

IT HAS been 10 weeks and two days weeks since lockdown restrictions were put in place to help contain the spread of the coronavirus. Tomorrow, phase two of the easing of restrictions begins, and with it comes more freedom than we expected at this stage.

For the first time in a long time, the announcement on Friday gave a traumatised public reason for optimism. The community spirit shown by the nation has been remarkable and our adherence to a raft of restrictive rules and regulations has ensured we now control our own destiny in this fight against Covid-19.

We have not beaten coronavirus, so we welcome the caretaker Government's realisation that learning to co-exist with Covid is an important part of the next phase of this battle. Trusting members of the general public to socially distance, to wash their hands and to follow public health rules is the only way a sustainable state of readiness can be maintained.

The realistic proposals, which we urge all readers to adhere to,

Easing of restrictions are a cause for hope. We have won a battle but not yet the war

provide a pathway to a return to some form of normality. We must not make the mistake of believing that this virus is fully in retreat, because the history of pandemics tells that the possibility of a second, more virulent, wave is real.

What that means is that the solidarity and mettle shown by the public may be called upon again in the future – maybe even the

very near future. The phases are not guarantees, they are experiments.

We all now look forward to enjoying some of the forbidden fruits – socialising, meeting friends, inviting people into our homes – that have been denied to us. In that context, we must maintain our sense of civic responsibility. We now know the very real privations lockdown involves,

dependence on the State for income or learning to work from home, the sometime frustrations of home-schooling, isolation and loneliness for many.

After all the hardships and sacrifices required to gain the upper hand on this devastating pathogen, we must make sure, if at all possible, that we never need to return to the blunt instrument of near-total lockdown.

And while this may be the end of the beginning, we can't lose sight of the fact that even if a second wave doesn't arrive, the battle against this disease has changed our way of life in ways we have yet to fully understand. Generations have been introduced to the reality that what happens on the far side of the world can have a massive global impact. Even if we are lucky enough to be spared a second attack, questions need to be asked about our preparations for any future global pestilence.

We have learned other lessons too, though – to be grateful for kindness, how lovely it is to hear bird song, how nice to breathe clean air.

Summer 2020 will forever be remembered for ill, yes, but also for some good. Let us, by acting responsibly, enjoying ourselves, spending on local businesses, prove that the solidarity of lockdown can translate into a community-led economic recovery. We have won a battle but the war continues. The next fight is for a more just peace for all, and for a planet that welcomed a chance to revitalise itself while we stayed out of its way.

Love Island stars back in the doghouse over idiocy

LOVE ISLAND reality stars aren't exactly renowned for their smarts. But this week two former Islanders took stupidity to a new level. Molly-Mae Hague was caught in a maelstrom after her boyfriend Tommy Fury gave her a designer puppy complete with a £2,000 a Louis Vuitton dog carrier.

The £5,000 dog – which was imported from Russia – died in agony just days later after suffering a seizure.

My feelings on puppy farms and



CLUELESS: Molly-Mae tries to explain sick pup's 'shock' death

people who buy designer dogs have always been crystal clear. Tommy bought the Pomeranian as a present for Molly-Mae's 21st birthday. That they consider a puppy a commodity akin to a designer bag seriously enrages me. That they think it conducive to the young pup's welfare to be flown at barely a few weeks old from Russia to the UK to be nothing more than an accessory in their Instagram lives disgusts me.

The poor pooch, whom they named Mr Chai, died an agonising death just days after Molly-Mae had set up the dog's own Instagram page. People were naturally furious at the pup's passing and took to

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social media in droves to denounce the pair for not doing any research into the dealer or the pup's provenance.

Taking to YouTube – a pay per view platform – the bereaved couple tearfully tried to justify the situation as they explained the tragic, and what they astonishingly believe were the unforeseen, circumstances around Mr Chai's death.

An autopsy revealed that he had a litany of health issues that would have seen the poor pup in absolute agony as he was cargoed thousands of kilometres to live for just a few days.

In a weepy 'woe is we' video the pair set out to prove shipping him to the UK had nothing to do with his death.

A statement later released catalogued Chai's issues and said that he died of a seizure and neurological issues. This probably related to the puppy's skull not being fully formed.

Even after the dog's death and having been inundated with information about puppy farms, Molly-Mae said that should they be getting another dog they would 'consider buying from the UK'. Speechless is an understatement.

Mr Chai, we learned, had just half a brain when he was poorly bred in Russia. But one thing is for sure – Chai had a fair few more brain cells than these clueless clowns.



Irish #BLM protest put lives at risk

THE killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police was horrific, grotesque and a shocking global wake-up call to systemic racism.

