



John McGuirk

THE EDITOR of *Gript.ie*, John McGuirk, has managed to look both foolish and incompetent in two legal stand-offs recently, just as his particular brand of reactionary politics appears to be making some progress among a section of the public. The controversial hack is plausible and editorially capable but is provocative to the point of occasional confrontation. More pertinently, some of his right-wing comrades wonder if he is the man to effect the real trick required to bring the movement into mainstream politics. Can he project such a movement as moderate and sensible as opposed to Irish stormtroopers such as Justin Barrett, the long-time leader of the National Party?

The first legal dilemma facing McGuirk is a High Court action taken by a man wrongly identified by *Gript* as the suspect in the stabbing of three children and a creche worker in Parnell Square last November. The second is McGuirk's stated rationale for not suing *Village* magazine over its full-frontal editorial assault on him in its current edition.

Taking the second issue first, McGuirk has suggested that a litigious response to the damning *Village* article is "exactly what they want". Having scrutinised the *Village's* publishing company, Ormond Quay Publishing, McGuirk noticed that, like many small firms, it had accumulated losses (€210,693 in its latest accounts) and, therefore, would be unable to pay damages or legal fees if he won his case. He even suggested, paradoxically, that the "financially struggling" *Village* could exploit "news of being sued by *Gript* to rally their supporters behind them".

So, devious *Village* owner Michael Smith is willing to incur a High Court defamation hit of many tens of thousands of euro in legal costs and damages – which is what a successful action against *Village's* allegations would surely incur – to raise a few bob from supporters?

In light of his stated reasons for not suing *Village*, *The Phoenix* asked McGuirk how *Gript* would be able to sustain itself financially in the event of the plaintiff succeeding in his defamation action over *Gript's* false identification of him as the person that stabbed three children and their carer in Parnell Square.

McGuirk had already stated that he would bring *Village* to the Press

Council rather than the Four Goldmines over its article on him. He also wrote that *Gript* Media and he himself are "voluntarily, but strictly, regulated by the Press Council of Ireland".

Goldhawk is doubtful about the council's ability to hold anybody to 'strict' account. Despite its worthwhile goal of providing an alternative to expensive litigation, the reality is – as Goldhawk has pointed out more than once – that nobody who believes they have a case for libel goes to the Press Council. Nevertheless, *The Phoenix* will monitor Press Council cases closely to ensure that readers do not miss McGuirk's epic pursuit for vindication.

More broadly, the real issue for McGuirk is the quest for a moderate, even respectable, image for *Gript* politics, as opposed to the range of clearly right-wing prejudices now being pushed by different groups and individuals. Unlike the overtly far-right National Party (NP), whose leadership is currently disputed by Barrett and

James Reynolds, McGuirk was sensible enough to publicly

point out: "You can't possibly think for any reason that he's ever going to win any power or influence in this country as an overt 50-year-old Hitler fanboy" (see *The Phoenix* 2/12/22).

Another militant right activist, Irish Freedom Party (IFP) leader Hermann Kelly, also denounced Barrett, saying his IFP is "the sane and sensible option for Irish nationalists.

Nazis and nutters

can go elsewhere."

While the two 'moderates' were adamant about the gulf between them and Barrett's NP, Barrett explained his support for Hitler's *Mein Kampf* by arguing that the NP was gaining sympathy from followers of Kelly's IFP and McGuirk's *Gript*. Thus, he explained: "There was a rush back to the centre as far as I could see, both politically and ideologically... I burnt the bridges back to the centre. Once you have quoted Adolf Hitler, there is no going back from that." Indeed.

This disassociation by McGuirk from such 'extremism' is echoed by many on the right, who are aware that it will destroy their chances of political growth in the medium term. But a most interesting article in *Hot Press* in 2013 revealed a cross-fertilisation a decade earlier of would-be NP leader Reynolds and members of Youth Defence (YD), the militant and provocative religious group that has campaigned against abortion and other social reforms over the last 30 years.

The *Hot Press* article by journalist Mick McCaughan, who infiltrated YD, described how the current director and 50% shareholder in *Gript* Media, Niamh Uí Bhriain, and other members of her Mathúna family were dominant, leadership figures in YD (see also *The Phoenix* 27/7/12).

