

John Moran

THE BRIGHTEST as well as the most self-confident Limerick luminary since Richard Harris has to be the former secretary general of the Department of Finance, John Moran – a close friend and colleague of the finance minister at the time, Michael Noonan. Following his spell at the minister’s side, Moran went on to supplement a glittering CV as the head of various corporate firms and state entities and he is now a front runner for the post of the first directly elected mayor of Limerick. But the word ‘hubris’ could have been invented to describe Moran and his self-image, currently being projected in advance of the election, could inflict more self-harm than good.

Before and after his entry to the civil service – to save Ireland from perdition, as he often explains – Moran’s career reads like a scaled-down, Limerick version of Peter Sutherland’s high-achieving, world-saving life and times. Throughout the 1990s he worked for firms such as McCann Fitzgerald (in its office in New York); Tony Ryan’s GPA on Shannonside; and for a decade he was head of Zurich Financial Services in Dublin as well as globally out of Sydney and New York.

In 2012 he was appointed by his mentor, then finance minister Michael Noonan, as secretary general at the department. There, as he puts it himself, he has since been “recognised, as head of Ireland’s Department of Finance, to have played a pivotal role in Ireland’s post-crisis economic recovery, the restructuring of the Irish banking sector, and to have been a key influencer in Europe’s move towards greater non-bank and capital markets funding sources”.

Well, if you’ve got it, flaunt it, as they say in Limerick.

Another way of describing Moran’s two-year term in the civil service top job is that he and his Limerick buddy, Noonan, opened the vulture funds gateway into Ireland. Subsequent reports of that time were that finance officials met private equity vulture firms 65 times in 2013 and 2014 – Moran

was department head for much of this period – with Noonan present at eight of these meetings, which led to tax concessions for the vulture funds.

At the Oireachtas committee of inquiry into the banking crisis in 2015, Moran was grilled by then senator Michael D’Arcy – not the most left wing of Fine Gael TDs – who asked him what he thought of “vulture funds coming in here, flipping assets for twice the money in a short span”.

Moran’s response was unequivocal: “There are lots of people in Ireland who, in the last two or three years, have probably bought a house and sold it at a profit, right? I wouldn’t consider them vulture investors... Our question, and your question, is do you want to have a system that encourages private investment into the system or do you want it all done by the Government?... and it’s not, I don’t think, as I said earlier, helpful to be talking about vulture funds. We are talking about investors without which we wouldn’t have office space, without which we wouldn’t have housing.”

More pointed than D’Arcy even at the committee hearings was TD Joe Higgins, who told Moran: “Statements I’ve heard attributed to you and even today might indicate a belief in a capitalism that is red in tooth and claw.”

More recently, the *Irish Times* picked up on Moran’s statement last month about his demand for greater transparency in public life. But shortly after Moran left finance in 2014, highly

embarrassing documents leaked by a lobbyist for Uber showed how its high-powered campaign to virtually abolish regulation in the taxi industry was assisted by Moran, who worked as a lobbyist for Uber.

The leaks from Uber spoke of how Moran had been hired to lobby government and Fine Gael advisors and how Moran had even managed to get an Uber soundbite – the “sharing economy” – into the party’s 2016 general election manifesto.

EMBARRASSING NOTE

One especially embarrassing note from Uber’s man in Dublin to a colleague said: “Can we make sure we are getting value from our 10k for Moran; have him talk to [Paschal] Donahue [sic] and apply pressure before the officials have the time to poop all over this [a proposal for a Limerick pilot project].”

During this period Moran was Ireland’s director on the European Investment Bank and chair of the Land Development Agency.

Following his altruistic stint as head of the finance department – “to help guide Ireland’s recovery from the great recession... in a pivotal decision that reshaped my life and perspective”, as his mayoral campaigning literature notes – Moran got involved in several Limerick entities, including Shannon Airport, Liveable Limerick and as chair of the Hunt Museum. He has, as the *IT* noted sarcastically, stepped back from these bodies in order, he said, to give a good example to others about transparency.

