Irish Daily Mail

COMMENT

# Fitzgerald must tell O'Sullivan it's over

OVER a period of at least five years, it appears, gardaí across the country systematically lied about the number of breath tests they were conducting.

In effect, for every genuine test that was conducted, a second one was recorded which had not taken place. Around a million breath tests were ultimately wrongly recorded as having been performed.

The gravity of this scandal seems to have escaped Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald and, indeed, the Government. Gardaí across the country told lies – and either their bosses were complicit in those lies or were all too incompetent to realise they were being routinely lied to.

Yes, the Justice Minister yesterday described the falsification of breath test statistics as 'staggering and appalling' but she also made it clear that, beyond having a few stern words with Garda Commissioner Nóirín O'Sullivan, no further action is being taken.

You might say the Garda chief was let off with a slap on the wrist, but the truth is she didn't even get that!

Nor, of course, is this rampant deceit the only recent scandal within the gardaí.

We know that for years, senior gardaí quashed penalty points for friends and relatives.

Yet when attempts were made to bring this practice to light, the whistleblowers concerned were smeared as 'disgusting' by the then Garda commissioner, Martin Callinan. Beside him was his then deputy, Nóirín O'Sullivan.

We know that after Ms O'Sullivan became Garda Commissioner, the force's lawyers said they were planning to attack one whistleblower's credibility – though that was later ascribed to a misunderstanding by the legal team of the commissioner's instructions. We also know that the gardaí have simply failed to send out almost 15,000 penalty notices to motorists, meaning that those people had to go to court where many received levels of fines and penalty points that were substantially higher than if they had been allowed simply to pay a fine.

Their convictions will now be quashed, and they will have to be compensated – not by the gardaí responsible, but by taxpayers.

So we have lies, cover-ups, smears and incompetence on an industrial scale – much of it happening on Nóirín O'Sullivan's watch as Garda Commissioner, and all while she was a very senior member of the force.

Meanwhile, of course, she is facing a judicial tribunal into allegations – which she denies – that she was personally party to the smearing of a garda whistleblower.

We said yesterday in these columns that what was required was a wholescale management clear-out at the top of An Garda Síochána. That clearly remains the case.

The question now is a simple one: why will the Justice Minister not take decisive action to save the reputation of the force? Set aside the smear allegations; is it not enough that gardaí were inventing breath test statistics on a vast scale?

Or that they were routinely failing to perform a basic administrative task, exposing taxpayers to huge compensation bill?

What exactly would have to happen within the force for the Justice Minister to accept that a change is needed?

It seems highly unlikely the Garda Commissioner can survive long. The longer the Justice Minister stands by her, the more likely it is that she will be dragged down too – and possibly her party's electoral hopes with her.

That, though, is a matter for Mrs Fitzgerald and the Fine Gael party; the real disaster would be that the reputation of An Garda Síochána would go with them.

For the force's sake, if no other, the Justice Minister should reflect – and then act before it is too late.

Backfiring? Martin McGuinness in the early 1970s

SATURDAY ESSAY

by Dr Mark Dooley

ON the evening of January 30, 1948, a Hindu nationalist, Nathuram Godse, shot Mahatma Gandhi three times at point-blank range.

Revered as the 'Father of the Nation', Gandhi was preparing to address a prayer meeting when Godse ended his extraordinary life. Having liberated India from the British Empire without a single act of violence, the Mahatma, or 'Great Soul', was dispatched from this world by the very method he had spent his life denouncing.

Gandhi was greatly influenced by Leo Tolstoy, whose ardent belief in the power of non-violent resistance touched him deeply. Indeed, Tolstoy's last letter before he died in 1910, was to the Mahatma. Another of Gandhi's correspondents was Albert Einstein who, following the murder of the Great Soul, wrote: 'Gandhi had demonstrated that a powerful human following can be assembled...through the cogent example of a morally superior conduct of life.'

On the evening of April 4, 1968, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr was fatally shot by James Earl Ray, on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. King, whose non-violent civil rights movement was profoundly influenced by Gandhi, often referred to the Mahatma as 'that little brown saint'.

'Christ gave us the goals,' he said, 'and Mahatma Gandhi gave us the tactics'.

Following Dr King's assassination, President Lyndon Johnson declared seven days of national mourning. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed into law a federal holiday in his honour. All that because King had a dream that, one day, 'little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as brothers and sisters'. What he said of Gandhi could be equally said of King himself: 'He struggled only with the weapons of truth, soul force, non-injury and courage.'

