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**British special forces in Gaza?**

**Pillar: Limerick's John Moran**



**Young Blood: TCD's Catherine Arnold**

**Ian O'Doherty's bad year**



**Catherine Martin's €7m headache**



**ALSO: Lyra v Beyoncé; Oliver Tattan's new venture; Jennifer Carroll MacNeill's disappointment; Far right spoiling for a fight; John FitzGerald's dismal forecast; Mark Gallagher's D4 mansion**



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## AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

## AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



## BRITISH SPECIAL FORCES IN GAZA?

THAT BRITISH Tory politicians should call for a halt to British arms supplies to Israel is most unusual, coming as it does from those who normally support Israel regardless of whatever military atrocities they commit. Britain's support for Israel depends on it abiding by international humanitarian law, threatened UK foreign secretary David Cameron, most unusually. That the deaths of six of the seven aid workers killed by Israeli air strikes recently were Western is not unique, although it is not typical. But the anger of the British government with Israel is most unusual. Why so?



David Cameron

A spokesperson for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees could not explain when asked why comparatively so little attention was paid to the 175 of its aid workers killed by Israeli forces. The standard, racist explanation is that Palestinian lives are less important than white Europeans. But does this really explain media and government outrage in the UK?

*The Phoenix* recently reported that many British media outlets had published a raft of stories last October about the SAS being deployed on standby in Cyprus in case they were needed to rescue British hostages seized in Gaza. However, a sudden silence descended on the UK media, which was explained by the issuance of a D Notice (see edition 8/3/24).

From Ukraine to Afghanistan and Belfast, undercover special forces of the SAS and

other units of the British Army have been deployed in various civilian roles, often as community volunteers and the like. The description of World Central Kitchen personnel as aid workers is truthful but it is not the whole truth. They were in fact security workers on a contract for their employer, Solace Global. While they may indeed have been motivated by charitable ideals, their military history and that of the principals in Solace Global indicates an enduring relationship with Britain's armed forces.

One was Derek Chapman, who was reported in the *Guardian* as being a member of the SAS before he moved into private security work. James Kirby had been a sniper with the British Army in Bosnia and Afghanistan, and James Henderson had served with the elite commandos of the Royal Marines before working with private security firms in various hot spots. The three were regarded as having skills learned in Britain's special forces.

Solace Global's managing director of its maritime section is Paul Queen and his firm boasts that he began learning operational and other skills in the Royal Marines. Martin

*Continued on page 4*

**SURPRISING TO see that, according to filings in the Companies Office for Morrison Private Settlement Trust Operations (MPST), the colourful Ben Gilroy has changed address from dreary Navan to sunny Albufeira in Portugal, as has fellow director Charlie McGuinness, previously of Tully in Monaghan, albeit to a different address on the Algarve.**

**Many moons ago Gilroy was the subject of a High Court order from Judge Robert Haughton preventing him from providing advice to others who found themselves before the courts. Although the MPST didn't feature prominently in the 2018 case – concerning a legal action by AIB against borrower Seamus McQuaid – it did get a mention when Haughton discussed Gilroy's finances.**

**The trust had claimed ownership of assorted valuable properties (the subject of charges by AIB) and the judge raised the issue of "fees" allegedly paid to the trust, with Haughton claiming that Gilroy had "probably" been in receipt of remuneration "in respect of his activities as a trustee".**

**The recent filings for MPST show that Gilroy and McGuinness each hold 50%. The good news is that at the end of 2022 the trust, which was set up to assist those involved in distressed assets litigation, was sitting on an accumulated surplus of €176,000.**

## GLENCREE'S NEW FACES

THREE MONTHS on from the appointment by the Department of Foreign Affairs of consultants to carry out a review of corporate governance at The Glencree Centre for Reconciliation, a final report is awaited. What has arrived is a new-look board, as a result of assorted exits and entrances.

It will be recalled (see *The Phoenix* 9/2/24) that there had already been rather a lot of coming and going on the board at the Glencree Centre – a charity that is funded directly by the taxpayer to the tune of around €½m a year, with a further similar sum from assorted not-for-profit entities.

Despite the turnover at board level, however, there is no sign of barrister Ciarán Toland SC, who was announced as chairman designate last November. It was shortly after this that a number of existing directors resigned and were immediately replaced by Denise Collins (installed as interim chair), Barbara Walshe and Mary Curtin. The three amigos had previously served on the board for 12 years, nine years and seven years respectively.

Last month, all three exited once again, as did fellow directors Niamh Darcy, Sean McGearty and Aisling McKenna. In their stead come half a dozen new arrivals, the most high profile of whom are former Irish Writers Centre director Valerie Bistany and ex-*Irish Times* director and all-round establishment insider Tom Arnold.

They are joined by Aidan Horan, James Bridgeman, Robin Hanan, and Geoffrey Corry.



Valerie Bistany

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Continued from page 3

Veale's title is operations director – risk, with Solace Global boasting that, “following a successful career... in the Royal Marines and UK Special Forces, Martin has worked as a security consultant and advisor to military units, governments and blue chip companies. After a period working in the Middle East, Martin took the opportunity to join Solace Global Risk as head of operations.”

Veale's blurb on the company website gives a clue to the relationship between Solace Global and various “military units” and “governments”, doubtless all western.

The three men who were killed by the Israelis were obviously engaged in security work protecting aid workers in Gaza. But the western world, and especially Britain, is full of private security firms staffed by former military and intelligence operatives in their countries' armed forces and these firms invariably retain links with state security forces. We may never know the precise relationship that their firm may have enjoyed with British state security and its interests in Gaza.

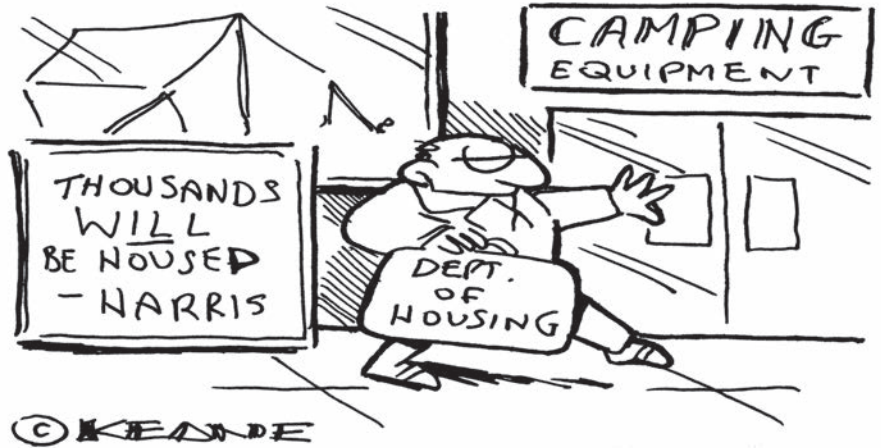
## JOHN FITZGERALD'S DISMAL FORECAST

DESPITE ITS headline-grabbing effect, the report by John FitzGerald and Edgar Morgenroth, entitled Northern Ireland Subvention – Possible Unification Effects and predicting that a united Ireland would cost southern taxpayers tens of billions, got a cool response from some of the more discerning critics in this field. This would not be the first time that FitzGerald caused a stir with his distinctly pessimistic forecasts for a united Ireland.