Moran’s mayoral election campaigning literature combines Limerick kitsch with the *Wolf of Wall Street* and he tells prospective voters: “To understand me and what drives me on daily you have to understand my history.” His “love... pride... ambition” and other feelings for Limerick, as well as his childhood experiences there, explain why he “will never tire of advocating and working to improve Limerick; it’s my home”.

There is even a touch of Frank McCourt in his description of how his parents contended with “economic forces beyond their control” and how he worked alongside his dad on building sites and both parents on the family farm – “It’s my backbone, the core of who I am.”

Other personal touches include his pride in having recovered from cancer and on another level he writes: “My pride in Limerick’s success, especially during sports events, is immense, but my most poignant and heartfelt moment was being welcomed at the Limerick Chamber dinner with my partner Damien in ways I had never believed possible when I left years before.”



AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

Moran goes on to outline in much greater detail his phenomenal success in finance and companies at home and abroad as well as in government. He also explained how after his spell as head of the finance department during the austerity years, “I had defined my success taking up that role to be Ireland’s return to the funding markets, the end of the troika programme and a turn-around in rising unemployment”.

Given such phenomenal achievements, seizing the mayoralty of Limerick should be a piece of cake to one of its most distinguished sons, on top of which Moran has also decided to present as a non-party Independent, despite his close association with Noonan.

But so too has Helen O’Donnell, widow of the late FG minister, Tom O’Donnell.

Helen infuriated her FG colleagues last month by seconding MEP Seán Kelly to run again in the European elections before resigning from the party in the following 24 hours to run as an Independent for the Limerick mayoralty.

O’Donnell is derided by some but should not be underestimated. She will secure votes from many FG supporters and also from non-party sources, and she has the backing of Limerick’s Mr Big, JP McManus.

This has left FG in turmoil, with

many councillors walking away from the convention for the mayoralty nomination and the party is now reliant on former mayor, councillor Daniel Butler, who will hope to be rewarded somewhere along the line for his party patriotism in the face of almost certain defeat.

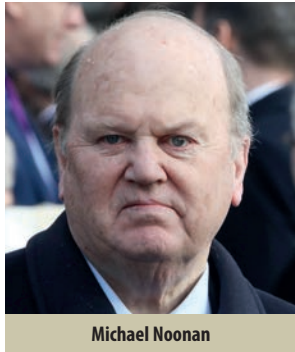
Some in Fianna Fáil believe its candidate, Dee Ryan – who is chief executive of

Limerick Chamber and a former member of Labour and Fine Gael – will emerge from the centre to centre-right group of candidates that also includes Moran, O’Donnell and Butler.

It is hard to tell if Moran, O’Donnell or Ryan’s campaigns will catch fire but whichever one is ahead on the first count will likely go on to confront Sinn Féin TD Maurice Quinlivan, who will probably come ahead of all the left candidates and then take transfers from them.

It may or may not become an issue but Moran might regret his objection to St Vincent de Paul’s (SVP) plan to develop a community support facility in the Georgian quarter, where he owns several expensive properties. Moran claims that prostitution is rife in the area and queries whether the SVP services are appropriate in a “Georgian neighbourhood community”.

Limerick, you’re a lady.



Michael Noonan

John Moran’s unlimited success

WHILE JOHN Moran has made clear his political ambitions, his private sector lobbying has been extensive and, on occasion, has overlapped with his significant property interests. Getting a handle on Johnny’s wealth is, however, tricky, as he has availed of the protection of unlimited status, which means companies do not have to file accounts.

One such entity is Red House Hill International Unlimited, the lobbying company that in the past has worked on behalf of the likes of Uber (see p14). It trades as RHH International and Moran holds 100% of the shares here, while the other directors are his partner, Damien Duggan, and Foxrock-based accountant Tom Moran.

RHH has lobbied in John Moran’s old stomping ground in the Department of Finance on behalf of the likes of Japanese bank Nomura, where Moran sought to “secure greater mandates” for his client in “providing investment banking advice to government or government-supported banks”. The company has also lobbied then finance minister Michael Noonan on behalf of the Hunt Museum in Limerick, where Moran was a board member from 2015 to 2022.

The Department of Environment was another target, with secretary general Mark Griffin lobbied on behalf of energy supplier Grange Backup Power, when Moran helpfully highlighted “upcoming shortages on electricity supply in Dublin”.

