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Opinion

Did Farrell die for a do at Stormont?

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

By Lindy McDowell

It's that line they use in the movies and television dramas when they're trying to justify a decision which might seem at odds with the wishes of the deceased. "It's what he/she would have wanted," someone says. Whether the audience agrees is, of course, debatable.

In the argument about the proposed ceremony to honour Provo bomber Mairead Farrell up at Stormont, where republicans were this week squaring up to their critics, it's the one question that wasn't being asked.

Mairead Farrell - her life (and death) commemorated with a twee wee soiree up at Stormont?

Is it really what she would have wanted?

In her day Mairead Farrell was prepared to massacre innocent civilians in both Gibraltar and Belfast in order to score a 'hit' on the Brits. In her eyes the terror campaign she called the 'armed struggle' was about demolishing partition and all its symbols.

Stormont? Surely she'd have wanted to bomb that, too.

And is this really what an 'activist' dies for?

A warm glass of plonk, a couple of chicken vol au vents and a few words of praise from Sinn Fein MLAs who have all settled surprisingly well into the well-appointed comfort of the ultimate symbol of occupied six county-dom?

From Sinn Fein's point of view the plus side of the proposed event is that it has enraged many onlookers, particularly - although not exclusively - within the unionist community.

Some observers feel that actually, that's the whole point of the exercise.

Sinn Fein at street level is currently being criticised by supporters for being too pally by half with the DUP end of the Chuckle coalition.

There's a sense that it's being made to look weak and irrelevant. Doing something guaranteed to raise hackles on the unionist side never fails to hit the spot. But there's a problem.

The party spin machine is also attracting intense criticism right now from former colleagues who argue that Sinn Fein is rewriting republican history to suggest that a coalition with the DUP at Stormont was the real game-plan all along.

This is not what people died for, republican critics say. And many of these critics will not be entirely delighted with the idea of that posthumous Stormont reception either.

Which is why, if unionists and victims were to mute their anger and their understandable revulsion and allow the proposed Stormont commemoration to go ahead, it could well backfire on the Shinners.

Given that it's being held on International Women's Day, a dignified vigil by women and child victims of IRA terrorism outside the venue on the evening would make a powerful point.

One that would be noted not least by observers in the south, where there's a growing cynicism about manipulative Sinn Fein.

DUP and UUP Assembly members have been working themselves into a lather about an IRA 'activist' being honoured up at the Big House ?

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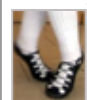
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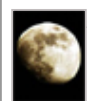
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But, let's face it, this wouldn't be the first time.

Martin McGuinness is a helluva way further up the 'activist' food chain than Mairead Farrell ever was. And look where he ended up.

The backlash this week over his bloodthirsty comments about Bloody Sunday is an illustration of how, when given free rein, the Sinn Fein hierarchy have an increasing knack of digging themselves into a PR hole.

Standing back and letting them get on with that?

Believe me.

It's what they wouldn't have wanted.

Something very fishy about Oscars' Marion

The Oscars are no longer dominated by actors and actresses who conform to the conventional stereotype of box office beauty - at least if this year's winners are anything to go by.

Tilda Swinton looks like she's stepped out of a 16th century Dutch painting. Daniel Day Lewis like he stepped out of a caricature. And Marion Cotillard? In that strange scaley dress she looked like she'd stepped out of the fishing net.

Why it could be time for the Barack-lash

Interesting news this week from the American presidential campaign.

Or, as I like to think of it, the First Truly Interesting Election Battle for Yonks.

It seems the runaway juggernaut of success that is the Obama effort is finally attracting some flak.

Well, maybe flak is putting it a bit strongly. But some reservations are being expressed. The Baracklash - the US media is calling it. People who found themselves caught up in the first flush of excitement at a candidate who offered something seemingly new and different are now standing back a wee bit and wondering: "Just what am I getting so worked up about?"

It's a natural human reaction to the sort of hype and hysteria (and genuine hope) that Obama created. Obamamania the US papers call it. Suddenly it's all becoming a bit too overpowering.

And let's be frank. Nobody quite does overpowering like our friends across the pond.

But after the hysteria comes the sneering. And pundits and satirists - particularly on the internet - are now queuing up to mock the whole Obama drama. One leading columnist has diagnosed what he describes as Obama Comedown Syndrome.

It doesn't mean the candidate is finished, of course.

It may take more than a bit of tongue-in-cheek humour to dislodge his lead over Hillary.

And even if Obama does lose a bit in public affection, it needn't be terminal.

The come-Barack kid?

Politicians need rail-ality check

In the railway network of life, you and I are obviously waiting at the wrong station. We're lucky if any old locomotive comes along.

Elsewhere, at Station Elected Representative, it's just one gravy train after the other.

Joining the passenger list in first class this week is Mr Michael Martin, Speaker of the House of Commons, no less. Mr Martin's wife, we learn, has been taxed on shopping expeditions at considerable public expense.

Time and time again when a story like this breaks we're reminded that actually there's nothing illegal or against the rules about it.

All the same ...

You'd expect that public representatives would have enough integrity and gumption to tell when something is obviously going to strike the hardworking taxpayer (who is ultimately footing the bill) as unfair and unreasonable.

It's not just the gravy trains that are now hitting the buffers. It's public confidence in politicians in general.

And that will be a whole lot more difficult to get back on track.

Oh baby, we needed this

Quote of the week from the Oscars ceremony.

Host Jon Stewart sums up the bleak subject material of this year's winners ?

"Tonight we look beyond the dark days to focus on happier fare - this year's slate of Oscar-nominated psychopathic killer movies."

Does this town need a hug? No Country For Old Men, Sweeney Todd, There Will Be Blood ...

"All I can say is: thank God for teen pregnancy."

Bypass work newt-ered

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A single great crested newt may be set to cost the public purse somewhere in the region of £1.7m. The creature, which is a protected species, has been spotted near where a Leicester bypass is being built.

There could be just the one newt. There could be 10.

But the work can't go on until it/they are rehoused at a cost of half a mill. Meanwhile the delay will cost another £1.2m.

The long-suffering taxpayer.

P****d off as a newt.

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