

Letter to Editor of The Irish News

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Dear Sir,

For just how much longer must civil society on this island be expected to indulge the Orange Order? Their expressions of "sincere sympathy" and an acknowledgement of the widespread support throughout the community for the family of murdered Constable Ronan Kerr, was bogus. The shallowness of this expression of sympathy was manifest when the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, Tom Elliot, attended the funeral of Constable Kerr in a Catholic church. Mr Elliot was informed that the issue of his attendance at a Catholic church is to be discussed by the Orange Order's governing body and that he faced disciplinary action. These unelected politico-religious supremacists in the primordial pursuit of reminding Catholics of their subordinate role in the northern state must not be allowed to dictate to and intimidate elected public representatives.

For civilised society on both sides of the border to continue to bow to the sectarian and undemocratic demands of Orange Order bullies is tantamount to permitting the state to be governed according to the principles of sectarian mob-rule. Neither the nationalist community nor the rule of law should acquiesce to threats and intimidation, nor should they be subservient to Orange Order demands.

In an act of political ecumenism at Messines Ridge in Belgium in 1998, President McAleese, alongside Queen Elizabeth II, dedicated a Peace Tower in memory of those from the island of Ireland who fought and died in the Great War. No religious distinctions were observed. Then in 2005, the President travelled to Gallipoli to honour those Irish who fell in 1915 at Suvla Bay. Groups like the Dublin Fusiliers and the Somme Association were most generous in their praise of President McAleese. Just last month at the National War Memorial Gardens in Islandbridge, President McAleese alongside the Queen of England and Prince Philip, welcomed members of the Orange Order, political and religious leaders from the North and representatives of the UDA, to remember those Irish who died in the two World Wars. These magnanimous gestures of ecumenism by Mary McAleese on behalf of the Irish people have not been reciprocated.

The Orange Order has fought a two hundred year rearguard action against democracy in Ireland, north and south, by opposing every progressive reform from the repeal of the anti-Catholic and anti-Dissenter penal laws to the Patten Report on the RUC. Any proposal (whether it be the Act of Union, Home Rule or power sharing) which they perceived might weaken loyalist hegemonic domination in Ireland, was vigorously opposed, often with threats of violence, and if the violence and division this island has endured for centuries is to be overcome, bigotry must be challenged, exposed and vigorously opposed by all.

Yours sincerely
Tom Cooper
Cathaoirleach
INC