



'GRIPT' GIFT TO EU RIGHT

A SPAT between *Gript* correspondent Ben Scallan and Leo Varadkar at the end of a recent Government press conference led to a focus on Gript Media's finances. Vlad had ignored a question shouted by Scallan as he was leaving and, when dismissing the latter's righteous indignation on Highland Radio, in reference to Gript the Taoiseach said that "we don't know how it's funded", adding that "they are not acting in good faith". He continued: "It's not based on informing their subscribers, if they even have any. There's a political agenda."

The *Gript* outrage machine then went into overdrive, with deputy editor Gary Kavanagh referencing donations and subscriptions in a series of tweets, while Scallan uploaded a 10-minute video on the melodrama.

Aside from Varadkar's comments, *Gript*'s finances are increasingly an issue. This is not only due to the upcoming libel trial by a man it falsely identified as the assailant in the Parnell Square stabbing of three children and their carer, but also because of the thousands of euros that *Gript* has spent in recent months taking out ads on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter appealing for subscribers. Ostensibly these are to fund *Gript* and emphasise its coverage of the pro-life movement, immigration, transgender issues etc.

This solicitation for funds might lead you to conclude that Gript is struggling but details of donations and contributions accepted by European political parties, recently published by the Authority for European Political



Ben Scallan

Parties and European Political Foundations, tell a different story. In the financial year 2023, it shows Gript Media Limited donated the maximum allowed – €18,000 – to the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR). Interestingly, the Edmund Burke Institute, of which Kavanagh is a director, also donated €18,000 to the ECR in 2023.

The ECR, a European Parliament parliamentary party, consists of 68 MEPs from 20 right-wing parties including VOX from Spain, Fratelli d'Italia, Sweden Democrats etc. There is obviously a clear ethical issue for a media company that is helping to fund the ECR and is writing frequently about its member parties and/or the politics of those parties. (See profile, John McGuirk, pp 14/15.)

BOG STANDARD 'IRISH TIMES' BEHAVIOUR

WHAT COMMONSENSE *Irish Times* media columnist Laura Slattery dispensed recently when deriding "everybody involved in RTE's rolling crisis" as having "lost the plot". According to Slattery, media minister Catherine Martin took the hump with RTE chair Siún Ní Raghallaigh because Martin didn't know that RTE "followed the correct procedure – correct on paper and correct in principle – when it reached an exit agreement with former finance chief Richard Collins. She didn't know that this new process – which, I reiterate, is the appropriate one – applied in his case. That's it. That's her complaint."

Last month Slattery wrote three articles in five days about "Ní Raghallaigh's absurd demise" and how Martin risked being "hoisted by [sic] her own petard". Laura's most telling and interesting article consisted of a series of quotes from "Labour Law experts", who stated that exit payments including confidentiality clauses were the "norm" and that such clauses in RTE's agreements with senior staff were "bog standard".

Laura did not need to seek expert opinion about golden handshakes – sorry, exit payments – and confidentiality clauses when



Siún Ní Raghallaigh

investigating this 'bog standard' business practice. Indeed, her employer, Irish Times DAC, negotiated substantial agreements totalling €1.15m with two employees – then editor Paul O'Neill and group MD Paul Mulvaney – in late 2022. These deals emerged in September 2023, just as management were explaining to staff why their remuneration had to be cut (see *The Phoenix* 6/10/23).

Unfortunately, when staff demanded a breakdown of the sums paid to O'Neill and Mulvaney, management said they were unable to oblige as Mulvaney's 'bog standard' deal contained a confidentiality clause.

This came in the wake of the Ryan Tubridy/RTE scandal relating to the lack of transparency about financial payments, which the hard-working hacks at the newspaper had so assiduously recorded and investigated. It also provided the editor's office with much fuel with which to drive a host of indignant columns about ethical precepts in public life.

A RECENT SPECIAL by David McWilliams in the *Irish Times Weekend Review* told readers: "In Dún Laoghaire a battle for the heart and soul of the town is ongoing."

This is a reference to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Council's plan to re-direct cars away from the town centre and adjacent streets – "a sort of people before bonnet movement which repossesses public space for people, space that right now is occupied by giant SUV bonnets..."

"Living streets are safer streets," warbled McWilliams as he explained how town centres clogged up with cars have been consigned to the 1970s along with Starsky and Hutch.

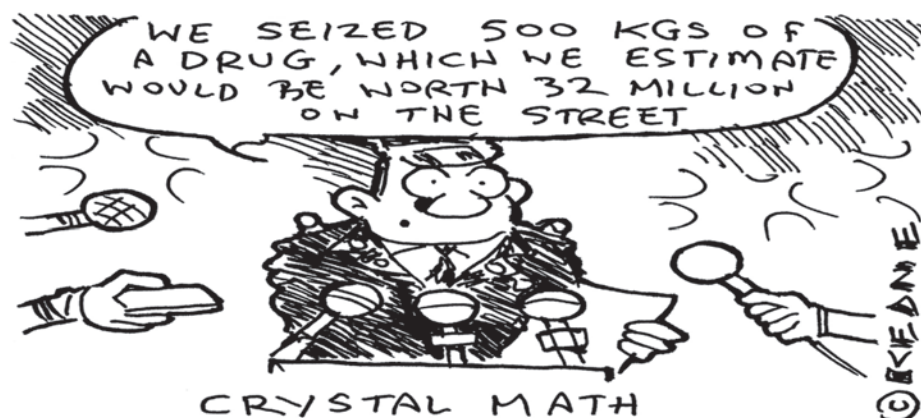
Goldhawk is well used to complaints from republicans, neutrality supporters and other malcontents being deprived of space on the IT letters page but was surprised to learn that it has declined to publish quite reasonable letters from more than one Kingstown resident. Is disagreeing with McWilliams never to be tolerated at the IT?

U2 WINS AWARD SHOCK!

ON THURSDAY March 7 U2 are to receive this year's RTE Choice Music Prize for Classic Irish Album for their 1991 album *Achtung Baby*, with the Vicar Street event being aired on 2FM.

The RTE publicity surrounding this Vegas-type event claims the record saw U2 "reinvent themselves musically and assert the band as one of the world's most popular", "explore new musical territory" and so on. The judging panel argued that the album had captured "the spirit of change at both a personal as well as a societal level, when the Berlin wall came tumbling down and Ireland sensed a change in the air". Yeah, man.

The panel was made up of Sinéad Crowley (Coimisiún na Meán), Michael Kealy (RTE TV), Maeve Quigley (*Irish Daily Mail*), Will Leahy (RTE Gold) and Paul Russell (2FM) as chair. While a statement from its members said the view of the record's cultural impact and other qualities was unanimous, one feels sure that Russell's wife, Lynsey Holmes – U2's long-time publicity agent – was especially pleased at the award.





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