

Shatter Article.

“Disgusted” -the term used this week to describe the behaviour of certain members of the Government. It was a Fine Gael TD that used it. John Deasy said that many people were “disgusted” by the way in which the Fine Gael party’s affairs were being conducted. He pointed the finger of accusation directly at Enda Kenny. And the accusation was one of high-handed, dictatorial cronyism in which a culture of fear and the rewarding of abject, uncritical loyalty are the order of the day.

“Disgusting” – the term that the former Commissioner chose to describe the actions of the Garda whistle-blowers who refused to be silenced in a wholesale campaign of cover-up by the force of its malpractices. This was the term that Alan Shatter notoriously refused to distance himself from. This was the term that Minister Leo Varadkar publicly rejected – preferring “distinguished” to “disgusting” - and thereby pulling the thread which led to the complete unravelling of the positions adopted by Shatter and Callinan.

Varadkar’s simple act of decency towards the whistleblowers seems to have rankled with Shatter. Last week Shatter wrote a long invective piece in the Irish Independent aimed directly at Varadkar and his recent good press (without naming Leo, of course). Shatter was apparently incensed by Varadkar’s straight talking about the budgetary crisis in the Health service for which he was publicly rebuked by Enda Kenny. So Shatter now joins obsequiously in Enda’s rebuke to Leo.

But when asked on the Late Late Show to make any comment on Enda’s behaviour in relation to the McNulty-IMMA-Seanad debacle, Alan Shatter became uncharacteristically tongue-tied and then - perhaps more characteristically - evasive and obsequious to Enda.

The belated bleat of apology by the Taoiseach for his behaviour in the McNulty affair is very revealing. This episode was not some brief aberration by Kenny. What most observers felt was the exact opposite. The veil of propriety had momentarily dropped revealing the real man, his standards and methods.

The behaviour for which the Taoiseach was apologising was, I regret to think, entirely characteristic. Far from being an aberration – this was an “Ecce Homo” moment right in the public eye.

The public “broth of a boy” image was cruelly exposed trying to be a secretive “cute hoor”, and ending up more like a public “stupid hoor”.

Hapless but decent Heather Humphreys was left twisting in the wind. When Enda said that she had made the McNulty appointment “in her own right”, he meant to convey the monumental political lie that she had acted independently of him and on her own initiative and for reasons wholly unconnected with his selection of McNulty to contest a Seanad by-election on the Culture and Educational panel.

Alas poor Heather, what was she then to do? She knew she was being used as a fall-guy. She knew that she was being “blooded” in the political culture of cynical deception of the public, just as described by John Deasy.

But, as a beneficiary of “geographical” promotion politics herself, she knew what Enda was up to.

And so, hating what she was forced to do, she stumbled through an inarticulate, awkward live interview and then went to earth – humiliated.

She could have told the truth and revealed that she had been directed on the authority of the Taoiseach to breach the Government’s own guidelines that dictated no further appointments to the IMMA board, and she could have confirmed that party apparatchiks doing the Taoiseach’s work had suggested the sordid little stratagem so that Enda could sign McNulty’s nomination paper describing him as a member of the IMMA board. But that approach would be akin to the Varadker use of the term “distinguished” rather than “disgusting” – a breach of the political mafia code of loyalty.

No Minister can make such an appointment without the say-so of the Taoiseach. It was enormously cynical for Kenny to describe the appointment as a decision made by Heather “in her own right”. And downright dishonest.

As for democracy, we now see Enda’s referendum attack on the Seanad in its true light – utterly, utterly cynical. His “own personal initiative” as the referendum was dubbed by his handlers (the same handlers who advised him not to take part in the referendum debates) was never based on conviction. Like the McNulty affair it was a stroke. The Seanad is not being reformed after the people voted to retain it. It’s back to cynical business.

The “new politics” that we were promised - involving truthfulness, openness and the end of strokes and cronyism - is as dead as the Monthly Python parrot.

The Late Late interview by Alan Shatter showed no remorse. By turns, it was condescending, filibustering, self-serving and evasive.

The suggestion that he could not answer a straight factual question about his own actions because he was constrained by the existence of the Fennelly Commission is, frankly speaking, ludicrous legal twaddle.

“You and I will be committing a criminal offence if I get into the detail of what the Fennelly Commission is engaged with,” he told Tubridy.

Funny that. I don’t remember that particular clause in the Commissions of Investigation Act. Nobody is muzzled by the confidential processes of that Act from answering a straight question the answer to which was in their own knowledge before the Fennelly Commission was established.

But to avoid answering such a straight question, Alan Shatter warned Ryan Tubridy that he, Tubridy, was risking jail.

And he added in the very observation remark that “Fennelly may be an F word..”.

So that’s clear, isn’t it?

It was a pity that Tubridy was partly deflected by Shatter's tactics so that the word "disgusting" and the Oliver Connolly sacking debacle were not covered as Shatter ran down the clock.

Alan Shatter is obviously seeking public rehabilitation. He will run again if his "continued involvement in public life can produce something positively beneficial" – we are told. And then Alan actually told the Late Late audience that he would accept a re-appointment to Government if offered it.

In the meantime, he is obviously determined to keep on the right side of Enda. If Enda can do such wonders for John McNulty, who knows what he can still achieve for Shatter.

But it does raise the questions about the day of his departure: "Why did Enda not give Alan more than a few minutes to read and refute the Guerin report? Why did Enda publish it, if Alan thought it was legally flawed and liable to be quashed? Why did Enda ignore the concerns that Alan voiced about the report as he resigned"

Asked by Tubridy whether the Taoiseach had used any "words of any friendliness, warmth [or]kindliness" on the occasion as he agreed with him that Shatter had to go, Alan's answer was eloquent:

"Er, we... there was no antagonism in the exchanges between either of us on that day when we met".

Sounds like he got short shrift from Enda.

Ecce Homo.