On the morning of March 21, 2017, Ireland awoke to the news that former IRA commander turned peacemaker, Martin McGuinness, had died of a rare heart condition. For ten years, McGuinness served as Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland. In so doing, he had, according to Ian Paisley Jr, 'saved countless lives'. Since his death, Mr McGuinness has been eulogised by, among others, former US President Barack Obama, who said he was someone 'who had the wisdom and courage to pursue peace and reconciliation for his people. His leadership was instrumental in turning the page on a past of violence and conflict that he knew all too well'.

However, for more than 25 years, Martin McGuinness was a leading figure in the IRA. At the time of Bloody Sunday in 1972, when he was only 21 years old, he was second-in-command of the terror group in his hometown of Derry. And even when he had put his violent past behind him, he still declared in 2002: 'I haven't done anything I am ashamed of.'

As a young man, McGuinness was deeply affected by the deaths of two of his friends, Eugene McGillan and Colm Keenan, both of whom he saw die as a young man in Derry.

Describing the incident to journalist Kevin Toolis, he said: 'I lifted [McGillan] into the ambulance. He looked at me, his eyes were wide open, and I looked at him. It was deathly quiet and when I left the ambulance Colm Keenan was lying down on the street, shot in the head. They were two unarmed republicans murdered by the British Army and both were exceptionally close friends of mine.'

This, and similar incidents, served to radicalise and inflame the young McGuinness, propelling him into the highest echelons of the IRA. His unremitting rage and desire for revenge, soon earned him the sobriquet, 'Butcher of the Bogside' (a play on his job as a butcher's apprentice). He had chosen the path of violence, believing that 'armies should be fought with armies'.

Of the total killings during the so-called 'Troubles', the IRA murdered 1,696, which is 49% of all those who perished. In his early career, Mr McGuinness singularly repudiated 'the weapons of truth, soul force, non-injury and courage', for the bomb and the bullet.

'We republicans', he once proclaimed, 'don't believe winning elections will bring freedom in Ireland. At the end of the day it will be the cutting edge of the IRA that will bring freedom.'

This begs the very obvious question: would Northern Ireland now enjoy more political and religious harmony if the civil rights movement, led by Gerry Fitt, John Hume and Seamus Mallon, had not been usurped and blown away by the IRA?

That movement, inspired by Dr King, had the backing of the large majority of voters in Derry. This was attested to by the fact that, during his violent phase, the people of Foyle rejected McGuinness on three occasions in favour of Hume for a seat in the Westminster elections.

One thing is undoubtedly certain: had McGuinness sought inspiration from Gandhi and Dr King, rather than from Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, 1,696 people might well have lived to see a brighter future rather than ending up prematurely in their graves.

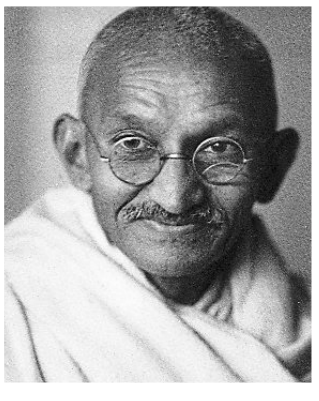
Let's suppose then, at those crucial points in his life as he watched his friends and neighbours die, McGuinness had listened to Gandhi and Dr King.

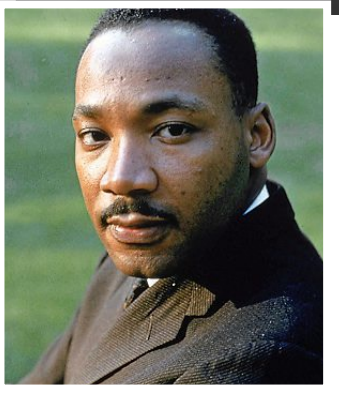
Gandhi often said: 'An eye for an eye only makes the whole world blind'. It was something that Dr King regularly repeated when urging non-violent restraint. In that statement, we hear echoes of Christ's injunction to 'turn the other cheek'. In so doing, we do not make ourselves weak, but we automatically seize the moral high ground from our opponents. We eschew the road of terror and war for that of non-violent heroism.

From his reading of Christ, Tolstoy and the Hindu sages,

# What if he'd chosen to wage peace, not war?

## Martin McGuinness's early life was governed by one belief: that to get any concessions from the British, you had to fight – and kill. But what if he had followed the examples of Gandhi or Martin Luther King instead? In this brilliant essay, one academic says the lesson of history is that choosing peaceful resistance, while difficult, would have achieved far more, far quicker... with far fewer deaths on all sides





**Meeting 'physical force with soul force': Gandhi and Martin Luther King**

Gandhi learned that pacifism does not mean surrender, which is why he opted for non-violent resistance. This meant refusing to co-operate with the oppressor, while never reciprocating his violence with violence. Hence Gandhi's famous homespun garment that gave him the appearance of a Biblical prophet. By spinning your own clothes, he taught the people of India, you will gently loosen your tethers to the Empire.