POLITICAL PREJUDICES

McCaughan also described how he travelled to Longford with YD to be greeted at a public meeting by the "proposed chairperson of the local YD affiliate, Mr James Reynolds", whose dialogue with the young crusaders included proposals to abandon democracy, bring in selective internment and resurrect the death penalty. According to McCaughan, the voluble Reynolds also expressed his admiration for Mussolini but decried Franco for going soft in the later years of his rule.

To complete this particular circle Barrett, Reynolds's current rival for the NP leadership, was also a founder of YD.

The problem McGuirk has in going all moderate is that the politically incestuous personalities and organisational links in the radical right extended family are too well known in what is a small body politic, with the radical right much smaller again. Thus, while McGuirk angrily denies he was ever a member of YD (see *The Phoenix* 16/7/21), he has for some years worked for Uí Bhriain, the co-owner and director of *Gript* Media Ltd.

The younger McGuirk may have been less discreet about his political prejudices but he was quick to disassociate himself from an interesting group called Restore Rhodesia back in 2008. At the time, when asked by Goldhawk about his social media links with the group, he said that, despite the clue in the group's title, he had never actually looked at the



AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

website's content and that he deplored the racism of the Ian Smith regime.

Another unfortunate alliance that went sour was McGuirk's association with the right-wing *Burkean Journal* for which he wrote, partly because it received funding from Declan Ganley, whose political group, Libertas, McGuirk worked for.

However, when the *Burkean's* editorial line veered from right of Thatcher to the right of Mussolini with a positive line on eugenics, Ganley disassociated himself, while McGuirk, described it as "utterly despicable".

In earlier days McGuirk moved from Fianna Fáil to Fine Gael before graduating to more right-wing entities such as the Freedom Institute, a group of mainly ex-Progressive Democrats members.

In this period he also became close to Lucinda Creighton but he quickly attached himself to Ganley and his Libertas group that helped to defeat the Lisbon Treaty mark 1 in 2008. Ganley's delusional ambition to sweep Europe via Libertas in the 2009 EU elections saw the group demolished instead, yet McGuirk has orbited around Ganley for much of the time since.

There are two aspects to McGuirk's political persona – apart from the radical rightward direction – that stand out. One is his volatile personality and the other is a traditionalist Catholic outlook that appears to be the main ideological drive behind his politics.

The clashes he has had with rivals, and even colleagues-turned-enemies, are legion but his language in some of these spats indicates an unpleasant side to his personality.

Attacking Amnesty International director Colm O'Gorman for his organisation's links to George Soros, he described O'Gorman in 2016 as a "cretinous stain on the Irish national discourse, who'll say whatever Soros pays [him] to".

When pro-abortion TD Kate O'Connell called out FG keyboard cage-fighter Barry Walsh for his misogynist tweets, McGuirk called O'Connell a "catty, spiteful, loathsome twit".

Not even his colleague in the Libertas EU campaign in 2009, EU candidate Caroline Simons, escaped his biblical wrath after he issued an incendiary press release on her behalf without her sanction. When she sent him a solicitor's letter alleging defamation, he retorted in his trademark style, calling her a "psychotic bitch" and the "worst candidate ever", something for which he later apologised.

McGuirk appears to have mellowed since those outbursts and, as *Gript* repeatedly informs its readers, he now "lives in county Tipperary with his wife Orla, and their cocker spaniel, Izzy". Cuddly or what?

Just one of the clashes this publication had with McGuirk involved his demand to peruse an article we had prepared on his boss, Ganley, in 2008. Failure to comply with this command resulted in a loud threat to bring a prior injunction, a legal initiative that never transpired, just like the 2013 bombast about the "nice holiday for me from the lawsuit" that "they paid for", as he recounted in a tweet

about a Young Blood profile published in *The Phoenix* some years earlier.

McGuirk has never sued *The Phoenix*, much less received a payment from us, in or out of court.

CATHOLIC IDEOLOGY

At bottom, McGuirk is driven by a traditional, conservative, Catholic ideology that harbours a contempt for modern liberalism – something he correctly identifies as dominating the new, post-Catholic public morality. He may not have been a member of Youth Defence but he travels, politically speaking, with leading members of the Mathúna family that helped to inspire it. Their targets are immigration, trans advocacy, NGO community groups, socialism, republicanism and – high up on the list – secularism, among other dark forces.

