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How Fianna Fail fundraiser rewarded SDLP's hypocrites

powered

by



By Maurice Hayes

Monday April 21 2008

It is like a player given a red card being welcomed in the dugout, instead of rebuked for letting the side down

The deaths of [Patrick Hillery](#) and [Michael Mills](#), and the eulogies to both have served to identify them as true patriots, exemplary public

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servants and decent human beings.

Shining out through all the rhetoric, are the values they exemplified -- public spirit, fairness, compassion, and concern for others, and the desire to make the world a better place.

It is not that these values have disappeared from public life, or that there are not still men and women of great probity and vision alive, but in these more cynical, worldly-wise times, such virtues need to be emphasised as they were in the lives of these two men.

They did not enter politics or public life in pursuit of power or personal gain, but through a sense of duty and a commitment to the public good. Both retained their integrity to the end.

Michael Mills, I came to know well as a fellow Ombudsman. He was an inspired choice for the post of first Ombudsman. It is a privilege given to a few to set up a great public office, to form its philosophy and methodology, to set the tone, to translate the dry words of an Act of the Oireachtas into an effective instrument which would vindicate the rights of the little people and correct abuses of power and of process by public officials.

Michael had already shown his independence as a political journalist. His ability to shine a light into dark places and to communicate the results of his investigation in clear language were the essential tools of the Ombudsman.

I had the totally unalloyed pleasure of accompanying him to many international meetings of national Ombudsmen where his wisdom, judgement and fairness were highly valued.

Michael Mills had no time for cant or hypocrisy, and even less for those in public office who wished to excuse themselves from the obligation to act fairly. In his book, those holding public office had an overriding duty to act fairly, to respect the rights of others and to avoid imposing their values on minorities of whatever sort. It is not, sadly, a view that appears to be held universally.

It may have been the start of a potential courtship, a desire for closer relations in the future, or a celebration of the tenth anniversary of the [Good Friday Agreement](#), but the meeting of [Fianna Fail](#) and [SDLP](#) recently seems to have arisen, consciously or otherwise, out of a set of values which are the antithesis of those on which the Agreement is grounded, and which sustained SDLP through years of struggle.

The agreement is based on the concept of respect for all traditions, and the right of the North's people to celebrate their identities with the help of the state. The SDLP, which emerged from the civil rights movement and stood against discrimination by unionist-dominated local authorities, was similarly founded on the ethos of respect for difference and diversity.

How strange then, that the breakfast at which they met Fianna Fail was presented as a fundraiser to bail out a group of SDLP councillors, who had been surcharged by the North's local government auditor after a petty act of spite.

Against clear legal advice, those councillors denied the use of a publicly owned community centre to a group representing Protestant victims of the Troubles.

[Willie Frazer](#), who had led the Love Ulster visit to the south, which was met with violence in [Dublin](#), had applied to use the hall for a FAIR (Families Acting for Innocent Victims) meeting.

The organisation, which he founded and leads, represents people in South [Armagh](#) who have seen their fathers, sons, husbands and brothers shot at home, in the fields, in the mission hall, or dragged from buses and murdered on the way home from the mill.

Willie Frazer may not have taken the honours course on how to make friends and influence people, and opponents may find him irritating and abrasive, but he is expressing a deep-felt hurt and, if the aspirations of the Good Friday Agreement are to be honoured, he is entitled to be heard.

There should be no hierarchy of victims, and no attempt to differentiate on political or ideological grounds those who may mourn or be mourned.

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MAURICE HAYES POLITICS



How Fianna Fail fundraiser rewarded SDLP's hypocrites

It is like a player given a red card being welcomed in the dugout, instead of rebuked for letting the side down

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In taking their stance, the SDLP councillors seem to have lost the plot, at least as it was written by their founding fathers. Was it for this that [Austin Currie](#) squatted to protest discrimination by a local council, or [John Hume](#) led civil rights marches in [Derry](#) to protest at the exclusion of a whole community from civic life? It is hard to imagine [Seamus Mallon](#) or [Gerry Fitt](#) or that man of enormous compassion, [Paddy Devlin](#) having much time for this sort of petty discrimination.

What raises it from the petty to the serious was the abuse of power in depriving a group of ratepayers of the use of a publicly owned facility (ironically called a community centre) on the same terms as it was available to others.


It is a matter of some significance in the conduct of relations with unionists in the North, that in rallying to the support of the surcharged councillors, Fianna Fail should not be seen to be endorsing discriminatory behaviour. It is rather like a player, given a red card, being welcomed with handshakes in the dugout by manager and reserves, instead of being rebuked for letting the side down and putting the game itself at risk.

It is a sad day for values in public life (and a poor bridgehead for Fianna Fail in the North). Paddy Hillery, who had himself travelled North to sustain a beleaguered minority, would have wondered: Michael Mills would probably have wept.

- *Maurice Hayes*


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Comments

 Congratulations to Maurice Hayes. This is precisely the kind of commentary we need to sustain and reinforce the accommodation which the Northern Ireland parties achieved, with a little outside help, through the 1998 Agreement: commentary which acknowledges the flaws on the commentators' own side of the fence. It would be helpful if Fianna Fail would follow suit by making clear that they do not condone the councillors' actions.

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Posted by Bill Smith | 21.04.08, 10:32 GMT

 Please tell me that the comments on Willie Frazer are a joke. After reading such posts as 'Ten Reasons Why Martin [McGuinness] is a tout', and failing to find a single reference to Loyalist violence, you can decide if Willie's world meets the stringent criteria suggested by Maurice Hayes:

'There should be no hierarchy of victims, and no attempt to differentiate on political or ideological grounds those who may mourn or be mourned.'

Which is precisely why Willie Frazer is not a worthy champion of victims of Republican violence.

Posted by Anthony McLaughlin | 21.04.08, 09:44 GMT

 Mr Hayes

Before taking up the cudgels on behalf of FAIR you might pay some attention to the behaviour of members of that organisation.

Before preaching about "fair play", reflect on your own behaviour towards the Catholics in Portadown. In 1997 you reprimanded them for being angry about an Orange strut through their neighbourhood.

Nor have I forgotten your ill-mannered interferences in the internal affairs of the GAA - concerning Rules 21 and 42. In one outburst you praised the leadership of Joe McDonagh, who in 1998 at the GAA Congress insulted Ulster Catholics by saying that the "Association cannot "stand idly bye" from the work of reconciliation.

Posted by John McMahon | 21.04.08, 08:29 GMT

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