014. If this proves anything, it is not just that they are under pressure to have sex before it is legal, but that the message about contraception and sexually transmitted infections is not getting through.

In this paper today, Dr Ciara Kelly urges schools to place more emphasis on contraception, consent, and STIs.

Pretending teens do not have sex will only lead to more unwanted pregnancies; they must be armed with facts to ensure they have the carefree childhoods they deserve.

Just short of perfect

A GADGET that will iron and fold all your clothes is fantastic news. But the inventors should not rest until they come up with a device that will pick up all those ironed and folded clothes and take them straight to the wardrobe.

WE CAN'T

IN 2005, I was approached by a group of concerned, moderate Muslims. Their worry was that radical elements had infiltrated their community and were recruiting vulnerable young Muslims. They also confirmed that certain people holding Irish passports had travelled to Iraq in order to wage jihad, or holy war, on Western troops – a fact that was subsequently confirmed by Garda sources here.

They knew that, as a religious person, I would not pursue the matter in a bigoted manner. They also knew that, as a trained philosopher and theologian, I would delve deeper than most commentators, whose usual tack is to whip up hysteria by playing on people's prejudices. The first article that I published in response to their concerns was, by current standards, a pretty benign analysis of Islam in Ireland. It appealed for moderation and integration as a precondition for peaceful coexistence between Irish people of all faiths and none.

Before going to press, the article was read and approved by all the Muslims with whom I was in contact. However, less than a week after publication, I was whisked off the set of *The Late Late Show* and was given a Garda escort home. Apparently, they had got wind of a threat against me and were taking no chances.

For the next six months, my home was placed under regular Garda surveillance. It was a terrifying experience, but one that authenticated the claims of those courageous moderates who had initially approached me. Throughout it all, there was not a single response from the Irish authorities.

LAST Tuesday, Fianna Fail leader Micheál Martin told the Dáil that 'we can stand up for basic principles and we need to enunciate basic principles. What has been articulated in the US election is worrying. It is not acceptable for democrats to speak in the way Donald Trump has about various religions and ethnic groups and about building walls.'

Mr Martin was referring to Trump's pledge, if elected, to place a temporary ban on Muslims entering the US, and his promise to build a wall on the US-Mexican border.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett was seeking clarification from Enda Kenny on whether, 'if Donald Trump was President of the United States, the Taoiseach would carry on the policy of facilitating the US military at Shannon Airport?'

At first, Mr Kenny replied that he could not 'presume to determine what decision the US electorate will make'. However, by the end of the exchange, the Taoiseach declared that 'if Mr Trump's comments are racist and dangerous, which they are, there is an alternative to vote for'.

It is very easy to dismiss Donald Trump as 'racist and dangerous'. It is, however, to avoid the real question: why is it that this man is proving so popular among certain sections of the American electorate? He is insulting, divisive and chauvinistic, but this seemingly does nothing to dent his support.

One of the reasons is, I believe, the fact that Mr Trump has identified Islam as a threat to the West.

For decades, Western governments have repeatedly denied that such a threat exists, and that those who raise concerns are either Islamophobic or sim-



Why is Donald Trump's proposed ban on Muslims entering the US, says one writer, because we have Koran's very clear exhortations in Buddhism, Hinduism or in the inherent difficulty within Islamic

SATURDAY
ESSAY



by Dr Mark
Dooley

ply racist. This despite the seemingly endless series of atrocities committed on Western soil, and notwithstanding the fact that journalists and writers who seek to debate the issue are regularly threatened or worse.

Donald Trump is not an attractive person and his message is, at best, inarticulate and incoherent. However, he has managed to strike a chord because he refuses to be bound by the creed of political correctness. This is especially so when it comes to the issue of Islam.

The fact that there was no official response to my own brush

with Islamic extremism simply highlighted the extent to which the Irish government was in denial.

Last Tuesday's exchange in the Dáil proved that little has changed in the last decade. However, at a time when European cities are under siege from Islamic militants, and when France is still under a state of emergency, it is high time we stopped denying that we have a serious problem that we need to debate.

My friend, the English philosopher Roger Scruton, writes that 'icons and rituals are holy things, and it is our duty to respect

them'. This, however, 'does not mean that we should not criticise another's religion or mention the unpalatable truths about its followers. On the contrary, there can be no accommodation between Muslim and Christian culture if we surround all points of disagreement with a veil of frightened silence'.

IHAVE often written in this newspaper of my respect for the Muslim way of life. In contrast to so much Western decadence, the Islamic traditions of family values, hospitality and care for the elderly, nobly express the moral core of the Koran. Likewise, the holy rituals observed by pious Muslims bear witness to a way of life we have sadly lost.

