

Irish Daily Mail

COMMENT

How many chances do the public deserve?

EVERYONE deserves a second chance: an opportunity to tackle their demons and address their criminal behaviour. Doubtless that is what Judge Melanie Greally had in mind when suspending the sentence of Gary Kearney, who had robbed and assaulted a stranger after pretending to be a garda. Judge Greally agreed that Kearney deserved the opportunity to address the drug addiction which was blamed for the vicious crime of which he had been convicted.

What is troubling about this case, though, is that this assault wasn't Kearney's first offence. It wasn't his second, or third or even fourth.

Prior to this crime, he had also committed assault, animal cruelty, robbery, theft, burglary, criminal damage and public order offences. In all, Kearney has a staggering 160 prior convictions.

The first question that has to be asked, naturally, is how it is possible to have racked up 160 convictions and still be out on the street at all.

The reason Kearney committed this most recent assault and robbery is in large part because our criminal justice system, which should long ago have ensured he was locked up for a very long time, let him out to reoffend yet again. His most recent victim – a man who was handcuffed, robbed and violently attacked – has every reason to blame our soft system for his horrifying ordeal.

The second question is this: regardless of Kearney's promises, how can we take the risk that he won't continue the habit of a lifetime and attack another victim?

If he wants drug treatment, he can continue it in prison. That way, he gets a chance to tackle his addiction – but the public are kept safe in case he decides to offend again. For the umpteenth time.

Paid with her life

TIME and again the Irish Daily Mail has highlighted the dangers posed by social media. While there are many positives to it, the social media world is rife with bullying and trolling, with savage (usually anonymous) mobs quick to pour their bile at anyone who offends their worldview. It is a world that facilitates child-grooming and terrorist propaganda, that whips up hysteria against modern medicine – without any of the filters or checks associated with traditional media.

Now we hear from one grieving family about another danger of social media: how fake identities can be used to trick people into dangerous encounters that they would never contemplate in the real world. Sonia Blount was murdered by a man who used social media to lure her into a murderous ambush. As her family said, she trusted social media – and paid for it with her life.

Naturally, everyone should heed their warning to be careful about meeting anyone based purely on internet conversations. But we should also be having a national conversation about the darker side of social media. We should be asking what can be done to protect people – especially children – from its dangers. And we must be unafraid to take whatever measures are necessary to protect our citizens.

A need for balance

PUBLIC sector workers earn a staggering €247 a week more than private sector workers, the CSO has found – and yet public sector unions are demanding giant pay rises. Whoever is chosen by Fine Gael as the new taoiseach must make his first priority to stand up for the private sector workers who are the heartbeat of the economy, and who are driving the nation's extraordinary recovery.

The need to balance public and private sector wages is not just an economic imperative, though: it is a question also of what some politicians might call 'social justice'.

THEY are a happy bunch, this group of people out enjoying themselves. They are without cares or worries, laughing and chatting as people do when relaxed – but looking forward to a very special day out. The atmosphere is full of levity as old and young enjoy their time together.

Suddenly, the calm is shattered by a shocking sound. It only lasts an instant and causes terrible confusion. To those who are still conscious, it is obvious that a bomb has just exploded.

Now there is only silence – that awful silence which immediately follows an explosion. No more laughing, no more peace or joy. There is only silence, smoke, devastation and death.

The silence is slowly broken by groans of agony. Limbs are scattered everywhere. An old man lies motionless. His legs have been blown off.

Two teenagers are also lying dead, their young lives sacrificed in a split second. They were obviously in the immediate vicinity of the blast and now they are gone. Beside them is an old woman – a grandmother of one of the victims. Barely breathing, it is clear that she will soon follow her grandson.

Later, a ruthless terror organisation claims responsibility for the outrage. One of their spokesmen refers to the murders of these children and their family members as an 'execution'. He claims that those responsible for the explosion were justified and that, with these deaths, the terror group has 'achieved its objective' of having people take notice of them and their demands. There is no apology for the slaughter of the children. Such actions are justified, the killers insist, because of what has been done to their people.

But this slaughter of a family, including a 14-year-old boy and his 15-year-old friend, did not happen in Manchester earlier this week. It was not carried out by Isis or Al Qaeda in Nice, or Paris, or on 7/7 in London, or any other scene of repulsive terrorist atrocities that have horrified and enraged us all.