Gandhi and Martin McGuinness faced the might of the British army and responded in two very different ways.

Both had major turning points that shaped how they subsequently pursued the liberty of their people. In Gandhi's case, that turning point was the massacre at Amritsar in 1919. For Martin McGuinness, it was Bloody Sunday in 1972.

On April 13, 1919, as thousands of Sikhs gathered in the holy city of Amritsar for a religious festival, British Brigadier General Reginald Dyer ordered his troops to indiscriminately fire upon a nationalist demonstration. He did so, he said, to create a 'moral effect' on the people. The bloodshed resulted in 379 unarmed demonstrators losing their lives.

The parallel to Bloody Sunday is obvious, if much greater in scale. But the way Gandhi retaliated would have been unthinkable to Martin McGuinness. Here was a little man who possessed no weapons and yet, that very day, he decided on a course of action that would eventually lead to Indian self-rule. No longer would he support the British in their war effort in the hope of securing partial home rule. Now, he would call on the Indian people to peacefully withhold all co-operation from their British rulers with the aim of establishing complete independence.

At first, the cause seemed hopeless. Gandhi was repeatedly arrested and the religious and nationalistic factions of India were consistently at odds. But once he called for a nationwide movement of non-violent civil disobedience, the country rallied and, by 1931, the British were negotiating with him. Such a situation would have been unimaginable a decade earlier.

Unlike McGuinness, what Gandhi clearly perceived was the moral power of non-violence. If, in other words, you don't meet violence with violence, you morally disarm your opponent. And that is because, in the court of public opinion, the aggressor always fails. Think of how the public mood changed in Gandhi's favour after Amritsar, or how, when police brutality was unleashed against civil rights protesters in America, the power of Dr King's message resounded all the more.

The British had no choice but to come to the table in India. How could they possibly win against a Christ-like pacifist clad in cotton homespun? In Northern Ireland, however, the IRA's violent terror tactics gave the British establishment every excuse to further entrench their power.

Suppose, however, that Martin McGuinness had not succumbed to rage. At the time of Bloody Sunday in 1972, he had the profound example of Martin Luther King before him. It was, after all, only four years since his assassination, and people like John Hume had brought Dr King's message directly to the streets of Derry.

Following a trip to India in 1959, Dr King returned praising Gandhi, saying: 'I am more convinced than ever before that the method of non-violent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity.' That weapon he deployed to optimum effect on the segregated streets of Alabama in 1963-64. The images of police dogs attacking peaceful protesters, including children, horrified all right-thinking Americans. So, too, did the wanton cruelty of those who sought to restore 'law and order' through the casual use of guns and batons on people who carried no weapons and offered no resistance.

By the time he marched on Washington and delivered his 'I Have a Dream' speech at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, King was a national hero. That speech, which owes as much to the inspiration of Gandhi as anyone else, made possible the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

If Martin McGuinness had opted to dream like Gandhi and Dr King, he would not have resorted to the destructive ideology of revenge. He would have joined hands with John Hume and Seamus Mallon by calling for a movement of nonviolent resistance. He would have marched and been struck down, beaten and bloodied in full view of the world's media. But he would not have struck back.

IN the absence of bombs and bullets, of innocent victims and slain soldiers, the moral power of McGuinness's position may well have forced the British to offer concessions far sooner than they did. Were British governments of the 1970s, after all, not more likely to respond positively to sustained, non-violent opposition than those that followed throughout the Eighties under Margaret Thatcher? In such a scenario, McGuinness would not have gone to his death with such a mixed legacy.

Gandhi once wrote that 'truth never damages a cause that is just'. His cause was peace, the truth of which always sets you free. As such, his monument is a free and flourishing India, while Dr King's is a country where racial segregation is no more, and whose first black president could publicly acclaim Gandhi and Dr King as people who 'changed the world' by the power of their ethics.

Had the young Martin McGuinness been inspired by the Great Soul, had he turned the other cheek, our country might now look very different. If Dr King had survived to see Bloody Sunday, he may well have repeated to the young Martin McGuinness what he said that day before the Lincoln Memorial: 'In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred...We must never allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence'.

For that is what it means to meet 'physical force with soul force', and it is the reason why the 'segregated walls' of India and Alabama have vanished, while those of Northern Ireland still stand firm.