One thumbs down this month came from a disturbing source, FitzGerald's old professional institute, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), where for some years he was its lead economist. However, the ESRI's current research director and economics professor, Dr Seamus McGuinness, delivered a harsh judgement on the subvention report, saying it was “static” and “unrealistic” in dealing with the manner in which unity would unfold.

“This mini-industry of estimating subvention... really makes no sense in terms of the reality of how a transition around constitutional change has to happen and has to be managed and planned for,” said McGuinness.

An equally wounding source, financial guru Cliff Taylor at the *Irish Times* – where FitzGerald has been a regular columnist for a century or two – was also unenthusiastic or at best agnostic. Taylor regards the subvention argument (the cost to Ireland of replacing UK subsidies) as one dimensional



and says the report “explicitly does not look at the wider economic impact of unification”. Taylor also points to other reports that predict “tens of billions in economic gains” that would result over seven or eight years, although he also says they might be optimistic.

FitzGerald wrote a strongly partitionist article in the *IT* five years ago headlined, “Irish unity poses greater risks to Northern Ireland than Brexit does”.

The newspaper simultaneously published a report co-authored with Morgenroth – entitled *The Northern Ireland Economy: Problems and Prospects* – on which FitzGerald's article was based.



John FitzGerald

The report predicted that a united Ireland would see living standards in the republic fall by 15%.

The latest ‘subvention’ report by FitzGerald and Morgenroth was published by the Institute for International and European Affairs (IIEA), which describes itself as an international think-tank but which, despite its portentous title, is not an academic body.

It does, however, know all about subventions. Its founder, Brendan Halligan, devised an ingenious revenue-raising scheme, whereby each government department was requested to donate to the institute and the annual sums, which began at IR£1,000 circa in the early 1990s has since reached the level of at least €10,000 pa and much more from some departments. Banks and corporate bodies also contribute to the IIEA, which exists to promote EU federalism.

Unity in Europe but not in Ireland, it would appear.

## JOYLESS JUNIOR JENN

IT'S A long way down from pre-breakfast delusions of becoming taoiseach to not even making it into Cabinet but that has been the career curve travelled by Jennifer Carroll MacNeill recently. Jennifer, however, must have known when she made the

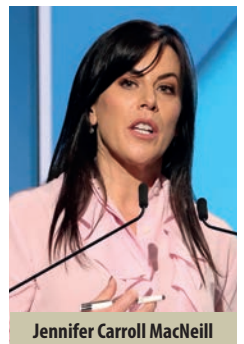
first of several early morning phone calls soliciting leadership support within hours of Leo Varadkar resigning that she was likely to pay a price for such over ambition.

Apparently not, as junior minister Jenn was described by smirking colleagues as smouldering with resentment at Simon Harris's failure to appoint her to Cabinet. That she was given the plum job among the juniors as minister of state for European affairs did little to mollify her and she was quite unable to hide her pique at not being catapulted into Cabinet proper by the new Taoiseach. But Junior Jenn's colleagues were equally unimpressed with the south Dublin diva's sulk, given her failure to appreciate that her new job is the best of the rest after senior ministers.

One of the chief responsibilities of the minister for Europe is attendance at a relentless stream of meetings in Brussels and elsewhere, involving meetings with serious leaders across the globe. So it was interesting to note that, while previous ministers for Europe invariably accompanied the taoiseach on trips to Brussels, Junior Jenn did not travel to Europe with her Taoiseach last week.

This is a pity as Harris had lined up various meetings with such as EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and others to discuss recognition of Palestine. Carroll MacNeill made it her business to revive the Oireachtas Ireland-Israel parliamentary friendship group and she followed this up by founding a similar Oireachtas parliamentary friendship group.

Not much has been heard about these inestimable groups since their foundation two years ago and presumably the minister will have little time for them now that she is in charge of Europe.



Jennifer Carroll MacNeill

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IAN O'DOHERTY'S  
BAD YEAR

LAST DECEMBER the *Independent's* lovable columnist, Ian O'Doherty, wrote about what he described as "maybe the worst year of my life" but it doesn't appear that things are getting much better, with the dreaded taxman registering a judgment against the media company co-owned by O'Doherty and his missus, PR queen Sarah Gallagher.

Ian didn't tell his readers exactly what had made 2023 so forgettable but maybe his significantly reduced profile in the *Indo* had something to do with his sombre mood.

Certainly, the newspaper's owner, Mediahuis, appears to have adopted a strategy of less is more when it comes to O'Doherty, who has found himself reduced to a single measly column a week, having been a near permanent fixture in the paper Monday to Friday, including a weekend column in the Saturday 'Review' section.

Separately, he lost his column with the *Irish Daily Star*.

Happily, Iano has been able to pick up assorted other gigs and he continues to pop up as a commentator on issues such as 'snowflakes', woke culture etc. For example, Newstalks Kieran Cuddihy recently wheeled the hack on to his *Hard Shoulder* programme to discuss "the right to be offensive", with Ian predictably telling the host: "There's nothing that really offends me."

O'Doherty's journalism also features in outlets in the UK, including the *Spectator* (natch), where he pontificated this week on "the real reason Ireland is going to recognise Palestine". The Tory rag's readers were informed that the move "is the latest way for the government to punish the Israelis", with Ian adding for good measure: "Ireland is a cold house for Israeli Jews".

Meanwhile, since September last, public relations consultant Gallagher (who started



Ian O'Doherty

out in O'Leary PR back in the 1990s) has held the high-profile position of head of communications and engagement at Gaisce – Michael D Higgins's annual presidential awards for young people who complete certain challenges.

Before that, she worked on marketing for the Women's Mini Marathon for seven years.

Back in 2015, Gallagher and her outspoken journo hubby incorporated a "media consultancy" company called Cloisters Media Ltd. The Tereure-based couple are the two listed directors here and each holds a 50% stake.

According to the last accounts filed, Cloisters was sitting on accumulated losses of €18,000 at the end of 2022, following a deficit recorded for the 12 months of €30,000. Nevertheless, short-term creditors, "including tax and social insurance", were owed €134,000, up from €95,000 at the end of 2021.

It is not clear how the two busy media players managed to overlook the tax status of their loss-making company but last month the Revenue moved to register a judgment against it for a paltry €16,300.

This could turn out to be another forgettable year for poor Ian.

CATHERINE MARTIN'S  
€7M HEADACHE

ARTS AND culture minister Catherine Martin came in for (yet more) criticism this week as a result of her ongoing failure to appoint a chair to the Arts Council, which has a budget this year of no less than €134m. Fans of Goldhawk will be well aware of how long it can take Martin to fill vacancies on arts institutions but there is also another issue relating to the Merrion Square Mafia that may have been distracting her.

Kevin Rafter, who had been appointed chair in June 2019, 'pulled a Robbo' at the end of last year when he opted to jump ship early in order to undertake a six-month sabbatical gig as a Fulbright scholar at Boston College.

Goldhawk is sure that, by the time he departed, the DCU academic was familiar with the car crash of an IT project that has started to ratchet up huge bills on Merrion

Square, way in excess of what was originally budgeted for.

Arts Council clients have been regularly informed for some time now that a new IT database system is in the offing. This is to replace the existing, much-derided and clunky system and provide a more streamlined online applications process for funding for the hundreds of client organisations and individual artists who are assessed for grants on an annual basis by the council.

The project dates back a number of years and while no one will tell Goldhawk how much taxpayers' money is involved, it is understood that an initial €2m was greenlighted after the initial sanction by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in July 2019.