No, this killing took place right here in Ireland: in Co. Sligo, in fact. It was carried out not by Muslim fanatics, but by the IRA. The 'execution' was that of pensioner Louis Mountbatten in 1979. He and his family were fishing off Mullaghmore Harbour when a 50-pound bomb, strapped to the boat by IRA operative Thomas McMahon, delivered them to oblivion.

The teenagers whose limbs were torn apart by the explosion were not Ariana Grande fans, but Mountbatten's grandson Nicholas Knatchbull, aged 14 – and a Co. Fermanagh crew member, Paul Maxwell, aged 15.

Like the Ariana Grande fans butchered last week, both boys were innocents. Neither of them had ever harmed any Irish person in any way. The 'crime' for which they deserved to die was not 'living a debauched Western lifestyle'; it was 'being related to Louis Mountbatten'.

Move to 1993, when, on March 20, the same terrorist group detonated two bombs on a busy shopping street in Warrington. Both were placed in cast-iron bins: as in the Manchester Arena bombing, this resulted in huge amounts of shrapnel being fired into the helpless victims caught in the blast radius. Fleeing one bomb, shoppers unwittingly ran straight into the path of the

other. Fifty-four people were injured: and on top of that, two children were killed. Jonathan Ball was only 3 years of age. Tim Parry was 12. Neither of them had ever harmed any Irish person in any way. The crime for which they were slaughtered was not 'offending Allah', but happening to be born citizens of the United Kingdom.

Last Monday night, Salman Abedi slaughtered 22 innocent souls in a wanton act of savagery. Among those murdered in Manchester was 8-year-old Saffie Roussos, a beautiful smiling angel. Indeed, the majority of those slain were teenagers enjoying a night out watching their favourite pop star.

After the attack, Isis claimed responsibility – in exactly the same cold and sinister manner as the IRA so often did when it committed similar atrocities.

People across the world have responded to the Manchester attack with shock and horror. Rightly, they have condemned it as evil, cruel, senseless and barbaric. Given our close links with Manchester, we in Ireland have been especially moved by the tragedy.

Gerry Adams offered his condolences to the victims and was quick to condemn the 'shocking and horrendous attack on children and young people' – a world away from his defence of the slaughter in Mullaghmore.

And yet, what is the differ-

ence between Abedi's callous act of carnage and those perpetrated by terrorists in Mullaghmore, Warrington, Birmingham or Enniskillen? In all cases, the same cruel tactics led to the very same results: mass murder.

IN response to the murder of Lord Mountbatten, Nicholas Knatchbull and Paul Maxwell, the IRA claimed that 'this operation is one of the discriminate ways we can bring to the attention of the English people the continuing operation of our country'. In other words, political grievance justified the slaughter of the innocent. But if blowing up children is a legitimate response to foreign occupation and 'imperialism', then surely when Isis attacks in a similar manner and for similar reasons – such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the ongoing strategic air support offered to Isis's enemies – it ought to be judged

Why is blowing up the blowing up the children



Manchester bombing victims: Saffie Roussos, 8, and Sorrell Leczkowski, 14

THIS NA DOUBLE ABOUT

SATURDAY
ESSAY



by Dr Mark
Dooley

children on the left an 'atrocious', but pictured on the right a 'legitimate act'?



Murdered by IRA bombs: 14-year-old Nicholas Knatchbull; Tim Parry, aged 12; and Jonathan Ball, aged just 3

USEATING STANDARD TERRORISM

in the same light as those who committed atrocities on behalf of the IRA?

If Isis can justify their attacks on the basis that they are defending territory that is rightfully theirs, that they are repelling imperial occupation and attack, then how do they differ from our own home-grown terrorists?

After all, I grew up in a country where scenes similar to that in Manchester were sadly routine. But if blowing up children in the name of the Caliphate is wrong, what made those killings in the name of a United Ireland legitimate?

Now ask yourself how you would feel if Salman Abedi's Isis supporters were elected to the Westminster parliament: if they stood up and defended blowing up children with bombs as a legitimate tactic in the face of grievance.

And yet many of those who perpetrated or supported IRA atrocities, along with their most enthusiastic apologists, have been elected to parliament in Belfast, Dublin and London.

So the question still stands: what makes the murder by the IRA of

children, single and pregnant mothers, the elderly or the middle-aged, any less evil than those committed in carbon-copy circumstances by Isis?

Is it that the cause of a United Ireland somehow mitigates the gravity of such crimes, whereas the political goals of Islamist fanatics do not? But when you study the language, methods and aspirations of both groups, you very quickly see how strikingly similar they are.

