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Owen Polley: It is no surprise that the funeral of the IRA thug Bobby Storey escaped even a caution

On Tuesday, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) announced that it will not prosecute republicans for breaches of coronavirus rules at the funeral of the IRA thug, Bobby Storey.

By Owen Polley, **Belfast Newsletter** Thursday, 1st April 2021, 12:57 pm



Bobby Storey, seen with Martin McGuinness and Martina Anderson in 2014, was a part of the IRA terror campaign, a jailbreaker, a bank-robber.

continues to lecture, the people of Northern Ireland about the importance of abiding by Covid restrictions.

In line with the faux 'progressive' gloss it likes to give its ideology, Sinn Fein was the most fanatical executive party when it came to advocating lockdown.

O'Neill accused people who gathered in large groups of "killing people".

Yet, aside from the deeper irony of that statement, there she was at Storey's funeral — along with Mary-Lou McDonald, Gerry Adams, Conor Murphy and the rest — assembling with thousands of mourners and even posing with two men for a 'selfie'.

Meanwhile, because of the laws that she'd helped create and promote, in the rest of Northern Ireland no more than ten mourners were allowed to attend a funeral.

Countless people missed seeing a loved one laid to rest, because of these strict rules.

It was always clear that O'Neill, and the other 23 Sinn Fein representatives whom the police belatedly investigated, would never face meaningful sanction.

But now we know officially that there will not be so much as a caution issued to these flagrant hypocrites, the political wing of a movement that has already been let off, quite literally, with murder.

It's easy to demand stringent regulations, when you expect them to apply to others, but can rest assured that they will never be enforced on you and your supporters.

Is there anybody in Northern Ireland who is surprised by this decision?

In the immediate aftermath of the funeral, I wrote in this newspaper that "there is one rule in Northern Ireland for republicans and one for everybody else" ('The Bobby Storey IRA funeral was reminder of who is in charge of Northern Ireland,' July 9, [link](#))

Unionists, I predicted, "will just have to suck it up," because, "the peace process is based on appeasing Sinn Fein and their ilk".

So here we are, after ten months of delay and obfuscation and that forecast has finally been borne out.

It took the police five of those months to organise an interview with Michelle O'Neill about her role in the event.

This was the woman who had lectured, and



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While the whitewash was coming, though, it was not inevitable that the excuses would be so flimsy.

Several suspects told the PPS that they were confused by the laws that their party had played an important role in agreeing.

They pointed out that, at the time, there was a plan to change the rules to allow 30 (yes 30 people) to attend a funeral.

In the run up to the Storey scandal, it's worth remembering, Sinn Fein social media channels promoted the event actively.

The idea that executive ministers, or other highly informed political representatives, were not aware of the timing of rule changes, or that they thought only thirty people would turn up to this celebration of their henchman, is laughable.

It's worth mentioning too the role that the chief constable and the PSNI played in facilitating the funeral.

The PPS report highlights that the police were aware of plans for the funeral, including the fact that it would be a "high-profile event that would be attended by a range of senior republican figures".

They knew, for example, that 94 people would be in proximity to the republican plot at Milltown Cemetery, in breach of the regulations.

This 'engagement' with Sinn Fein seems to have compromised any chance of prosecution. That's if you accept the idea that decision-makers in the policing and justice system had any genuine intention of prosecutions taking place.

In truth, the breaches of coronavirus regulations aren't even the most scandalous aspect of this whole sorry affair, though they are serious and undermine trust both in Stormont and its lockdown.

Remember who Storey was.

A key part of the IRA's murderous campaign of terror, a jailbreaker, a bank-robber.

Have we simply decided, as a society, to give republicans a free pass to glorify and sanitise terror?

The worst derision is often reserved for people who insist on pointing out how Sinn Fein and their supporters routinely distort history to portray themselves as victims rather than perpetrators.

A common attitude seems to be, "why can't we just forget about all that and look to the future," even though our future could well be blighted by republicans' incessant campaign to whitewash their past.

As I write, the assembly is preparing to censure Sinn Fein for its members' attendance at the Storey commemoration. Arlene Foster has called for the chief constable, Simon Byrne, to resign, because he's lost the confidence of unionists, thanks to his part in the debacle.

The short-term political ramifications may rumble on for a few days, but I can predict one thing with confidence.

Nothing meaningful will change in the longer term.

It will continue to be one rule for Sinn Fein and one rule for everyone else in Northern Ireland.