Since then, there have apparently been quarterly "liaison meetings" between the Arts Council and Martin's mandarins "at which ongoing programmes are discussed, including the progress of the IT applications system".

Those meetings are presumably pretty short, given that there has been sod all "progress" to report, with the project having been the subject of redesigns. In the meantime, the meter is ticking at quite a pace, adding millions to the initial planned spend.

Goldhawk understands that a Grant Thornton consultant has now estimated that the finished product could be at least another three years away and the budget could yet top €7m. Given the council imposes very strict conditions in relation to the drawdown of grants by its clients, this is not a good look.

What any new chair of the Arts Council (as well as the six ordinary members still to be appointed) will want to know from director Maureen Kennelly is how the project has been managed, given the council's own lack of expertise in the IT area.

According to the arts department, it continues to be updated on the project, while the Arts Council had nothing to say about the budget for its IT upgrade but did admit that the existing user experience "is not good".

Furthermore, in relation to the so-called "transformation programme" that started nearly five years ago, "we are very disappointed for a variety of reasons this is not in place. We are engaging with the original contractors in relation to possible redress."

Watch this space.



Maureen Kennelly



"Yo! It's your TikTok T live streaming from The D with Vogue and Joanne!"



## ROBERT NAIRAC RE-VISITED

ROBIN 'THE Jackal' Jackson, of the Portadown UVF, was the most notorious assassin of the Troubles. Virtually all commentators on those turbulent times believe he was a British agent, run by the RUC special branch. He was a key member of the so-called Glenanne gang.

Jackson led the UVF team responsible for the Miami Showband massacre in 1975. In December 2021, the British government paid £1.5m to the surviving members of the group and the relatives of those who perished. One factor in the collapse of the State's defence was the discovery of a document that placed Captain Robert Nairac, a British Army undercover operative, at the scene of the atrocity (see *The Phoenix* 31/1/20).

The state defendants in the Miami Showband case allege that the £1.5m payment was made without an admission of liability. This was

nothing more than a face-saving exercise.

The UK police inquiry, Operation Denton, is presently looking at the activities of Jackson and the Glenanne gang, which encompasses the Dublin and Monaghan bombings in May 1974. The burning issue for the probe is whether any of them were British agents.

Unfortunately, Operation Denton has yet to re-interview Colin Wallace, a former British psychological operations officer who worked at British Army HQ in the 1970s. He has much knowledge of the gang (see *The Phoenix* 22/3/2024). The inquiry was meant to finish its inquiries in the spring and report next June.

Meanwhile, the families of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings are pursuing their action against the British state.



Robert Nairac

The Jackal was involved in that atrocity too. He drove the bombs used in the attack to Dublin. The British state brought an application before the High Court in Belfast seeking to have the action by the families struck out on a variety of grounds. The motion was rejected earlier this month.

It is perplexing that the UK threw in the towel over the Miami Showband massacre – led by Jackson – yet is fighting tooth and nail over the Dublin and Monaghan atrocity – also involving Jackson. All going well, the lawyers in the Dublin and Monaghan case will be able to produce the Nairac document, which shows the British captain was linked to Jackson and the Portadown UVF, when the hearing takes place.

In the legal action taken by the families and survivors of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, the NIO and MoD denied any involvement with the UVF gang in that atrocity. So they could hardly have admitted to the officers from Operation Denton that Jackson or any of his pack were British agents. Operation Denton, therefore, is unlikely to confirm that British agents were members of the Glenanne gang.

A new documentary on the atrocity, *17-May-74 Anatomy of a Massacre*, will receive its premiere at the Lighthouse Cinema in Smithfield, Dublin, on May 10.

## GOING NUCLEAR IN IRISH SEA

IN RECENT years much has been made by various academics, media and politicians about Ireland's dependence on the Royal Air Force (RAF) for air defence. Independent TD and former Army Ranger Wing member, Cathal 'Gung Ho' Berry even went as far as describing the situation as a "national humiliation and embarrassment".

Strange then that the same voices, and even Gung Ho himself, have not drawn attention to other RAF activities in close proximity to Ireland.

A recent briefing document, released jointly by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and Nukewatch,

describes how nuclear materials and warhead components for use in nuclear weapons are transported on 10 round-trip special flights annually by RAF C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft between RAF airbase Brize Norton in Oxfordshire and airbases in the US.

The RAF describes Brize Norton as "the largest RAF station" with over 7,000 personnel and contractors. Among other things, the station "provides rapid global mobility in support of UK overseas operations and exercises as well as AAR support for fast jet aircraft, both on operations and in support of UK Homeland Defence". The station's website advises the public to read its environmental policies and major accident emergency instructions. Here's why.



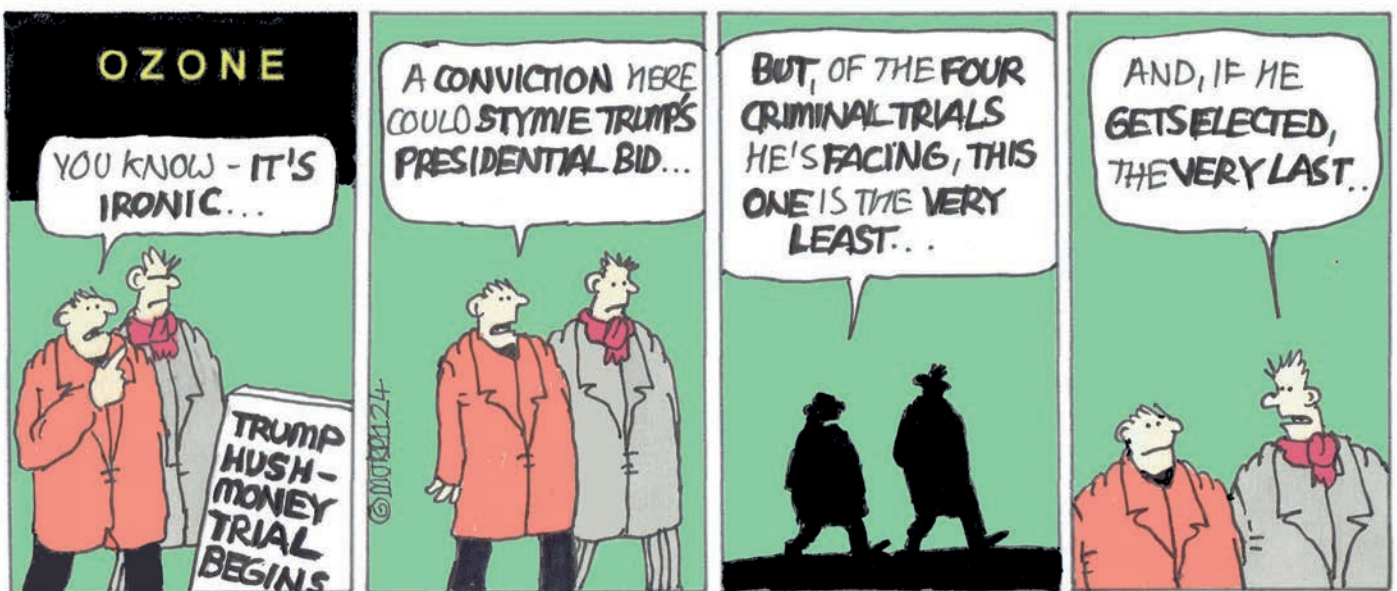
Cathal Berry

The CND/Nukewatch report outlines that special nuclear materials for use in Britain's nuclear programme are on board these flights including tritium, a radioactive isotope used in nuclear warheads; highly enriched uranium; a nuclear submarine reactor fuel and nuclear warhead component; and plutonium for warhead components.

