

We need to avoid economic disaster

This continuing political instability and the increasing likelihood of a no-deal Brexit is incredibly damaging to the local business community and the economy as a whole. Retail NI is very clear - a no-deal Brexit should not be considered by the UK Government as an option.

With over 40,000 jobs at risk, a withdrawal deal is essential to avoid the economic disaster of crashing out on October 31.

Glyn Roberts

Retail NI Chief Executive

An outrageous move by the PM

This is an attempt to stage a constitutional coup by Boris Johnson and his band of hard Brexiters.

The anti-EU rhetoric at the time of the referendum was about taking back control. Right now, there is attempt to take control away from the people and allow a small section of Brexiters to crash us out of Europe.

Boris Johnson's career has been marked out by a series of mistruths.

To describe the attempt to suspend parliament as anything other than a ploy to secure a no-deal Brexit is yet another lie.

Clare Bailey

Green Party NI leader

COMMENT

Legislation fails to recognise moral dimension of a victim

WRITTEN BY

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The recommendation brought forward by Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, Judith Thompson, that terrorists injured by their own violence should be included in pensions for Troubles victims, has brought widespread condemnation from innocent victims and the organisations representing them, including Ulster Human Rights Watch. We have been clear in expressing this concern during our meeting with NIO Minister of State, Nick Hurd MP, when we also stressed our lack of faith in government assurances on this matter, which have yet to be enshrined in legislation. Unfortunately the position taken by Judith Thompson,

while being morally indefensible, sadly is legally defensible. This is because no distinction has been made in Northern Ireland at statutory level between innocent victims of terrorist violence, and perpetrators of the same violence, who while attempting to commit mass murder may have hurt themselves in the process.

This brings us to the crux of the matter: the legislation - the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, which provides the statutory interpretation of a victim in the Troubles context. This is a legal interpretation that stands alone globally in failing to recognise the moral dimension of victimhood, and the need for victims to be acknowledged as distinct and treated differently to the terrorists who inflicted their suffering. In fact, it is not only inconsistent with international norms, it is inconsistent with other UK legislation, including the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, which brought into force EU Directive

2012/29/EU, which establishes minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime, and to which all UK legislation, including the offending 2006 Order, should conform. Victims of terrorism have been granted a statutory victim definition which is not fit for purpose, and which is uniquely appalling. Commissioner Thompson has now brought forward pension proposals in line with this approach and understandably the instant reaction to these recommendations has been for many organisations to turn their fire on Commissioner Thompson, and demand her resignation.

We fully agree that Commissioner Thompson is due criticism, not least for failing to recognise or to articulate effectively the legitimate disgust of victims of terrorism on being categorised together with murderers and criminals. She has also failed to advocate for the necessary review of Article 3 of the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, to

achieve a definition of victims and survivors that complies with the definition of victim of crime provided in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 and EU Directive 2012/29/EU. However, as Commissioner Thompson's contract now comes to an end we believe the emphasis must continue to be focused on attacking the 'interpretation' of 'victim and survivor' in the 2006 Order, and that innocent victims of terrorism focus every effort to achieve real change by campaigning to see the reform of the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 by bringing it into conformity with the rest of the legislation in the UK and the EU directive. Achieving reform of the Statutory Instrument 2006 would ensure any present or future commissioner's representations and recommendations would have to reflect an accurate definition of victims and survivors - perpetrators NOT included - and that is where our focus will remain.

● **Jonathan Lerner is advocacy support officer of Ulster Human Rights Watch**

'It would be a constitutional outrage if parliament were prevented from holding the government to account at a time of national crisis'
Philip Hammond

BIRTHDAYS

Elliott Gould, actor, 81; Joel Schumacher, film director, 80; Chris Copping, musician, 74; Lenny Henry, actor/comedian, 61; Joe Swail, snooker player, 50; Lea Michele, actress/singer, 33, Liam Payne, singer, 26.

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