The video of his death quite rightly provoked outrage and anger and mass protests ensued.

While I wholeheartedly believe our democratic right to protest should be protected and enshrined, the very real fact is that a public health emergency on the scale of Covid-19 supersedes this right.

The initial Dublin march that saw 5,000 protesters descend on the capital to show solidarity for a violent death in America was a blatant disregard for lives in Ireland.

That our police force failed to intervene as protesters failed to observe social distancing rules was a disservice to us all.

Should people wish to protest, there are ways of showing support without risking others needing life support.

Senator exposes cover-up at Lidl

SENATOR Lynn Ruane was looking to the saying 'sun's out, buns out' this week when she went shopping at her local Lidl in a bikini and sarong.

But the trip left Ruane 'absolutely apoplectic furious' when she was approached by a security guard who asked her to cover up while wearing 'inappropriate' clothing in the store.

Ruane took to social media to share her shopping saga.

Taking to Twitter she vented: '@lidl_ireland wants me to wear a different top to shop there apparently. As if me wearing a swimsuit for a top in the summer is any different to any other little tank top I'd wear.'

'Get a grip. Men walking around in vests showing just as much skin.'

Lidl, of course, apologised.

But why?

Having lived for more than a decade in Spain I feel eminently more qualified to comment on swimsuit sartorial etiquette

than Ms Ruane. I can attest to the fact that most shopping centre supermarkets there insist that both men and women are covered up when they shop.

So get a grip, senator. It has nothing to do with 'keeping the woman down' but everything to do with hygiene and basic decency and respect for other shoppers.

But what is far more egregious is that in these terrible times when pensioners are literally making a life or death dash to the supermarket for essential supplies, THIS is what bothers an elected official.

New BBC boss can't help his upbringing

IT APPEARS we have reached a lamentable point in life where people are expected to apologise for the circumstances into which they were born.

The BBC announced its new director general this week and no sooner had the name Tim Davie dropped than there was a cacophony of catcalls labelling him a 'white privileged Oxbridge educated male'.

That Mr Davie is more than qualified for the role is inconsequential in some quarters, where they raged that the job should have gone to a woman or someone from a minority. One can as much help being born white or privileged as he can help being born into an underprivileged minority.

At a time when the BBC needs, more than ever, a leader to pull it back from the precipice, it surely stands that the best person should get the job.

Pulling my hair out waiting for a new do

WITH the Government announcing that it was accelerating the reopening of the country it is befuddling that hairdressers and beauty salons will still remain shut until July 20. Many salons have already put in social distancing measures and the nation at large – including Leo Varadkar himself – are calling out for a haircut.

So chop, chop, Leo! Let us get back to the business of beauty.

No country for old or the ill, as A&E crisis scares patients away

AS THE nights close in and December arrives, we find ourselves facing what has become a perennial crisis in the health service, particularly in the emergency departments of our hospitals – and this before flu is even an issue.

Today, the Irish Mail On Sunday reveals that over the course of 17 months, thousands of patients who attended A&E left without receiving treatment. Faced with a seemingly endless wait for treatment, in often fraught conditions, they were forced to downgrade their own assessment of what constitutes an emergency and just go home. Who knows how many put their health in jeopardy as a result?

For those who stayed put out of necessity, there are multiple instances of substandard treatment. One particular example is Deirdre Nugent, who spent five nights on a trolley in circumstances she described as horrible and degrading following a fall that left her unconscious.

This cyclical crisis is marked by an acceptance that this is simply the way it is, that the situation is endemic and inevitable. But why?

Year in, year out, it seems we throw more money at the HSE for no appreciable benefit; in fact, it seems things simply get worse. Notwithstanding the efforts of the Department of Health to make this a non-party issue, and years after the launch of Sláintecare, we again find ourselves at square one.

Permanent crisis is not an acceptable management solution. At the moment, you

would be forgiven for thinking that the advice from the HSE was an echo of former UK Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock's famous speech: 'I warn you not to fall ill. I warn you not to get old.'

COURAGEOUS VICKY SPEAKS OUT

CERVICAL cancer campaigner Vicky Phelan has shown her courage, once again, by speaking candidly with the Irish Mail On Sunday about the harsh realities of living with terminal

cancer. Naturally Vicky wants to live as long as possible, but feels she will be lucky to see out the five years she wants in order to usher her son into his teens. When the time comes, she also says she would like to be able to determine the time of her own death, a subject Ireland has skirted but has yet to confront head on.