When these special nuclear flights depart from Brize Norton they take one of two routes towards the Atlantic. Both routes, and the return trips, involve flying just to the south of Ireland, 25-30 miles off the Irish coast. While just outside Irish airspace, the flights are over Irish territorial waters and if an accident were to occur, it would pose a serious risk.

The report outlines how "both plutonium and uranium are flammable metals which burn easily if exposed to heat, creating a plume of radioactive smoke which is easily ingested. Tritium is a radioactive gas which is also flammable and can easily be incorporated in water and organic compounds, in which form it may be ingested. All three materials are carcinogenic."

Have our military enthusiasts and security experts nothing to say about this nuclear traffic in the Irish Sea?



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## AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



## FAR RIGHT SPOILING FOR A FIGHT

DESPITE THE attention the far right in Ireland has received in recent years, it has had little or no success in elections.

However, far-right politicians believe fervently that, in the upcoming local and European elections, their fortunes are about to change. The problem from their perspective is that there are several political parties vying for the same votes and, as a result, tempers are getting frayed.

A recent confrontation in the European Parliament between Irish Freedom Party (IFP) leader Hermann Kelly and Irish journalist Thomas O'Reilly, who works for the *European Conservative*, was due not only to personal estrangement but also to the aforementioned political tensions.

O'Reilly's supporters in the *Burkean* claim that "Kelly slapped a phone out of Thomas O'Reilly, a young Irish journalist's hand after confronting O'Reilly and trying to instigate a fist fight between them". They claim that this was only the latest incident in a campaign of harassment by Kelly and that it was reported to both the Brussels police and the European Parliament security.

Kelly has dismissed these claims, arguing that he has had an impeccable working and behaviour record in the European Parliament over the last 15 years. He published a picture of O'Reilly on X and made a string of insulting comments about him.

The context for this row is that Kelly and the IFP have been outflanked by the emergence of Independent Ireland (II). Party leader Michael Collins recently claimed that the II will run somewhere in the region of 75 candidates in the local elections. With former RTÉ midlands correspondent Ciaran Mullooly announced as its candidate for the Midlands North-West constituency in the European elections, the II has grabbed headlines. The new party also hopes that talk radio personality Niall Boylan will run for it in the South constituency.



Hermann Kelly

This contrasts sharply with the IFP's lacklustre campaign. Kelly hopes to run 20 or so candidates in the local elections but many of those already announced are relative newcomers to electoral politics compared to some of the more experienced campaigners II has attracted.

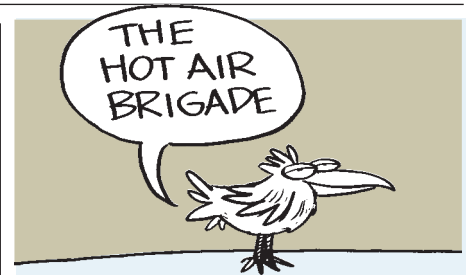
IFP candidates for the EU elections also lack the profile of those standing for II. While Kelly has attracted a smattering of coverage in the Irish media over the years, it proved irrelevant in the 2019 European Parliament elections, when he secured just 2,441 (0.67%) votes in the Dublin constituency. The IFP's other European candidates, Michael Leahy in South and Diarmaid O'Connor in Dublin, have little or no name recognition with the electorate.

Some IFP council candidates have also had negative publicity. Alan Fagan from Drogheda was stood down as a candidate after the *Sunday World* revealed some of his antisemitic, anti-Muslim, homophobic etc posts on social media. Paul Fitzsimons, an IFP candidate in Ongar, Dublin, also received some column inches after he was arrested by gardaí and charged with threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour in a public place; failure to comply with the direction of a member of An Garda Síochána; and possession of a knife in a public place in Dublin city centre in February.

A large amount of Kelly's credibility in the conservative-right scene in Ireland derives from the fact that he has worked in the European Parliament for a decade and a half, first as Nigel Farage's press officer and more recently for Romanian politician Cristian Terhes. The latter is a member of the European Conservatives and Reformist (ECR) group in the parliament.

Keen to show that he is not merely an errand boy for the likes of Farage and Terhes, Kelly shared a picture of a post he made at a 2023 rally of Terhes's Alliance for the Union of Romanians party, which stated he was invited to the event as IFP president. He also recently shared a picture of himself and Farage at the latter's 60th birthday party and the accompanying text asserted: "We worked together for over 10 years in Brussels and achieved great things".

Collins's ECR links are on a different level. In November he was on stage at its conference in the Lyrath hotel in Kilkenny and in December he spoke at Fratelli d'Italia's annual Atreju gathering in Italy.



Join the Harris juggernaut. **Enda Kenny speech at Fine Gael's ard fheis**

I'd read a lot about the ancient Celtic warriors going into battle. There were always rituals beforehand. I remember getting ready for the opening night of *Lord of the*

*Dance*. I started putting on my face paint. Then a guy showed up with this bowl. He said, 'This is for you. We slaughtered a bull in your honour'.

**Michael Flatley, Sunday Independent Life Magazine**

I wish only the best to Kate O'Connell in the rest of her life. **Leo Varadkar, quoted in Irish Mirror**

I'd watched a documentary about fast fashion and my cognitive dissonance was shattered overnight. And I jumped in at the deep end and did no less than a six-month buying ban for myself. So that was a little baptism of fire into it. **Fionnuala Moran on Drivetime, RTÉ Radio 1**

Simon [Harris] quickly displayed the attributes that are needed to be a minister – the ability to listen, compassion, an agile mind and the ability to speak without hesitation, a firm belief in his abilities.

**Newly appointed minister of state Peter Burke speaking in the Dáil**

Objectivism maintains that individualism and devotion to personal productive achievement should be our only driving force. Today, Elon Musk exemplifies the virtues that Rand eulogised in *The Fountainhead*. **David McWilliams, Irish Times**

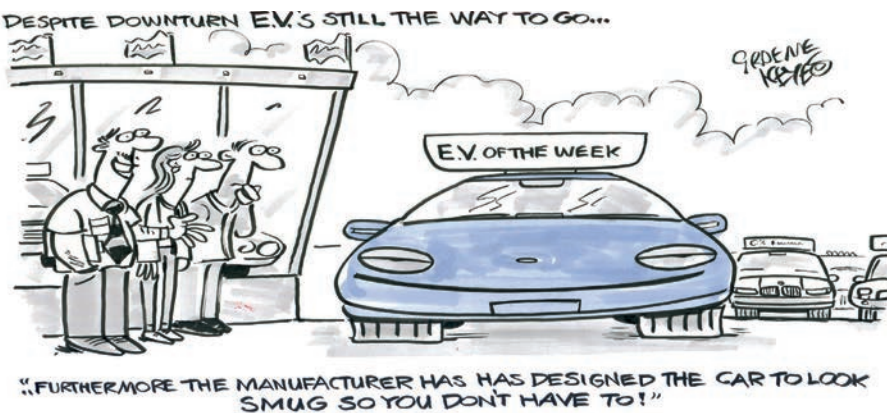
Harold Macmillan used to talk about 'events, dear boy, events'. Those times in life when the least expected things happen. Such events happened to me last summer. Despite it being an exceptionally difficult time, it made me reassess and explore new opportunities to realise some dreams I've long held in my heart. **Ryan Tubridy on the launch of his new podcast, Instagram**

It's also skilfully produced (by NK Productions, which also makes *Path to Power*, with Matt Cooper and Ivan Yates), with seamless edits, warm audio, Walliams's measured baritone playing counterpoint to Tubridy's lickety tenor. **Fiona McCann on Tubs's podcast, Irish Times**

Coachella doesn't deserve Blur – I saw them in Dublin in 2013 when gigs were about the music and not just Instagram opportunities. **Chrissie Russell, Irish Independent**

I am probably one of the happiest divorced women on the planet.