The simple truth is that when it comes to the murder of children, you can draw no moral distinction between an IRA terrorist and an Isis terrorist.

Their goals may differ slightly in emphasis, but nothing distinguishes their brutal methods and fanatical logic.

The fact that you blow innocent people up in Manchester, Enniskillen or Paris makes little difference from a moral perspective. It is murder most foul no matter where it is committed.

No right-thinking person could excuse Salman Abedi on the basis that he was forced to commit such

an evil act because of his opposition to British foreign policy.

Quite rightly, we condemn his senseless and depraved bombing as the product of a warped mind. As we watched the horrific scenes unfold in Manchester, it would never have occurred to us to argue that this man was a 'soldier' or a 'freedom-fighter' using the only effective method at his disposal.

BUT that is exactly how we like to cast those like the late Martin McGuinness, a self-confessed terrorist in the style of Isis. If it is an act of murderous evil to blow up innocent people in either Manchester, Syria or Mullaghmore, then why is McGuinness feted as a 'soldier' while Abedi is reviled as a wicked terrorist?

If the slaughter of children is wrong in any and all circumstances, why do we continue to elect people who supported and assisted and abetted such killings - people who still glorify the killers and insist that what they did was

entirely justified? In short, why do we persist in eulogising McGuinness and lending legitimacy to Gerry Adams, while simultaneously repudiating and demonising Abedi and his fellow-terrorists?

A terrorist is a terrorist irrespective of where he comes from or what his cause.

The fact that he would consider it justifiable to murder and maim children and shoppers, party and concert-goers, grannies and granddads, is evidence of his evil.

To think otherwise, is to say that the innocent victims of Manchester are somehow less innocent than those who died in Warrington or Enniskillen.

A dead child is a dead child and no amount of verbal casuistry can lessen the gravity of the crime.

Yet, somehow, many of us have convinced ourselves that you can, indeed, morally distinguish the footsoldiers and supporters of the IRA from those of Isis.

Why else would we have placed them in high office and given them a mandate to determine the future direction of our country? Would we have done the same for Abedi,

excusing his vile deeds as an expression of his social and political frustration?

The bottom line is this: you cannot legitimately draw moral distinctions between terrorists. That is because you cannot draw a distinction between Jonathan Ball and Saffie Roussos. Both were beautiful little children blown to smithereens by people masquerading as 'soldiers'.

Only the most morally hypocritical could deny that there were differences between what we saw on Monday night, and the orgy of violence visited upon the innocent people of Birmingham in 1974.

In two separate pub bombings on the same night, 21 people were murdered and 182 were injured. In terms of its scale, depravity and devastation, it was almost identical to the carnage unleashed by Abedi in Manchester.

What could be more callous than targeting public houses where innocent people were out relaxing and enjoying a night?

Yet the IRA saw those people as fair game in their 'struggle' to banish the British and achieve a United Ireland.

When Isis stormed the Bataclan theatre in Paris in 2015, massacring 130 people, when they targeted pubs and restaurants that same night, were they not simply drawing from the same rulebook as the Birmingham bombers?

Either we believe the killing of innocent people, for whatever purpose, is wrong or we do not. To deny that Isis and the IRA are morally equivalent, is to suggest that 'our' grievance is somehow more legitimate than that of Abedi and his friends.

It is to say that the murder of Mountbatten's little grandson, Nicholas Knatchbull, was more justified than that of Olivia Campbell, that beautiful 15-year-old who was the first of Abedi's victims to be named.

OF course, very few people would say that, believing, as they do, that murdering children for any reason is a crime that cries out to Heaven. But then, we have to ask ourselves why it is that people like Gerry Adams, who has always defended the IRA's atrocities, has been given political respectability when Isis are considered as evil and vicious murderers? How come the IRA's 'grievances' justified such brutality whereas those of Isis do not?

In the end, it boils down to moral double standards. Proof of this is surely the fact that the Irish Republican movement enjoys such popular support, whereas Isis and their surrogates are universally considered a threat to civilisation as we know it.

They are rightly abhorred for their hatred and their cruelty, whereas those who continue to retrospectively justify the IRA's 'war' are treated as statesmen and 'peacemakers'.

What we cannot deny, however, are those slain innocents that both groups struck down in cold blood. First, there was laughter and light, little children playing without a care.

Then, there was only the silence and darkness, all life extinguished without so much as a warning.

Such are the true tactics of terrorists everywhere, and shame on those who would laud one while loathing the other.