Euthanasia is a controversial topic but one that has been addressed and legislated for in other countries. By sharing her views on it, as well as talking openly about the toll the many challenges she has faced have

taken on her family life, Vicky has allowed us an insight into the devastating journey she is on.

Her resilience and strength have been clear since the first day she went to court to get justice for herself and the hundreds of other women whose smear tests were misread.

She could be forgiven for concentrating solely on herself, but once again she has done a great public service in speaking about one of society's last taboos.

TOY SHOW KICKS OFF SANTA SEASON

EVERY year we ask when it is appropriate to put up the Christmas decorations and the tree, to sing carols, or to be subjected to Christmas display windows in shops and festive ads on radio and TV. The debate is robust – but now at last is over. The Late Late Toy Show is when we can all agree the season has begun.

What's up doc? Ciara Kelly's cancer slight is scandalous

NEWSTALK's talking doc Ciara Kelly has taken a vicious swipe at women affected by the cervical cancer scandal.

Ciara said that women who were given false positive results were somehow out to capitalise on cancer and litigation would jeopardise the CervicalCheck screening programme.

'It is a public health success story, despite its limitations. If it is sued into oblivion, who will benefit? No one will benefit except those in receipt of legal fees,' said Dr Ciara.

Firstly, Ciara seems to have missed the myriad reports that Vicky Phelan was initially offered money to walk away and keep schtum about the serious failures within the CervicalCheck programme.

Vicky refused and also, notably, so did her lawyer who at that stage would have received a handsome fee. But they both put principles first and turned down the money in favour of exposing the serious flaws in what Ciara deems a 'public success story'.

But what is astonishing is Ciara's claims are devoid of any type of empathy with the women who have suffered so much. And that anyone – never mind a doctor – would even equate health with wealth.

They forgot about the most vulnerable

THE disabled protester's placard summed up the priorities of a blind and indifferent Government that allowed the country's only holiday respite centre to close for the sake of a measly €1.3m.

Think about it: €1.3m for rewiring is all the Cuisle Centre in Roscommon needed to continue to provide a vital lifeline for disabled people

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and their families. A fortnight's holiday once a year – that's all many of our most vulnerable citizens had to look forward to, but it has been taken from them. The Cuisle Centre closed its doors on Friday with 48 job losses into the bargain.

Some 1,500 people, many in wheelchairs, had protested at the closure, stressing the importance of Cuisle in their lives, pleading for it to be kept open. It closed anyway.

Because when it comes to throwing taxpayer's money around, other things are far more important.

Like the Dáil printer that has – so far – cost us €1.8m and climbing because some overpaid, underperforming Government official had neither the wit nor the inclination to bother to check the dimensions to see if the monstrosity would come through the doors before shelling out a king's ransom for it.

This white elephant will end up costing us almost €2m – and for what? €2m squandered to print TDs' literature that nobody wants, calendars likely to end up in landfill – because, let's face it, who wants to look at a TD's mug Sello-taped to the fridge – and election leaflets dumped in the bin.

The powers that be have no qualms signing a blank cheque for a printing machine for the boys and girls in the Dáil. But when it comes to signing a €1.3m cheque to keep the lights on in a holiday respite centre, that's when

they get a fit of the jitters.. Like the woman said: 'They forgot about us.'

Put a lid on this nutty waste of cash

THE sheer definition of notions gone nuts is luxury jewellery store Weirs of Grafton Street in Dublin proudly displaying an empty Nutella jar with a silver lid.

While you could think this is a decoration or quirky store ornament this empty, ugly jar of Nutella is actually on sale for the princely sum of €350.

As a 'gift', this outrageous display of ostentation gone wrong is neither pretty, practical nor purposeful – it is pretentious.

Yet the jarring truth is that there exists out there someone who is silly enough to actually waltz into Weirs and happily hand over their cash for an empty jar. Nuts indeed!

Let's remember the real victims

WHILE much has been made lately about the Irish 'compensation culture', and rightly so, genuine victims have been largely forgotten.

It is undeniable that a lot of claims awards appear arbitrary and in some cases absolutely outrageous, but there are some people who have suffered through no fault of their own.

This week a cleaner wiped the floor with her employer and was awarded a payout for a workplace accident.

Mary McKenna suffered a serious arm fracture after falling down a stairs exposed to the rain at Dublin's Blackrock Market. This week she was awarded €105,000 damages by a High Court judge.

Ms McKenna was aged 74 at the time of the fall in 2014, and she sued businessman Nicholas Roche, owner of Blackrock Market, after the accident had a 'devastating effect on her life'.