**Sharon Corr, RTÉ Radio 1**



Please send suitable contributions to: The Hot Air Brigade, The Phoenix, 44 Lr Baggot St, Dublin 2 or email: hotair@thephoenix.ie



## AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



## FARMERS' PR CAMPAIGN

FOR DECADES scientists have warned of the extreme vulnerability of global food production systems to disruption as climate change accelerates. This is now coming to pass in real time, with farmers across Ireland and Europe feeling the brunt of ever more extreme weather.

Last year, torrential rainfall hampered cereal crop production from France to Poland, while drought in southern Europe saw Spanish wheat, rice and barley crops hit their lowest production level in over a decade. Water scarcity is approaching crisis point in many Mediterranean countries, with large swathes of farmland in danger of becoming permanently infertile as



Ursula von der Leyen

temperatures continue to climb.

The spate of angry protests by farmers across Europe in recent weeks has seen the EU back down on many of its green commitments, including dropping agricultural emissions from its 2040 climate roadmap, with EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen abandoning plans to sharply reduce pesticide use across the EU.

While ironically much of this unrest is related to the pressure farmers are feeling as a result of extreme weather conditions, it has been hijacked and weaponised by a combination of far-right populists and agri-industrial interests to dismantle climate and biodiversity protection measures.

They have infiltrated and manipulated farmer groups and co-opted them to do their dirty work in destroying vital protections for nature and putting the kibosh on climate action across Europe.

The aggressive nature of many of these protests is doing little to garner public support for farmers. And some actions, such as the recent spraying of slurry into the offices of the French biodiversity agency, have provoked a furious public reaction.

In Ireland, despite the millions that have been spent in recent years selling the idea that our agriculture is clean and green, the battle for hearts and minds is not going well. This is evidenced by a recent report in the *Farmers Journal*

headed, 'New body to tackle poor perception of farming'.

The proposed new group will be given the task of countering what the *Journal* terms "misinformation regarding the farm sector" and challenging what it sees as the negative portrayal of agriculture on "environment, water quality, biodiversity loss and climate change".

Discussions around the proposed new agency are reportedly being facilitated by Bord Bia, the Irish food board, along with such bastions of environmental stewardship as the meat processors and dairy co-ops. Awkwardly, dairy and meat companies regularly feature on the Environmental Protection Agency's list of worst offenders in terms of environmental non-compliance and pollution issues.

A figure of €5m as a budget for this new body is being mooted, possibly raised via levies. Confusingly, there is already a slew of groups, from the National Dairy Council and Bord Bia to Agri Aware and Meat & Dairy Facts, already involved in assorted projects to spin the sector's reputation, so it's obviously felt they are not delivering.

It is unclear where exactly this latest boondoggle will fit into the existing agencies but one thing remains firmly off the table – reshaping agriculture to be genuinely sustainable, meaning low emissions and less chemical fertilisers, pesticides and pollution.

Still, why bother with the tough task of actual reform when you can just crank up the PR instead?



## DUP ELECTION NIGHTMARE

IT'S CHANGED times in the north. There's a reversal of the natural order of politics. Turmoil and confusion in unionism threatens the stability of the Stormont institutions, while Sinn Féin works to steady the ship. With Dáil elections looming, it is in SF's interest to maintain a working assembly and executive to show the party can run an administration in co-operation with its DUP partners. That's exactly what the DUP's opponents in unionism don't want.

DUP interim leader Gavin Robinson will have no honeymoon period. In the immediate future there will have to be a formal leadership election, as stipulated by the party's constitution. The 11 members of the DUP officer board hurriedly appointed Robinson the day Jeffrey Donaldson was charged but the 130-strong party executive will have to ratify him. There's scope for ructions then.

The party is moving heaven and earth to avoid a contest between Robinson and any candidate who opposes what party dissidents call the 'Donaldson deal', which got the

executive up and running again in February. So far, no credible opponent has emerged. The election of a deputy leader to fill the vacancy created by Robinson's elevation could be a different matter.

Potential division in the DUP executive is being stoked by Jim Allister, leader of the extreme Traditional Unionist Voice, who last month signed an election pact with the radical-right Reform UK party to fight seats in the north. Last weekend Allister repeated his intention to fight all 18 seats.

He also disclosed that last summer he had offered a Westminster election pact to the DUP and UUP to select a single unionist candidate in each constituency in the common cause of opposing the Irish Protocol. That might seem impertinent as the TUV have no Westminster seats but Allister was pursuing the chimera of 'unionist unity', offering the DUP a free run in key constituencies to maximise the anti-protocol vote. The DUP turned him down.

According to Allister, East Belfast MP Robinson was particularly opposed because he wants a UUP candidate to stand in East Belfast to split the Alliance party vote. Robinson's majority over Alliance leader Naomi Long in 2019 was only 1,819 out of a 42,600 poll. If Allister fields a candidate against him, he's a goner, which will cause a huge headache for the DUP because it will need yet another new leader.

Such is Allister's animosity towards what he calls the DUP 'protocol implementers' that he seems determined to go through with splitting the unionist vote across the north,

even though his TUV has no chance of winning a seat. What he wants, of course, is that individual DUP Westminster candidates reaffirm their opposition to the Windsor Framework and the 'Donaldson deal', thereby splitting the DUP.

Robinson has pushed back against Allister's threats, warning that Allister is in danger of allowing SF, in Robinson's words, to score "a hat trick". That is to say, SF winning most seats in the 2022 assembly elections, the 2023 council elections and then the 2024 Westminster elections.

The Westminster elections present Robinson with another headache: who to field in Donaldson's seat of Lagan Valley? Donaldson is currently suspended from the DUP so he won't be a candidate.

The DUP has three assembly members in Lagan Valley: Edwin Poots, the assembly speaker; Paul Givan, the education minister; and Emma Little-Pengelly, the deputy first minister. None of them is likely to risk standing, especially with a TUV candidate

also standing and likely to hand the seat to Alliance. Nobody's hurrying to fill the vacancy.

To complicate matters further, Doug Beattie, the UUP leader, has declared he will stand candidates in all constituencies. The UUP has no Westminster seats but with the turbulence in the DUP and TUV rivalry, the party has a chance of picking up one in South Antrim from a low-profile DUP incumbent.

Meanwhile SF stays aloof. Is there a word in Irish for *schadenfreude*?



Gavin Robinson



## WHITHER KATE O'CONNELL?

THE RE-ENTRY of Kate O'Connell to national politics via a place on Fine Gael's general election ticket in Dublin Bay South (DBS) is not a given, despite new Taoiseach Simon Harris's effusive welcome home for the former TD.

