

Tullamore Tribune

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Criminal gangs well known to gardaí

The appalling story of the Offaly farmer who lived on his own and was burgled, attacked and consequently hospitalised, was raised in the Dáil by Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin.

The gangs are well known to the Garda, he said. “They have become quite sophisticated in how they organise themselves,” he said. “Apparently they no longer use the motorways but use the older primary routes. Senior security sources are quoted in the media as saying these gangs are winning the war and are taunting An Garda Síochána.”

Rural communities do not feel secure, he said. They do not believe enough is being done. “CCTV is very limited on motorways,” he said. “The Garda presence is historically down. Many rural Garda stations are closed. They have not had the same fortune as Stepaside. The programme for Government is very clear that there would be increased support in investment in CCTV at key locations along the national road network and in urban centres to deal specifically with these issues. Will the Taoiseach or the Minister outline how much extra has been invested in CCTV and the Garda fleet to prevent rural crime?”

Sinn Féin Deputy Carol Nolan said that prior to the recent incident in Offaly, this issue was being raised constantly because rural crime is increasing. “The figures might not show that but it is increasing,” she said. “What actions are being taken? How do rural communities know that they are being taken seriously and are being listened to? I have had it brought to my attention that there are Garda cars parked outside Garda stations in Offaly because there are not enough gardaí to drive those cars and to patrol areas. That is unacceptable.”

In response, Justice Minister Charlie Flanagan said he could assure the deputies that Operation Thor is continuing unabated. “I advise that the sum of €3 million is available over a period of three years, €1 million per annum, to increase CCTV presence across the country. Applications are open. I advise communities that they should consider making appropriate application to my Department. I am anxious to ensure that this money is expended, particularly across rural areas.”

He reminded Deputy Martin that the Garda Training College in Templemore has reopened, having been closed for many years under the previous regime. “The next attestation of 200 new gardaí will take place on 8 December,” he said. “Full and detailed consideration is being given by An Garda Síochána to dealing with the issues, as mentioned by the Deputy.”

Failure to supervise private rented sector is a shame on the Government

The failure to adequately deal with supervising the private rented housing sector is one of the greatest failures and shames of the Government, Fianna Fáil Deputy Barry Cowen told the Dáil. “The failure to adequately deal with this issue is putting lives at risk and they remain at

risk,” he said. “Although we are told the economy is thriving and racing ahead, services are not being adequately resourced or funded for the most basic of needs in this area.”

Speaking during a debate on a motion on the rented sector, he said he saw as much recently in his constituency. “The story featured in the news,” he said. “The sister of a person who was affected by a violent burglary talked about her elderly brother going to bed and locking the bedroom door. Regardless of whether the Minister likes it, the Government is not adequately funding or resourcing policing to allow people to have more faith in the protectors of society.”

When dangerous cars were to be taken off the roads, a system was put in place to ensure they were taken off the roads, and it succeeded, largely, said Deputy Cowen. “Now, it appears there are dangerous properties in the marketplace and they have to be taken out,” he said. “This is a way in which it can be done. The Minister says the Residential Tenancies Board can be resourced. Unfortunately, the RTB is not doing the job it was charged to do. I have no faith in the board being in a position to do this task either.”

If every property that was leased had to obtain a certificate from the local authority to confirm that it was in compliance with planning permission, fire safety measures, building regulations and all the laws pertaining to the way in which property can be leased, then it would be fine, he said. “If the process were repeated every few years, that would be fine too. However, I believe the system the Minister was talking about smells of self-regulation and it mentions providing certification. The Minister is depending on goodwill and I have no doubt but that he would get it from many. However, as others have said, in the context of the crisis in which we find ourselves, there are people who will take opportunistic means to better themselves at the expense of others. That is our society. That is the way it is. That is what we have to expect, unfortunately.”

Those who paid water charges treated same as those who did not

The recommendation on equity and fairness, as provided for in Fianna Fáil’s ‘Confidence and Supply’ arrangement with Fine Gael initially, was that those who had paid water charges would be treated no less favourably than those who had not, Deputy Barry Cowen told the Dáil.

“We were all laughed at when it was divulged how that might emerge or could be squared,” he said. “If one was to go after those who had not paid, it would cost much more than paying back those who paid. It was fair and appropriate, meeting with everybody’s approval, despite the fact they felt it might never happen. It is in the process of happening. A campaign has been initiated already to ensure people get those refunds as quickly as possible, despite the protestations of others in the hope they might act as a Christmas Grinch to detract from a feel-good factor for some households which might require or be glad of it.”

If others want to donate to charities or to the homeless, as was suggested by a campaign initiated recently, so be it, said Deputy Cowen. “That is people’s choice. I know some Members who initially paid the first water bill but then changed their minds and decided not

to pay the others. At least they will get something back and they can see what to do with it then.”