What emerged during the action was that Ms McKenna is no oppor-



GENUINE CLAIM: Mary McKenna won her workplace injury case

tunist and was in fact doing back-breaking work cleaning the south Dublin market for a measly €25, for three hours, one day a week.

That someone would pay such a paltry sum for what Mary admitted in court was 'hard work' highlights just how inadequate minimum wage levels are.

Not unsurprisingly her employer, Mr Roche, wasn't in court when the judgment was awarded. So while we can all whinge about compo chancers, I hope Mary McKenna enjoys her money and never has to clean up after anyone again.

Focus on the present, not gifts

'It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more?'

– Dr Seuss

The bombardment of adverts for Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Super Sunday and whatever random moniker marketers can put on a day to entice us to buy more stuff has reached peak madness.

I, for one, love Christmas but I think that The Grinch really was on to something. It would serve one and all well to take heed of the wise words of Dr Seuss, and enjoy the festive season instead of being frazzled into a shopping frenzy.



Sinn Féin may not like to be questioned, but we'll continue doing our job

CONGRATULATIONS to Sinn Féin. Their election was so successful it caught even them by surprise. The party's share of the vote rose from 13.8% in 2016 to 24.5% last Saturday, leaving it with 37 seats in the new Dáil.

The massive upswing in its vote can be attributed to dissatisfaction among voters with the outgoing confidence-and-supply pact between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. Disquiet over how the country was being run will not surprise Irish Mail on Sunday readers, because this newspaper has been consistently critical of the resulting 'do-nothing' Dáil, and has led the way in holding to account Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's government.

Sinn Féin now becomes a major player in national politics and is a serious contender to form a government. On that basis, we must insist the party adheres to democratic norms.

During the election, journalists witnessed Sinn Féin attempts to manage the news. Press conferences and public appearances of candidates were arranged last minute. After a debate misstep dealing with the continuing fall-

out from the murder of Paul Quinn, a doorstep interview with Mary Lou McDonald was organised at short notice, and at the same time and place as a boisterous protest on childcare. This gave journalists barely enough time to attend.

This week, the party invited journalists to attend a speech by the leader ahead of a parliamentary party meeting – but with no questions allowed.

The Mail's group political editor John Lee did not accept that his role is to act as a stenographer to record speeches by party leaders, and tried to ask a question.

In this case, he raised the myth

that Sinn Féin TDs take only the average industrial wage from their salaries. As it turns out, they take much more than that – and it is still unclear what they will do if in receipt of ministerial salaries. It ought to have been an easy question to answer for straight-talking Ms McDonald. Instead, she called John Lee childish for doing his job.

Sinn Féin – and their apologists – say they had scheduled an opportunity for questions after the event. This is false. The only firm commitment to answering questions came two hours after the exchange – and with only four minutes' notice.

On Newstalk radio on Friday, the party's housing spokesman Eoin Ó Broin was asked about a report in the Irish Daily Mail outlining how newly elected Sinn Féin TD Violet-Anne Wynne didn't pay rent for four years. He said: 'I would question the accuracy [of the story],' even though the story was confirmed by Ms Wynne. This attempt to dismiss valid news stories smacks of Donald Trump. Separately, Mr Ó Broin and Ms McDonald have both written for the Mail in the past so, presumably, he values some of what we publish.

This isn't the only Trump-like news management attempt this

week. Adviser and Ard Comhairle member Enda Fanning claimed that Joe Duffy was using Liveline to denigrate Sinn Féin representatives. On Twitter, he wrote: 'It is utterly shameful. It really needs to be addressed by a new government and a proper monitoring authority with powers introduced to prevent such political bias as we have seen before and since #GE2020.'

Leaving aside the deeply sinister threat to have 'powers introduced', there is the usual Sinn Féin cry of media bias any time it is held to account. Sinn Féin would do well to contact the current occupants of Government Buildings and ask how they feel our coverage has treated them.

The election is over. Our elected representatives need to start behaving like grown-ups in their attempt to form a stable government. And to not throw their toys out of the pram, when faced with journalists doing their job.

For our part, the MoS will continue to ensure every policy and process is scrutinised, and each actor is held accountable. Our readers expect no less. As do the electorate.

Ugly election outcome pits young against old

THE Wolfe Tones famously sang A Nation Once Again, but what this election has proved is we have never been a nation as divided; and not so much North vs South, rather young vs old.

This week I was listening to Liveline and I found myself to be furious, upset and disgusted at the amount of hate levelled at the older generation. Their cardinal sin, it seems, is exercising their democratic right to vote.

