

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



IRISH TIMES: 1916-2016

THE Irish Times souvenir edition of the 1916 Rising managed the notable feat of airbrushing out of history not only Sinn Féin but its own reportage of the event 100 years ago.

According to the souvenir edition, the *IT* headline on its front page report of the Rising in April 1916 was, "THE DARKEST WEEK IN THE HISTORY OF DUBLIN". But the actual front page of that century-old edition bore a quite different headline, namely, "SINN FEIN REBELLION IN IRELAND", in black edging. That the paper of record should deliberately excise the headline of its own front page coverage of a seminal, 100 years-old event has to be some sort of first for any newspaper.

An explanation of sorts appeared on the next page, saying that the April 1916 edition was too large to be fully reproduced that day. However, that day's page was large enough to carry both the modern and the 1916 *Irish Times* masthead, each of which was larger than the Sinn Féin Rebellion headline.

A week later, *IT* opinion editor John McManus penned an unusually patriotic column denouncing the "anti-Irish" *Daily Telegraph* and two of its columnists – Charles Moore and Nigel Jones – for comparing the Easter Rising to Isis atrocities. McManus played the *Torygraph* writers and suggested they look at their own body politic to explain the modern link between Muslim extremism and terrorism.

But McManus did not need to cross the Irish Sea to cross swords with British prejudices about 1916. His colleague, Martyn Turner, indulged his long time



Martyn Turner

anti-republican spleen with a cartoon in the *IT* that compared Isis suicide bombers in Brussels, Paris and elsewhere to Easter 1916, depicting an Irish school child drawing an Irish tricolor and shamrock over a 1916 logo. It is hard to credit that the *IT* received just one letter, published in the newspaper in the following days, taking objection to this crass cartoon.

Turner has an impressive record of bashing all manner of republican formations, from SF to Fianna Fáil. In his compendium of cartoons on the Northern troubles, published in the early days of the peace process, Turner included about 50 cartoons demonising the Provos; one that criticised the British demand for the early release of a soldier convicted of murder; and none at all criticising the British Army or its government's policy in Ireland.

THE GUARDIAN ON IRELAND

PUBLISHERS Cork University Press (CUP), recently advertised an interesting critique of the Northern troubles, entitled *Britain's Algeria, France's Ireland*, written by Toronto based author and teacher Patrick Anderson. However, even more recently, CUP withdrew all copies of the book from reviewers and pulped the entire print run of several thousand copies.

This is a little ironic, as the sub-title of Anderson's book is *The War, the 'Troubles' and the Faltering Liberal Voice*, and as CUP puts it in its promotional material, it describes the British media's coverage of the Troubles as, "little more than a first (propaganda) version of history".

Even more ironic is that it was Henry McDonald, Ireland correspondent of that premier organ of British liberalism, *The Guardian*, who indirectly prompted the pulping of the book as he claimed to have been libelled in it. In his book, Anderson comments on various journalists, including McDonald, the late *Sunday Times* Northern correspondent, Liam Clarke, and Eoghan Harris, all of whom were once associated with the Workers Party.

However, while Belfast-born McDonald did not and never has denied his past WP links, it was the book's characterisation of the WP in the most derogatory terms that provoked him to threaten CUP with a libel action, after the book landed on the desk of

his newspaper for review.

This is not the first time McDonald has engaged in spats with other writers over his Ireland coverage. In 2014, *The Guardian's* Readers' editor admonished McDonald and upheld a complaint against him by commentator Paul Larkin, about the journalist's coverage of the Smithwick Tribunal (into alleged collusion between Gardai and the IRA over the latter's killing of two senior RUC officers in 1989).

The Guardian had reported in 2011 that according to tribunal witness Ian Hurst (aka Martin Ingram, a British Army intelligence officer), Sinn Féin presidential candidate Martin McGuinness was aware of the RUC murder plot.

When Smithwick reported in 2013 that collusion between the IRA and Garda officers did, "on the balance of probabilities", take place, Larkin accused *The Guardian* of reporting on the tribunal "through the prism" of Hurst, despite the judge's comment that he "simply did not find Mr Hurst to be a credible witness". The *Guardian's* Readers' writer, Chris Elliott, found that having reported on Hurst's evidence, "It was a failing of the paper's journalism" not to have reported Judge Smithwick's view of Hurst.



Henry McDonald

PRIVACY is fast becoming the new weapon of choice by those who claim undue coverage of their affairs in the media, and two minor celebs have recently taken such cases to the High Court.

RTÉ presenter Sharon Ní Bheoláin's action against three red tops – the Mirror, Star and Sun – is heading for a High Court hearing in what is likely to be an important test case.

The tabloids published a photo of Ní Bheoláin in pyjamas and pullover as she walked in her neighbourhood and the three newspapers have made clear their determination to fight the action. Their legal teams have been tic-tacking with each other and have decided to join forces in preparing a defence.

Celeb solicitor Gerald Kean is also taking a privacy case against the Star after it published a photo of Kean outside his legal practice and commented on a visit by the Criminal Assets Bureau to his office recently.

Interestingly, publishers and major INM shareholders, Denis O'Brien and Dermot Desmond, have, separately, taken privacy cases against the media. O'Brien took a privacy case against RTÉ for its proposed programme on his dealings with IBRC and has also taken an action against the Revenue Commissioners for allegedly leaking his tax details to the media. And Desmond has taken a complaint against The Phoenix to the Data Protection Commission for allegedly breaching his privacy.