The storyline surrounding the period in which La Kate was consigned to a political nunnery since she lost her seat in the 2020 general election has been that she was the victim of political

and personal vengeance at the hands of then party leader and taoiseach Leo Varadkar. However, O'Connell's problem with FG members in DBS is at least as problematic as her difficulty with Vlad, despite her public taunts about his "choir boys singing for their supper" and the like.

Revealing the special talent for media spin that O'Connell and her team have developed, they put out tales of beastly behaviour towards her by Vlad's fans in the local organisation, including the dreadful taunt that she was some sort of intrusive culchie parachuted into Dublin 6 and 4.

The reality is that most of the hostility to O'Connell came from fans of the publicly pulverised former housing minister, Eoghan Murphy, rather than Vlad's people. Protective of Murphy and resentful of O'Connell's disregard for their boy after he had done so much to help her win a seat in 2016, they insisted on selecting councillor James Geoghegan instead of O'Connell to run in the 2021 by-election created by



Kate O'Connell



James Geoghegan

Murphy's flight from politics.

In the event, that turned out to be a disaster for new party favourite Geoghegan in DBS – Labour's Ivana Bacik won easily – and even some of O'Connell's detractors began to wonder if she would, after all, be the best candidate to win back a seat in DBS, which is Sir Garret FitzGerald's old constituency and where there is now not a single FG Dáil deputy.

Two aspirant party TDs – councillors Emma Blain and Punam Rane, from the Dáil constituencies of Dublin Rathdown and Dublin West, respectively – moved into DBS for the local elections and are now standing in Dublin City Council areas. Each has done this with a view to taking a local council seat and then lobbying party HQ to be added to the DBS ticket with Geoghegan, thus contributing to the gender quota and perhaps even taking the single Dáil seat that will surely go to FG.

This looks like very bad timing given the possible resurrection of La Kate's political career and while both 'transferred' councillors have been working hard locally, this may not be enough to prevent Harris and the party's national executive from

adding O'Connell to the ticket.

This initiative, however, will face the opposition of Geoghegan, the two potential councillor/Dáil candidates and many local members. Is Harris willing to risk a resentful local membership in revolt against O'Connell should she be added on without their approval?

Meanwhile, there are whispers that another constituency – Dublin Rathdown – may turn out to be the constituency whose burghers will be represented by O'Connell. Minister Josepha Madigan's resignation from national politics leaves FG with a difficult job of retaining its two Dáil seats here, even though it goes from three seats to four at the next election.

Councillor Maeve O'Connell had been expected to accompany newly enhanced minister Neale Richmond – an eager fan of new leader Harris – at the next election in Dublin Rathdown but there are doubts about her ability to retain the second seat here.

Could Kate ride into Rathdown and save the day?

## HELEN OF NAVAN SURVIVES

MUCH MYSTERY and knowing punditry surrounded the survival of Helen McEntee as justice minister given all the indications that persuaded most people to believe she was a goner. However, it was not so much the political permutations, geography, gender, ideology and so on that proved most crucial in the end.

Neither was it political circumstances and parliamentary party factors that led former justice minister Frances Fitzgerald – she who possesses the wise, shrewd head that has allegedly guided Taoiseach Harris since he was in short trousers – to persuade the new leader to keep Helen *in situ*.

The original plan was to install Peter Burke – and decidedly not Jennifer Carroll MacNeill – in justice for a variety of reasons, many of which were splashed all over the media in the days before the Cabinet was determined and announced.

McEntee had made a public and media pitch to be retained as justice minister but not many believed that this was going to influence Harris. Neither did many view the political influence of the McEntee clan as being of huge weight inside the Blueshirts, as has since been claimed.

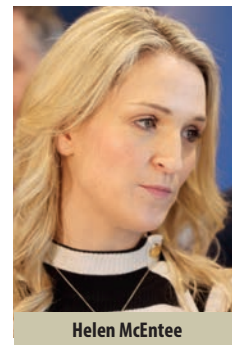
However, as the days passed the existence of one particular individual in the McEntee operation – a non-family person – became significant, namely Caroline

Murphy, wife of RTÉ programmer Sean O'Rourke and a press advisor to former justice minister Charlie Flanagan from 2018 to 2020. When Fiach Kelly relinquished the post of press advisor to McEntee, Murphy was appointed to replace him and her knowledge of the justice department was regarded as crucial.

There are various reasons why McEntee was elevated to the position of justice minister in 2020, as the profile published in *The Phoenix* (see edition 1/7/22) outlines. As stated there: "McEntee's loyalty to Varadkar and Murphy [Varadkar's chief of staff, Brian Murphy] was regarded as vital as Vlad was acutely aware of the UDI tendency at justice where some officials really do believe they are the permanent government. Having the trusty McEntee *in situ* suited the Taoiseach down to the ground, providing him with a regular supply of real, unvarnished information from the department from the most obedient of ministers."

Fitzgerald, as ex-justice minister, knew what a minefield that department could be. More specifically, she knew what an independent fiefdom it could sometimes behave as and how ministers could become prisoners or victims of the scheming mandarins or permanent government that some civil servants regard themselves.

Incoming Taoiseach Harris certainly did not want to become prey to this tendency



Helen McEntee



"Personally, Figgis, I'm all in favour of your new gender identity, especially as we can now pay you 30% less."

## AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

that exists in all departments, but especially justice, and was quickly apprised of the view that even the capable Burke could become a cropper there before he became fully familiarised with the area. Thus, a team comprised of Murphy and McEntee, who had much combined experience of the department, was seen as a safer bet.

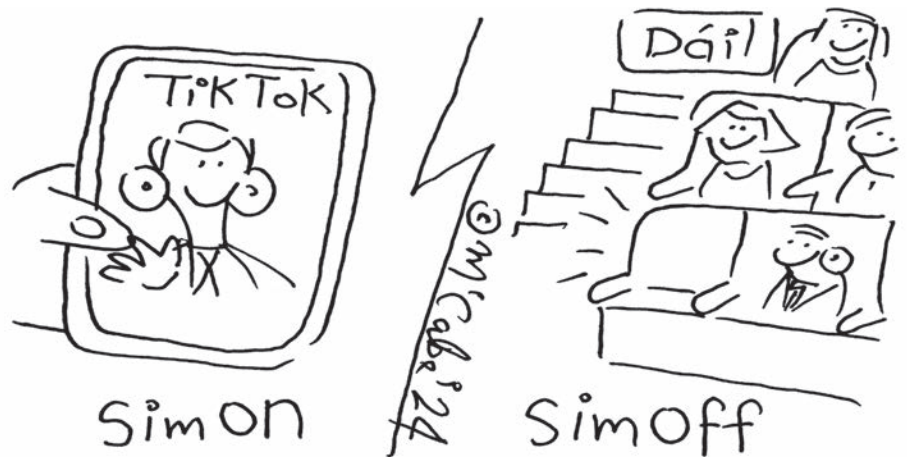
**THE COALITION parties have continued the sharing (among themselves) policy of divvying up Seanad seats if and when they become available – a policy that also includes telling northern unionists to feck off.**

When senators Michael D'Arcy (Fine Gael) and Elisha McCullion (Sinn Féin) resigned in 2020, the two by-elections in 2021 saw FG and Fianna Fáil combine to ensure that their respective candidates, Maria Byrne and Gerry Horkan, were elected by "their peers" (ie their parties' TDs and senators).