McGuirk recently penned a morose article on this week's referendums in which he anticipated with sorrow the defeat of the 'No' side in both of them, saying that "there's no real way to dress this up" as the latest Red C poll "was about as bad as you can get" for the 'No' side.

Just a week later, he wrote a quite different opinion piece, bordering on the euphoric, following a *Sunday Independent* poll that showed better news for the 'No' side, headlined: "A brutal poll for Team YES".

McGuirk's *MO* is more as provider of ideas and communications than electioneering and party building. But he knows the real task that faces the new right in Ireland is that of reinventing its disreputable politics and entering the mainstream without being accused of right-wing extremism.

Gript articles on immigrants, therefore, are couched in the language of concern for those (native Irish, that is) without homes and services, as expressed last month in an article by Uí Bhriain headlined: "Asylum arrivals surge... to record numbers". The author was described as a "contributor... a commentator and campaigner", not as a director and 50% owner of Gript Media.

Perhaps the most interesting comment from McGuirk came on his website a day later, February 9 last, where he lauded an immigration protest in Dublin, warning, however: "But lads: marches don't do much except make you feel good about yourselves. While you're marching, the established parties have canvassing plans for every housing estate, candidates with leaflets printed and ready to go, and posters ordered. All the grassroots energy in the world is no substitute for proper organisation. And on that front... Irish populists are a mess. My feeling is still that the June elections will come 5 years too early for those demanding truly radical change."

McGuirk has put his finger on the real problem for the new right – its lack of political and organisational coherence. However, it is not just organisation but a lack of proper policies on housing, health, the cost of living and so on that will continue to stymie the real growth of the movement he champions.



'STRANGER THAN FICTION'

A DRIVER maintained that a breath sample he gave to gardai, which showed he was over the drink-driving limit, was invalid as the arresting garda gave him chips prior to the sample. Killarney District Court heard that Daniel Shanahan, of Tullig, Kilflynn, Tralee, had been celebrating his 78th birthday last June when he was pulled over by gardai, who then noticed that he smelled of alcohol. Shanahan was arrested and brought to Tralee Garda Station. He alleged that he was given chips by Garda Leanne Haussmann and that interfered with a 20-minute "nil-by-mouth" fasting period prior to a breathalyser test. Garda Haussmann told the court she doesn't "eat chips". Judge David Waters said he didn't believe Shanahan's story for one minute, to which the defendant insisted that the truth "is sometimes stranger than fiction". Shanahan was banned from driving for two years and fined €300. *Kerry's Eye*

CRAP SHEET

CLONAKILTY DISTRICT Court heard the case of James Healy, who – having been arrested for dangerous driving – took a swig from a bottle of whiskey before defecating on the ground and removing his clothes. On July 3 last, Garda Joseph Tippins spotted a car being driven in a dangerous manner by the defendant, of Farran, Ring, Cork. The officer told the court that when he approached the vehicle, he saw Healy take a bottle of Jameson from the passenger seat and attempt to drink from it. After removing the bottle from the defendant's hands, Healy informed Garda Tippins that he needed "a shit", before dropping his trousers and defecating. Healy attempted to clean himself using some grass and tried to throw some excrement at Garda Tippins. He then removed his remaining clothes, which had become soiled. Healy was disqualified from driving for four years, while three four-month custodial sentences were issued for refusing to give a breath sample, dangerous driving and drink driving. *Echo*

'RAT BASTARDS'

JUDGE EIRINN McKiernan issued a bench warrant at Drogheda District Court for the arrest of a man accused of public intoxication and engaging in threatening and abusive behaviour outside a Drogheda hospital. On November 18, gardai spotted Michael Kearney (32) of Ashling Park, Dundalk, causing a disturbance on Windmill Road following his discharge from the nearby Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital. The court heard that the officers told Kearney multiple times to leave the area but he told them to "fuck off", adding that they were "rat bastards". The defendant failed to appear in court and, upon hearing that he had 18 previous convictions, Judge McKiernan issued a bench warrant for his arrest. *Drogheda Leader*

• Please send suitable contributions to: *Bog Cuttings*, *The Phoenix*, 44 Lr Baggot St, Dublin 2, or email bogcuttings@thephoenix.ie



Declan Ganley