During the pandemic, then taoiseach Leo Varadkar was also lobbied by Moran on behalf of the SME Recovery Coalition, who

had hired RHH to help secure “better and fairer treatment for SMEs suffering from Covid-19 restrictions”.

RHH also provides consultancy services to clients and has been a direct beneficiary of Moran’s time as a director of DirectRoute (Limerick) Ltd, which is the entity that landed the contract to construct and operate the M7 Limerick Southern Ring Road. Moran was appointed to the board here in 2019 and the good news is that, according to DirectRoute’s 2022 accounts, RHH International Unlimited was paid €18,000 in consultancy fees.

Moran has also found time to lobby on his own behalf, notably in relation to property, which is not surprising given that he has show quite a flair for this business. For example, he previously lobbied Limerick City and County Council officials about “developing a civic campaign to encourage a visionary and creative approach to the planned redevelopment of O’Connell Street in Limerick”.

Moran must have been impressed with the potential for the area, as a couple of years later he acquired a Georgian property in the upmarket Crescent neighbourhood, just a couple of minutes walk from O’Connell Street.

More recently, RHH lobbied the council, again on Moran’s own behalf, seeking improvements that would lead to “a better public realm in the Georgian quarter for safety of residents”. By that stage, Moran had acquired a second Georgian pile – on Pery Square, again a stone’s throw from O’Connell Street.

John is quite the operator it seems.



WHAT A SPECTACLE

KEVIN DUFFY (34) of Castlecourt, Ballaghaderreen, Roscommon, found himself before Tubercurry District Court charged with two public order offences following an altercation on January 19 last. Gardaí received reports that the defendant was heavily intoxicated on Main Street, Charlestown, Mayo, and was holding a pair of damaged spectacles that belonged to an injured third party. When the officers arrived on the scene, Duffy became abusive, telling them to “go fuck yourselves you wankers”, leading to his arrest. Defence solicitor Eamonn Gallagher told the court that the defendant had just left a long-term relationship and, on the date in question, had taken exception to being refused a drink at a bar. He added that Duffy had paid €200 to the injured third party as compensation for their damaged glasses. Noting, however, that Duffy had 20 previous convictions, Judge Michael Connellan fined him €500. *Sligo Weekender*

‘DROP ME HOME’

A 30-YEAR-OLD Dunmanway man, who was on a night out in Kinsale and drunkenly demanded that gardaí give him a lift home, has pleaded guilty at Bandon District Court to charges of public intoxication and engaging in threatening and abusive behaviour. Sergeant Tom Mulcahy told the court that on October 27, 2023, a Garda patrol was driving through Kinsale. On noticing the vehicle, Craig Roche, of Mary Street, Dunmanway, yelled out: “Hey asshole, drop me home.” When the officers exited the vehicle and approached the defendant, they noticed a strong smell of alcohol and said Roche was “incoherent and clearly a danger to himself and others”. The defendant then became aggressive towards the gardaí and refused to give his details, which led to his arrest. Noting that he had been leniently dealt with in court previously for similar charges, Judge James McNulty issued Roche with a €600 fine. *Southern Star*

ARRESTING DEVELOPMENT

CORK DISTRICT Court heard the case of a man who became abusive towards gardaí after he was incensed at their decision to arrest his friend following an incident on March 11. The officers were called by Paul Lynch (50), of 13 St Patrick’s Terrace, Greenmount, following an altercation that led to the arrest of his friend. When the gardaí arrived, Lynch was noticeably intoxicated. He became abusive and demanded to know why his friend had been arrested. The defendant berated the officers for the perceived unfairness of the situation, asking them: “Why don’t ye do your fucking jobs?” Ignoring a warning to calm down, he continued his tirade of abuse. Lynch was then arrested and, as described by his defence lawyer, he spent “the night in the Bridewell” for his “troubles”. Judge Mary Dorgan convicted him and issued a fine of €350, taking his drunkenness into account. *Echo*

• Please send suitable contributions to:

Bog Cuttings, The Phoenix, 44 Lr Baggot St, Dublin 2, or email bogcuttings@thephoenix.ie