Last year SF senator Niall Ó Donnghaile resigned due to ill health and another



Mal O'Hara



by-election was called. This time the third coalition party, the Greens, got to fill the vacancy and its nominee, Mal O'Hara, was duly elected with the tacit support of FF and FG and no opposition (it was pointless).

O'Hara and Green leader Eamon Ryan immediately made statements about the Greens being an "all-island" party but the reality of this Seanad carve-up is a little more prosaic.

For a start, Malachai O'Hara is a former Green councillor who lost his seat in last year's local election in the Castle area. But Mal is also leader of the party in the north,

which helps to explain why he has been gifted the €76,000-plus salary for senators.

As well, Ian Marshall, a moderate northern unionist and ex-president of the Ulster Farmers' Union, had won a Senate by-election in 2018 with the support of then taoiseach Leo Varadkar and SF but was denied selection as one of the Senate nominees of the current Government in 2020. If the 'shared island' approach does not even amount to the sacrifice of a Senate place by any of the Government parties, then what might it mean when it comes to more substantial issues?

## WILL SINN FÉIN BOUNCE BACK?

GLEEFUL NOISES from Government parties and media critics at Sinn Féin's poll slide as well as its political confusion indicate a new confidence among coalition Government members that they can see off the party at the local, EU and, most crucially, general election in the coming months. How does Mary Lou McDonald and the SF leadership explain recent setbacks and how do they expect to return to the heady days of 12 months ago, when SF was polling in the mid-30s (the latest poll showed the party on 26%)?

The answer is that they don't expect to return to such levels, although most of their strategists believe the party will take well over 200 council seats (up from 81); three MEP seats (up from one) and will climb back to levels of 30% at the general election. If this transpires the coalition permutations will need AI to sort out the next government.

SF's blunders and U-turns have included, most recently, the denouncing of the Hate Bill, whose main target would surely have included racist attacks. This followed a dramatic retreat from its usual solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, which saw the party vote against demands to expel the Israeli ambassador from Ireland in motions in Belfast and Derry local councils and a refusal to boycott the St Patrick's Day White House festivities – unlike the SDLP!

The effect of these and the softening of other positions has led to the charge by its rivals that SF is not really different from the establishment parties. Ironically, this particular accusation grew out of the party's refusal to align itself with anti-immigrant protests and has been hurled at SF by the far right as

it attempts to lure its more nativist nationalist support away.

The charge of being part of the establishment does not square with the ferocious attacks from the actual establishment parties, such as Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, but it is an allegation that threatens to undercut much



Mary Lou McDonald



Pearse Doherty

of SF's appeal. The last fortnight has seen both FG and FF leaders, Simon Harris and Micheál Martin as well as a near-unanimous chorus of hacks deride SF as having flip-flopped on its politics.

The 2020 general election saw McDonald, Pearse Doherty and others manoeuvre both 'centre-right' parties into the elite establishment role as against the party for change, SF, a narrative that hugely benefited the latter, it being essentially true. This division will re-occur naturally at the next election but may be harder to maintain throughout an election campaign, depending on which issues are dominant at the time.

Israeli genocide may not be a big issue at election time but SF's prevarication over

Gaza has made a negative impression on many young people and left-wing activists, its natural support base.

The Social Democrats have been quick to take advantage here, with relentless attacks on Israel including a demand for withdrawal of the Israeli ambassador – unlike SF – which is hardly accidental.

Some SF strategists explain that external circumstances – immigration, continued housing crisis, increased far-right agitation – have combined to create a perfect political storm and that political and media opponents have exploited this (naturally enough). But they also concede that a conscious decision by the party leadership to behave as if they are in government and are being judged as such led to conservative responses, as was the case in the Gaza debate.

All of this has meant that the party has bled support on the left and the right. How will they get back to the status of front runners to lead the next government?

The belief is that the reason for SF's surge in 2020 was due to its focus on central, essential issues such as housing, the cost of living and health, which dominate in predominantly working-class communities and, to an extent, middle-class areas. These are what SF sees as 'its' issues and it believes it should and can resist attempts by the far right and Government parties to change the political agenda.

It also believes that the far right may take some local seats from SF but that, come the general election, the far right will have nothing to offer on the economy, housing etc.

All general elections are interesting but this one will be novel and doubly fascinating.



## IRISH PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

THE IRISH edition of the *Sunday Times* appears to have corrected its revisionist line on British foreign policy and has been brought to heel by the chaps in the London office, whose tutors in MI5 and Whitehall were aghast at the deviant editorial penned in the new year's Aawrish edition. Then, a stern editorial castigated the Irish Government's intention to abolish the triple lock and asked, rhetorically, if Irish voters wanted "their ministers, hungry for approval in Brussels and Washington", to have the power to send Irish troops to such hot spots as Iraq, Libya and Ukraine (see *The Phoenix* 12/1/24).



John Mooney

This was some sort of first for the *ST*'s Irish edition, which had become used to lecturing the Paddies for not standing up to Russia, China, Iran and the Palestinians, telling us we should ditch neutrality and defend the western way of life.

Last Sunday week the real *Sunday Times* in London published the usual diet of anti-Russian polemic in its editorial arguing: a) the Ukraine war had triggered a rethink at Nato; b) Donald Trump was right to lecture "delinquent" Nato members about not spending enough on weapons of war; and c) increased Nato spending was necessary even in the UK, where military cuts have bitten deep since 2010.

The Aawrish edition was written in an almost different language but its main points were: a) Nato doctrine of collective defence

was more necessary than ever because of Ukraine; b) Trump's undiplomatic words were unnecessary but his point was valid; and c) further spending by Nato was a good move, even in the UK. What an uncanny coincidence.

The *Irish Times* has aped these foreign affairs attitudes as they apply to Nato, neutrality and an EU armed force, but it appears to be more in tune with the latter than UK and US primacy in geo-political military matters. The *IT* recently ran an investigation into an Irish-based company, Irish Training Solutions (ITS), headed by Danny Cluskey, a former Army Ranger Wing soldier. ITS has been training the forces of Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar, a rival to the UN-recognised Tripoli government.

The investigative efforts by *IT* Europe correspondent Naomi O'Leary and security and crime correspondent Conor Gallagher amounted to several thousand words and dealt with the concerns of the Irish Defence Forces about former Irish soldiers working with ITS to train Libyan forces, which is in breach of EU and UN embargoes on such work in that country.

It may be that *ST* security correspondent John Mooney – whose view of Irish foreign and security policy does not conflict with his newspaper's western world view – believes that an investigation into ITS is small beer compared to the major inquiries he conducts into the nefarious behaviour of Russia and other malign states such as China and Iran. Mooney was one of those specialists that last February addressed a Zoom webinar organised by ITS entitled, Delivering Relevant Real World Security Skills – De-Risking the Security Threats to Ireland's FDI Success.

## CROSS (VERY CROSS) BORDER VIEWS

*IRISH TIMES* northern editor Freya McClements wrote extensively and flatteringly about the longest-serving newspaper editor in these islands, Noel Doran, who is retiring after 25 years as editor of the *Irish News* (IN), the constitutional nationalist paper in the north. But Doran may not have been altogether flattered by the complimentary tone of McClements's article.

The article dealt with Doran's attitudes as deputy editor and editor towards major

events in the north, such as the Troubles, the peace process, Brexit and so on, as well as central personalities like John Hume, Ian Paisley, Gerry Adams etc.

