

THE IRISH NEWS

Pro fide et patria

Politicians must serve public

WHILE the talks grind on at Stormont with no apparent sign of a positive outcome, we can only wonder how much attention is being focused on the consequences for the Northern Ireland economy if there is no agreement.

It must be acknowledged that even a fully functioning assembly will not have all the answers to our many problems but at least it would provide a structure for strategic direction, ministerial decision-making and accountability to the public.

As we face the enormous challenges presented by Brexit and adjust to whatever trade arrangements are agreed by the British government as a result of that process, people are entitled to ask: Who is looking after the north's interests and why should businesses invest in a place which does not have a working administration?

These are pertinent questions in a week that has seen hundreds of job losses with serious repercussions for workers and their families as well as the wider economy.

There was devastating news on Tuesday when water technology provider Williams Industrial Services (WIS), which employed 145 people in Mallusk, Co Antrim, was placed in administration.

WIS is one of the largest firms of its kind in Ireland and its closure, said to be because it 'ran out of funds' after encountering a number of commercial issues on some of its key contracts, came as a shock to workers who faced immediate redundancy.

On a bleak day for local manufacturing, Schlumberger, which constructs equipment used in the oil and gas industry, confirmed the loss of 205 jobs at its Newtownabbey operation.

There are also fears over staff reductions at NIE Networks while the planned closure of Kilroot power station could put almost 300 jobs at risk.

These are difficult and uncertain times for hundreds of people who will be asking what political leaders are doing to help them as they face the loss of their livelihoods.

Fitting penalty for blatant crime

DRUG dealing is unacceptable in any section of our society but yesterday's court evidence confirming that it has been taking place in the grounds of Belfast City Hall illustrates the sheer scale of the problem.

Michael James Mark McGann (24) received a 14-month sentence – with seven months to be served in custody and the remainder on licence – after admitting selling cannabis on the front lawn of the prestigious building last July.

His crime would have been no less serious if it had occurred in a dark alleyway or a shady club but the symbolism of the location, at the very heart of civic life, had to be taken into consideration.

The judge was entitled to describe it as a "blatant act" and similar penalties need to be applied to all those who come before the courts in connection with such offences.

Running up that hill



■ STEPPING IT UP: A fell runner tackles the steps up Cave Hill, north Belfast

PICTURE: Mal McCann

Abortion attitude may cost Sinn Féin dearly

A FEW days ago, I read this. It has stayed with me. "I have a six-month-old son, a wonderful, unique little person who brings joy everywhere he goes. I had my first scan with him at 11 weeks. It was amazing – I saw his little heart beating, his perfectly formed body and him moving. He was not a blob or a clump of cells. He was, and is, a unique person. "He was the same baby at 11 weeks as he is today – just at a different stage of development and not simply a foetus. "The doctors and nurses talked about my baby, not some alien being. Under the government's proposal this perfectly formed, innocent baby can now be aborted for no reason at all." Scary, isn't it?

According to media reports – that I have not seen refuted – this proposal, which would effectively make abortion in the Republic available, on demand, up to 12 weeks, is set to be put to a Sinn Féin ard fheis before the expected referendum on the Eighth Amendment.

If the Eighth Amendment is repealed, then all the protection afforded the baby in the womb in the Irish constitution will go with it.

The proposal referred to above arises from an Oireachtas committee report that advised the government on what would follow in the event of repeal and its recommendations would liberalise Irish abortion laws in a way that would have seemed unthinkable just months ago. Unrestricted abortion up to 12 weeks – abstained on by Sinn Féin in the committee – has been making all the headlines but there is also a proposal to kill babies with so-called fatal foetal abnormalities right up to birth.

And very worryingly, while the report rules out abortion on grounds of a foetal abnormality not considered fatal, it

Martin O'Brien



recommends generalised "health" grounds for abortion without recommending any gestational limit, thus potentially paving the way for an abortion regime in Ireland as liberal or even more liberal than that emanating from the iniquitous British Abortion Act of 1967. That act provides for the killing of 90 per cent of unborn babies found to have Down Syndrome and also the killing of preborn human beings with operable disabilities such as a cleft palate or club foot.

Sinn Féin's reported plans to further

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liberalise their abortion policy help confirm a suspicion that some have had for a long time, namely that when Sinn Féin say that they are opposed to the extension of the 1967 act to the north, their main problem with that act is that it is British legislation, as opposed to Irish, and not its evil provisions that have resulted in the killing of almost nine million unborn babies.

Under the act 20 preborn human beings are killed every hour, or one every three minutes, as Lord David Alton informed

an audience in a powerful and troubling speech in St Brigid's Parish, Belfast, a fortnight ago. Every voter and public representative would do well to check out Lord Alton's website, *dauidalton.net* for more information.

That passage that you read at the top of this article was part of a newspaper column written last week in *The Irish Sun* by Lucinda Creighton, former Irish minister for Europe, who by now would most likely be a senior cabinet minister, tipped to be the first woman taoiseach, had she not the courage to defy the party whip and her boss Enda Kenny and vote with her conscience the last time abortion legislation came before the Oireachtas in 2013.

Kenny's infamous decision to deny his colleagues a conscience vote caused such trauma in Fine Gael that Leo Varadkar had no option but to promise a free vote on any future abortion legislation.

Of the three largest political parties in Dáil Éireann only Sinn Féin has decided to refuse its TDs a conscience vote, despite the pleas of among others, Peadar Tóibín, their Meath West TD who courageously defied the whip in 2013.

This is not to Sinn Féin's credit and must compound the anger of those supporters who think that they are

too liberal on abortion as it is, and that denial of a conscience vote on such an issue is totalitarian.

Martin Luther King said: "There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right."

If Sinn Féin don't change tack on a conscience clause and on abortion, Michelle O'Neill may have some explaining to do in Mid-Ulster and elsewhere.

■ Newton Emerson is away