That, however, cannot mask the fact that Islam is not a

IGNORE ISLAM



Rhetoric: Donald Trump's popularity rises as he airs fears about Islam; Isis inflicting its brand of callous brutality; the 2001 attack on the Twin Towers

ban on all Muslims gaining so much support in the US? are effectively banned from discussing or critiquing the to violence against non-believers. No similar calls exist teachings of Jesus Christ: and if we keep denying this scripture, more people will flock to the Trump banner..

very idea of a 'Christian army' is anathema to the Gospel. I detest Donald Trump's silly insinuation that all Muslims are potential terrorists. However, it is a fact that, today, the vast majority of terror attacks are committed by Muslims, not only against the West but against other Muslims who they regard as apostates or infidels.

We vividly see how Isis inflicts its callous brutality on European targets and high-profile Western hostages, but what we rarely notice is the medieval cruelty endured by those Muslims who must live under the group's so-called Caliphate.

Isis believes that it has theological legitimacy for the savagery it inflicts. The fact that there is no central body similar to the Papacy in Islam, a body to teach and interpret holy scripture, means that self-styled imams are at liberty to take from the sacred text whatever suits their particular purposes. The result is a conflict of interpretations that very often ends up in actual conflict.

INSTEAD of tiptoeing around these facts, we need to openly discuss why it is that, in the words of Middle East scholar Bernard Lewis, there is a significant number of Muslims for whom 'there is no way but war to the death, in fulfillment of what they see as the commandments of their faith'.

We can only do so when, in defiance of those who would seek to stir up a populist frenzy, we first show respect for those Muslims who define jihad exclusively in terms of moral struggle. And, secondly, when we approach the subject with equal respect for the Holy Prophet and Islam's sacred text.

To have such a reasonable debate, instead of perpetually pretending that there is no need for one, would deny ideological oxygen to people like Donald Trump.

For it is a simple truth that, despite the official dogma of political correctness surrounding the subject, many ordinary people in Europe and America are frightened of Islam.

Those worries, while often justified, can only be assuaged when we feel we can raise legitimate questions without fearing that doing so will result in threats or intimidation.

The great irony is, of course, that while there are many good Muslims and Islamic scholars willing to have this debate, our political leaders prefer to sink their heads in the sand.

'Racist and dangerous' he may be, but not until they start asking why Mr Trump's message resonates so strongly, will our elected representatives understand why long-term peace with Islam requires respectful debate rather than serial denial.

homogenous religion like Catholicism. It contains various strands and traditions, each of which vies for supremacy and emphasises different parts of the Koran. For example, Sunni Islam differs from Shia Islam on the basis of an ancient dispute as to who was the rightful heir of the Prophet Muhammad.

The fact that we in the West know very little about the history of Islam, and the fact that few of us have read the Koran, means we are at a disadvantage when it comes to contesting its claims.

For example, the usual response from Western leaders to atrocities perpetrated by Islamists, is that 'Islam is a religion of peace'. For the majority of Muslims, Islam is indeed a peaceful religion.

As Prince El Hassan bin Talal – a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad – said following the attacks of 9/11: 'Such acts of extreme violence, in which innocent men, women and children are both the targets and the pawns, are totally unjustifiable.

No religious tradition can or will tolerate such behaviour and will loudly condemn it.' Moreover, the word 'Islam' derives from 'salam', meaning 'peace'. However, as Islamic expert Malise Ruthven points out: 'The problem consists not in the idea of peace as a goal, but in the means deployed to achieve it.'

'In the Koranic discourse, as in the legal formulations derived from the Koran and the Prophet's traditions, the very notion of peace is conditional on acknowledgement of the Islamic idea of God'.

While at one point the Koran insists that there 'shall be no coercion in matters of faith', separate verses admonish the faithful to 'kill the polytheists wherever you find them, and take them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem [of war]'.

In the hadiths, or the various reports surrounding the words and actions of the Holy Prophet, it says that jihad 'is your duty under any ruler, be he godly or wicked', and 'he

who dies without having taken part in a campaign dies in a kind of unbelief'. It is true that jihad, which means 'striving' or 'effort', can be interpreted as moral striving. Indeed, in the early chapters of the Koran which date back to Muhammad's life as a spiritual leader in Mecca, jihad has precisely this meaning.

HOWEVER, following persecution, the Prophet moved to Medina where he became head of state. It was then that he waged an armed jihad against the rulers of Mecca which would extend, in time, to the whole of Arabia and beyond. It is also in this period that jihad assumed a more military meaning – a fact reflected in the later chapters of the Koran which were written from Medina.

The fact that the majority of the world's Muslims cannot even entertain the idea of waging armed jihad

does not mean that it is not a central tenet of Islamic teaching or that it doesn't provide scriptural justification to those who turn to terror.

The standard response to this is that Christianity has had its own history of bloodshed and persecution. That is certainly true, and I think all Christians should join with Roger Scruton in expressing shame 'that Christians established the Inquisition, pillaged Constantinople and the Holy Land, and imposed colonial systems of government in Muslim lands'.

We should do so, not only because Christ denied that His kingdom was of this world, but also because there is not a single line in the New Testament which exhorts Christians to violence. We are commanded to love our enemies, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and to pray for those who persecute us.

This means that the Crusades, and other armed conquests by Christian armies, were direct deviations from the teachings of Christ. Indeed, the