



# CNI

---

## **PRESS WATCH - McGuinness funeral showed flexibility denied to many families**

**There were many moments during last week's superbly organised and sensitively handled funeral of Martin McGuinness RIP that will live in the memory, Martin O'Brien writes in the Irish News.**

They included the arrival in Long Tower Church of Arlene Foster (accompanied by Peter Robinson and Simon Hamilton) and the prolonged applause she received as she took her seat.

I had a good view of Mrs Foster's arrival in the church as I was seated in the gallery overlooking the altar and directly above the pews reserved for the ranks of visiting dignitaries.

At that moment, along with everyone else in the church, I was unaware of the spontaneous and

generous applause that had already greeted the DUP leader as she walked towards Long Tower.

The applause would have been even greater if the huge crowd had known that Mrs Foster had chosen to come to the funeral not wearing her royal crown brooch that obviously means much to her - a significant detail that seems to have been overlooked in much of the media commentary.

Mrs Foster has incurred trenchant and justifiable criticism in recent months but in a society where healing gestures are as important as they are welcome – something she did not “get” when she was first minister – her courage in attending the funeral and the sensitivity that she showed in eschewing that brooch should be recognised as something to be built on, whatever the gravity of the current political crisis.

Another memorable moment was the widely-reported eulogy of Bill Clinton.

It should be said, in passing, at the risk of stating the obvious, that in the circumstances it was perfectly fitting for Mr Clinton to be permitted to make that speech in which he skilfully prodded all our political leaders to honour Mr McGuinness’s legacy by finishing “the work that is there to be done.”

I make the point because there are some priests who need to reconsider their stringent attitudes and resultant abuse of power when it comes to accommodating the reasonable wishes of families at funerals.

Indeed, I have learned of one example of the kind of insensitivity and silliness that can sour bereaved families' memories of funerals in the Derry diocese itself not that long ago.

So, if the latitude that was granted at the nearest thing to a State funeral that Derry has ever seen leads to appropriate flexibility at unpublicised smaller obsequies around the country that will be welcome.

For me, probably the most evocative moment came immediately after Mr Clinton's eulogy as the tricolour draped coffin was lifted and carried out of the church to the singing of Mo Ghile Mear, the incomparably haunting Gaelic poem and lament.

A lament, interestingly, composed in the 18th century in memory of Bonnie Prince Charlie, the grandson of Catholic King James II, the Young Pretender to the British throne, whose mortal remains rest in the crypt of St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

I wondered what went through the minds of the DUP trio as Martin McGuinness's coffin passed almost within touching distance of them in the aisle, on the IRA leader turned statesman's final earthly journey, with that inexpressibly striking Gaelic lament filling the air.

Did Mrs Foster's memory return to the murderous IRA attack that nearly killed her father that she had to witness as an eight-year-old child, that forced her terrorised family from their beloved home?

Or when they bombed her school bus? Or killed and maimed her fellow Fermanagh citizens (and mine) as they remembered the dead of two world wars in Enniskillen?

Did Mrs Foster's exposure to Mr McGuinness's rich Irish heritage - shared by Sinn Féin and SDLP voters alike and a sizeable number of Protestants - and exemplified in the singing of the hymns and some other parts of the Mass as Gaelige, cause her to re-think for a moment her resistance to reasonable legal protection for the Irish language?

And what of the masses of nationalist mourners, some of whom would have also gone to the funeral with mixed feelings, given Mr McGuinness's mixed past.

Did they see Mrs Foster as being much more than a very welcome fellow mourner who had braved “the lion’s den” to pay her respects?

Did they see her as the leader of the unionist community with whom their own leaders must work fruitfully as equals, here in our still deeply divided north, if the healing is to take place that will in time enable the flowering of the agreed Ireland pioneered by John Hume, who was also in the congregation, to become a reality?

+++++

Professor Ray Kinsella is an economist. First published in The Irish News, March 31, 2017

+++++

The inclusion of an article in Press Watch does not imply endorsement by CNI. Rather it is an endeavour to present articles from a variety of view points for consideration by CNI readers.

