

# The normalisation of untruths

**T**he political vernacular has taken a dangerous turn in the last few weeks. Before this there was, with a few dishonourable exceptions, a general pact among most politicians not to exploit fears or concerns over asylum seekers. That's all changing in an election year and it could lead to a further backlash against not just asylum seekers but all sorts of migrants to this country.

Last weekend Fianna Fáil produced a policy document on migration. One proposal is that asylum seekers convicted of a crime be deported. There is no record of asylum seekers committing crime to any greater extent than the rest of the population. The Garda commissioner and Department of Justice have confirmed this. Why put this proposal out there, as if it was responding to evidence of criminal activity?

There is a campaign among some elements to paint asylum seekers as murderers, rapists, and thieves. This spreading of hate has had some purchase, particularly at a time when there is a squeeze on accommodation. Last Monday on RTE's *Drivetime*, Ciara Smyth from NUIG laid it out plainly. "Members of the public are being encouraged to have a number of anxieties about asylum seekers," she said.

Politicians are hearing these anxieties on the doorsteps. Euro election candidate Lisa Chambers confirmed as much last week.

"If you break the law you need to be sent back," she said at the Fianna Fáil and sheis. "That's what the public are asking us for." Ms Chambers and her colleagues could explain to the public that their fears are misplaced. Is she afraid to tell voters that there is zero evidence of heightened criminality among asylum seekers because they would reject the truth as it doesn't fit neatly with anger or concern or frustration? Surely responsible politicians have a duty to challenge lies based on hate and accepted through ignorance.

Instead, Fianna Fáil included a dog whistle in the party's policy document. "This just encourages people to associate asylum seekers with criminality and there is no evidence that that is the case," Ms Smyth said on RTE.

Then we have the canard of "open borders". This is another lie being spread around which has gained purchase in some quarters of society. Last December, Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald dismissed the concept. "I don't know anybody who is in favour of open borders," she said. "We have a rules based system ... you shouldn't pretend it doesn't exist".

In recent weeks, as the EU asylum and migration pact has come to the fore, Sinn Féin has resurrected these open borders that McDonald previously said didn't exist. "Sinn Féin is not in favour of open borders," the party's justice spokesperson Pa Daly



Anthony Fauci, lead medic in America's response to the pandemic, has referred to the lies spread about the pandemic.

I'm asking an entirely innocent question: is Ireland full?" This week Anthony Fauci, the former chief medical officer of the USA, was in Dublin. Fauci's work during the pandemic was lauded for his evidence-based approach. He warned about what he called "the normalisation of untruths", referencing lies spread about the pandemic and vaccines by various nutjobs.

Mainstream politicians here would do well to take notice. Issuing dog whistles about asylum seekers contributes to the normalisation of untruths. Coming from otherwise rational representatives it is playing with fire, feeding into an atmosphere that can easily drift towards hostility to migrants of all hue, and particularly those who are fleeing from somewhere else. In an election year, some politicians and parties are succumbing to the pressure of appealing voters' irrational fears rather than confronting them, irrespective of the cost. It would be no bad thing if everybody who professes to care about standards in public life paused right now to reflect on where this might be going.

said. "Sinn Féin is not in favour of open borders," MEP Chris MacManus said. Why introduce a baseless concept being spread by merchants of hate?

The answer is that Sinn Féin canvassers are getting it on the doorstep, voters telling them the Shinners are all for open borders. In the name of social cohesion, or equality or any alleged political principles the party could explain that there is no such thing as open borders in the Western world. That, however, would not sate the anger. So the party that once claimed to be some class of a socialist entity issues the dog whistle. There may well be open borders, voter, but be assured, Sinn Féin is not in favour of it.

From two of the main three political parties we now have the possibility of hordes of criminal asylum seekers pouring over our open borders, so best to vote for the candidate who reflects your anger. And be assured that wherever those two entities go, Fine Gael will be hot on their heels.

The EU pact is another opportunity for some politicians to surf the anger. The government has decided to opt into the pact, which is designed to tighten rules on asylum seekers, because presumably, it believes this is in the country's best interests. The merchants of hate spread it around that the Government is in cahoots with global forces — such as the EU — to ramp up the number of people coming in here. And right now some voters are in a mood to buy into this garbage.

On Wednesday in the Dáil, Aontu's Peadar Tóibín asked the Taoiseach

**The Mick Clifford Podcast**  
Available from 10am Friday

Apple Podcasts | Spotify

Irish Examiner

how much it would cost to opt into the pact. What a silly question. Simon Harris is supposed to calculate trends in immigration, the effects of the pact's measures, where wars are likely to break out, how climate change will impact population movement and let's throw in inflation in the price of a pint between now and 2050. Harris is reputed to be an energetic communicator but he's hardly an actuarial scientist. The Taoiseach's failure to make these calculations was considered a

"gotcha" moment by Tóibín. "This is a stunning admission," a tweet breathlessly revealed to his followers. "Despite this farce, we will stand by you." Right, so Tóibín is standing by you, the voter, while the Government in conjunction with global forces is allowing thousands into the country. And if these hordes are being delivered by spaceship, then Peadar is all against spaceships.

The deputy was speaking in concert with a number of other politicians who want to have a full debate on the pact rather than refer it to the Oireachtas justice committee, as would be normal with EU matters like this. There may be a case for such a debate but why just for this particular measure and how would it be conducted? Inevitably some politicians would use the occasion to fulminate about "immigration" — which is an entirely separate matter to accommodating those requiring international protection. These video clips, full of anger and completely devoid of solutions or reason, would then be loaded onto social media accounts.

They might as well be saying: "Look at me, voter, I'm angry just like you. I don't want open borders just like you."



## Mick Clifford