

## THE MONEY BEHIND THE WIRE

LAST WEEK'S unanimous decision by the UK Supreme Court quashing Gerry Adams's convictions for twice trying to escape from internment in Long Kesh in 1973 sparked predictable outrage from Ulster Unionist politicians. The fact that it was their party leader, Brian Faulkner, who in 1971 insisted on the efficacy of internment as the way to stem the IRA campaign, and that the UUP supported internment to the hilt, was lost on them.

However, the annoyance of unionists is the least effect of the judgement, which will have widespread legal and financial consequences. The court found that the statutory procedures for authorising internment were not always used. The northern secretary, not any NIO minister, was required to personally consider and sign each internment order.

Documents the Pat Finucane Centre discovered in British archives show that the British knew many orders were unlawful because the British attorney general warned Prime Minister Harold Wilson on 17 July

1974; the memo was kept secret for decades. Adams is entitled to exemplary damages since not only was his detention unlawful, but his two convictions and sentences for attempting to escape were in fact for attempts to escape from false imprisonment. For Adams, the quashing of his convictions means that he has a clear record, which will no doubt aid his libel case against BBC *Spotlight* at the Four Goldmines, where one of his team of legal eagles is senior Fianna Fáil TD Jim O'Callaghan. Adams claims the programme implicated him in the murder of ex-IRA man Denis Donaldson, who was exposed as a British agent in 2005.

Of course, Adams was not alone in this treatment. Sinn Féin initially believed 200 men fell into the same category, but lawyers in the north say they have been inundated with inquiries and that the number affected – including family members of internees who have subsequently died – could be 600.

One of the lawyers acting for claimants, Kevin Winters of KRW Law, says he will be seeking to require the British to prove not only that a northern secretary signed all orders, but that he also "personally considered" each case: there were 1,981 people interned. Many of those claiming were also sentenced for trying to escape and maltreated when recaptured.

The total compensation for those involved is estimated to be north of £50 million, not

including fees for m'learned friends.

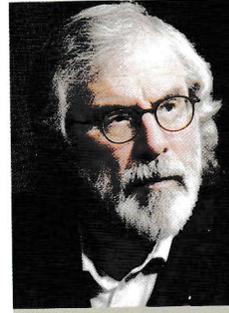
However the saga of British chicanery around internment doesn't end there. Of the 1,981 people interned, only 107 were loyalists, but the internment of loyalists didn't begin until February 1973.

About 10 years ago, a 1972 document in the helpful British archives was unearthed, which pointed out to ministers that internment was one-sided, affecting only Catholics and the statistics looked terrible, so something had to be done to even up the numbers. The British therefore began interning Protestants.

As a result, a case is slowly wending its way through the courts with 20 loyalists claiming they were interned because they were Protestants to make the statistics look better. The group was brought together by the late William 'Plum' Smith, a senior UVF and Red Hand Commando operative, who chaired the Combined Loyalist Military Command. Smith was later a leading figure in the political wing of the UVF, the PUP.

The group's lawyer, presenting the case in 2011, said that the men's submission is "that this was entirely a political decision to detain, and, in fact, that it's wrong and unlawful to be detained for entirely political reasons".

Almost 50 years after internment was imposed, the traumatic effects of that decision are still being played out in both communities in the north.



Gerry Adams



## MOORE'S ALMANAC

US FILM MAKER Michael Moore is doing his best to sabotage the boom in renewable energy with his latest attack documentary, *Planet of the Humans*. Desperate to rebuild his brand as a maverick "truth-teller", Moore's film purports to expose hypocrisy at the heart of the renewables movement, but it's a bizarre mix of long-ago-busted myths, outdated figures and blatant falsehoods, which aligns Moore with climate deniers and the far-right. Meanwhile, here in Ireland a combination of bureaucracy and vested interests is thwarting a solar revolution.

Renewables have become the world's cheapest way to generate power. With or without meaningful climate action by governments, investors are following the money into renewables, where the returns are outstripping those in oil and gas. Renewables have been relatively untouched by the coronavirus lockdown that has sent oil prices to rock bottom.

On one day recently, solar supplied 30% of the UK's electricity – higher rates have been achieved in Germany. Figures for Ireland are almost non-existent. Like Michael Moore, we're stuck in the past, with rules that are unchanged since Dick Spring introduced them decades ago. Rooftop solar represents a huge opportunity for schools and community buildings to supply the grid – especially on days when they are closed. But they need planning permission to put even one panel on the roof. An even bigger deterrent is that it is still next to impossible to get paid for what you feed into the grid.

In his climate action plan last year, Richard Bruton promised the planning issue would be resolved by the end of 2019,

but there has been no progress.

Correspondence involving Bruton's department, seen by Goldhawk, reveals the hold up is due to the Irish Aviation Authority, which claims to be concerned about solar panel "glare" close to airports. This is odd, considering many airport runways around the world are surrounded by thousands of solar panels. It's touching to see aviation come to the aid of another beleaguered industry – namely fossil fuels – by hampering renewables.

Electricity fed back into the grid – when a school is closed for example – is wasted, thanks to an interplay of arcane bureaucracy and prohibitive costs. Unless you invest in a 'network connection', which can cost a five-figure sum, the electricity you feed into the grid is not measured or valued – and doesn't reduce the need for generation by

other means. And in a triumph for small-mindedness, it's illegal to share your excess electricity with a neighbour – even for free.

Reform of this mess is being held up by ESB Networks. It may or may not be pertinent to mention that the ESB Group also owns power stations that burn gas, coal and peat. Could it be that ESB chief Pat O'Doherty and his team are less than excited about the coming "rooftop revolution"?

**SOCIAL DISTANCING** is suddenly bringing us the wider footpaths and cycle lanes that years of campaigning could not quite manage to do. It's a double win, since investment in cycling and walking has to be a key element of any green recovery. But not everyone is happy. The Dublin City Centre Traders Alliance (DCCTA) got so agitated, its chairman, Noel Smyth, accused Dublin City Council of using the "cover of Covid-19" to commit an "illegal act", namely installing the Liffey cycle lane.

The DCCTA is in fact an alliance of multi-storey car park owners, which explains why it has opposed every attempt at pedestrianisation. Other business organisations have come around. Taking cars out of the city centre not only makes it safer, less polluted and more pleasant – decades of evidence from across the world shows car-free streets have higher footfall, with all retail benefitting.



Richard Bruton

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