Callers from an entitled electorate spewed bile at those over the age of 55 who dared to vote for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, with more than a handful saying: 'It was the older people who voted for that lot,' and 'Why should their vote count?' The common thread was: 'What about me? What about my children? My house? My health? My benefits? My... My... My...'

There was not a word about 'my work' or 'my contribution'.

A soft-spoken gentleman of 74 years of age was pilloried by an entitled buffoon. The elderly man told host Joe Duffy that he would 'leave Ireland if Sinn Féin took office'. He very calmly pointed out that, having left school at 13 to begin his working life, he grafted for over six decades to pay for a modest home and rear his family, outlining the many hardships he had lived through. He said when he was young, education was a luxury denied to him and it was his generation that paved the way for free education for all Irish children.

The older people being berated have lived through multiple recessions, not helped by the violence in the North.

They've seen and experienced poverty and survived repression from both Church and State. But they managed to build better lives

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and, in the process, a better Ireland we can ALL call our own.

And yet, some idiot feels free to shout down a pensioner and tell him to leave his country. He scorns him for having a 'leafy house' – ignorant to the fact that the pensioner lives in a modest semi in Dublin's Cabra west. And even if his home was of the leafy kind, it was one he worked hard to pay for.

An ugly, pervasive hatred has emerged in the aftermath of the election from a cohort that thinks elderly people should leave the younger generation to rule this country.

When Mr Irate finally paused, the gentleman explained that for the sake of future generations he had gone Green. This brought forth another barrage of bile, with the elderly man accused of being nothing but a well-to-do, planet-preserving pensioner who should be put out to pasture.

If certain sections of our electorate have their way, any views other than their own will be deemed 'undemocratic'. That a man in his 70s should be subject to such vitriol on our national airwaves shows that, for now, a

United Ireland we will be never be. This country was built on the experience, sweat and intelligence of our elderly members, so respect and gratitude is not only due, it is owed.



Flanagan's Black and Tan blinkers

SPEAKING of rebel songs... Charlie Flanagan's attitude towards the Black and Tans commemoration, revealed in internal emails this week, shows he is tone deaf when it comes to the public mood.

Emails show the outgoing justice minister's hands-on approach to the ill-judged – and ultimately ill-fated – RIC commemoration by suggesting Danny Boy as a musical backdrop, along with poems by Thomas Moore.

While Flanagan was apparently rubbing his hands in anticipation, members of the public were bombarding his department with warning of riots in the streets if it went ahead. 'It is trending on Twitter... and it is not exactly favourable... just type in "Black and Tans" and you'll see what I mean,' warned one. Even the Gardai voiced concerns over the event but Flanagan ploughed ahead regardless.

On election day it became clear this was a monumental political disaster that would cost Fine Gael dearly. It allowed Sinn Féin to remind the electorate at every opportunity that 'the Blueshirts never change their spots'.

Even former health minister James Reilly admitted it was the 'main mistake' that was brought up at the doors. The commemoration was dropped, or deferred, with the benefit of hindsight.

We are paying government ministers a king's ransom for their foresight – not for hindsight. Dessie Ellis's impromptu rendition of Come Out You Black And Tans at the election count was ill-advised, ill-judged and not befitting



tone deaf: Charlie Flanagan's Black and Tan plan was ill-judged

of a newly elected Sinn Féin TD. The thing is, Charlie Flanagan should have seen this coming.

Councils failing tortured puppies

IRELAND'S most notorious dog dealer John Boland Sr, 64, was this week hit with an immediate closure notice for his puppy farm at Moate in Westmeath.

Boland, who at one stage had 1,500 breeding bitches and boasted that the more dogs he sells the more money he makes, was ordered to close because of 'immediate and serious threat to animal welfare' and 'contempt for animal welfare law'.

Credit must be given to Offaly Council officials [whose district it the puppy farm was in] who have been dogged in their determination to close this hellhole.

Sadly the same can't be said for many other councils who, despite complaints from the public and damning exposés, have had scant regard for animal welfare under their watch, allowing puppy farmers to operate with impunity.

Puppy farmers say they make no secret of the fact that, for them, pups are purely for profit. But what excuse have the councils that fail to act while dogs are bred to within an inch of their pitiful, miserable lives in dark sheds in their communities? They should be held accountable for allowing this trade to continue.

Battle royal to get near Will & Kate

THE Cambridges are coming to town and, while I've never been a royalist, this news as a showbiz reporter fills me with joy. There isn't a week that goes by without another palace scandal or bit of gossip to debate and dissect.

So with William and Kate on the way it will be every woman for herself in our office as a right royal rumble erupts for that coveted press pass to glimpse the royal couple up close and personal.