Doran also touched on prospects for a border poll and argued that it would happen around "2030, maybe a bit beyond that", but it must surely happen and unionists cannot hold it back for too long.

Thankfully, the editor of the sole nationalist newspaper voice in the north appears not to have been asked what he thought of the Irish Government's attitude to his part of the, er, country and especially the sense of abandonment by Dublin that many nationalists have felt down the years. It may be that readers of the newspaper of reference would be interested in such cross-border opinions but the more mature thinkers behind the *IT*'s project, Common Ground – Evolving Islands: Ireland & Britain, would probably not approve of such naked nationalism.

It is not as if the *IN* has normally been slow to voice the most trenchant views about Dublin ministers and taoisigh, especially in the recent past.

The newspaper excoriated then taoiseach Micheál Martin in 2022 in the most concerted attack on any taoiseach from the long-time voice of northern, constitutional nationalism. Academic and writer Brian Feeney, as well as former *IN* editor Tom Collins, savaged Martin, with Feeney describing his speech at the annual Seán Lemass commemoration as a "tired deadbeat sermon... of vapid, vacuous piosity saying nothing".

Collins, like Feeney, is a respected academic, author and BBC commentator and their joint broadside reflected the angst that the southern coalition government evokes among northern nationalists, especially since FF went into coalition.

Other Dublin ministers in previous coalitions to feel the wrath of the traditionally moderate *IN* have been former tánaiste Eamon Gilmore and ex-justice minister Charlie 'BlackandTanAgain' Flanagan.

It may be just as well that the *IT* did not elicit this sense of betrayal that the northern newspaper – the long-time champion of those extremist parliamentarians in the SDLP – has come to reflect in its editorials and columns.

*IT* political editor Pat Leahy last weekend referred – unflatteringly – to Derry barrister Joe Brolly as a "spokesman for Northern nationalism's resentment of their Southern confreres" and who will bring a "bitter, personalised and partisan" discourse to discussion about a united Ireland.

In other words, Brolly does not hold any common ground with the *IT*.



Noel Doran



"About time - they're warming up the lawyer"



Forests  
*for people*

Forests  
*for climate*

Forests *for*  
nature

Forests *for*  
wood



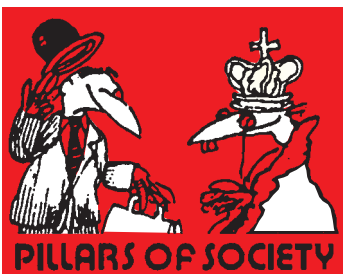
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 **COILLTE**



# 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.

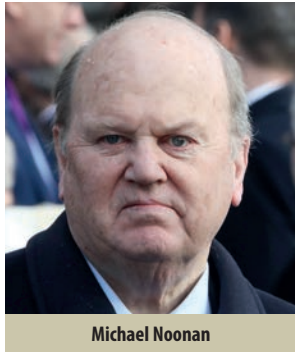
Some in Fianna Fáil believe its candidate, Dee Ryan – who is chief executive of

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](mailto:bogcuttings@thephoenix.ie)



# Catherine Arnold

Amidst rising political tensions within Trinity College Dublin Students' Union (TCDSU), Catherine 'Cat' Arnold, the (former) education officer, has announced their shock resignation. A union member for almost their entire college life, Arnold's decision to quit with immediate effect was due to issues with a toxic workplace environment and alleged bullying. Why did Arnold feel that resignation was the only option and how does this reflect on a union that, under the far-left leadership of László Molnárfi, has become more controversial than ever?

As the 2023/24 academic year comes to a close, many TCDSU members will probably be breathing a rather large sigh of relief. Disagreements, tensions and arguments are all par for the course in student politics – eagerly watched on by future union members, nerdy student media journalists and unemployed alumni on X – but this year took the biscuit. From in-fighting over harassment accusations, presidential impeachment attempts and, most recently, Arnold's resignation, it has been a year to remember.

But what was the straw that broke the camel's back and caused Arnold, a seasoned union veteran and political campaigner, to disappear just weeks before exam season?

If someone were to write a novel about Trinity (because God knows we don't have enough of those floating around lately), Arnold's character could easily, but perhaps incorrectly, be described as polarising. Like so many student politicians that have come before, Cat was affiliated with the youth wing of a major Irish political party, if Labour can still be called a 'major' party these days.

As the gender equality officer for Labour Youth and having worked closely with Labour LGBT, Arnold ticked all the right boxes for the left-leaning politicians on campus who voted Cat4Education in the 2022/23 elections (which had a record low turnout of 9% of the student body, with most of these voters likely identifying as the aforementioned left-leaning politicians).

In an apparent contrast, Arnold also worked as a research assistant for the Young Women's Christian Association. Not to paint all young people who are religious with a broad stroke but, on a college campus, their views can sometimes be co-opted by those with more right-wing tendencies, as happened during the Repeal the 8th Referendum.

Arnold was also involved in TCDSU from very early on in their college career – a green flag for union hacks and the left, but a red flag for those on campus whose votes only go to those outside the left-leaning 'establishment'.

Yet despite these potentially contrasting elements of Cat's *curriculum vitae*, Arnold was elected to the position of education officer with more than 81% of the vote. The main reason for this – and the main reason that their politics were not open to much scrutiny during the election campaign – is the fact that they were running unopposed. Perhaps if there was somebody running against Arnold, the contest would have opened the platform to more debate.

As it was, the few students who voted in

the 2022/23 elections voted for the only name on the ballot, Catherine 'Cat' Arnold.

It didn't take long for the job to get bumpy. October saw the first major schism between TCDSU president László Molnárfi and Arnold. After accusations of harassment by members of the Trinity Postgraduate Worker's Organisation (PWO TCD), Arnold, along with three other sabbatical officers and the vast majority of the part-time officers, brought forward a motion to withdraw the constitutionally mandated support that TCDSU must give to postgraduate unions.



Catherine Arnold

Arnold gave a measured speech with the word 'alleged' liberally sprinkled throughout, so its toxic meaning was effectively neutered. There is a world of difference between 'allegedly harassed' and 'harassed' in the world of politics – and sometimes also in libel law.

Molnárfi, ever one for the dramatics and use of his thesaurus, successfully one-upped Arnold in this regard. To him and his, the claims were "unproven", "unsubstantiated" and the whole shebang was "in bad faith". But as usual, Molnárfi didn't stop there.

Even his staunchest opponents cannot deny that Molnárfi has a gift for great soundbites and he claimed that "this motion, if passed, will reverberate throughout the entire country".

In what would, unfortunately for Arnold, be only the first in a series of defeats this year, the motion failed to pass.

Losses for Arnold did not automatically

mean victories for Molnárfi, however. His enduring legacy as TCDSU president will likely be the blockading of the Book of Kells exhibit in a stunt – which was in protest over the student accommodation crisis – that reportedly lost Trinity College over €25,000.

A close second on the list of 'things László will be remembered for' is bringing the question of the politicisation of TCDSU to the fore and almost getting impeached over it.

After being accused of multiple constitutional breaches for his political campaigning, Molnárfi last month faced a vote on whether he was to be censured (one step down from impeachment). In what, in hindsight, really should have been expected, Molnárfi's many supporters simply walked out before the vote could be held, thus ensuring the union council could not reach quorum.

The students' union is now well and truly split down the middle, with the more left-leaning Molnárfi supporters versus his more centrist and centre-right opponents, a minority of whom believe him to be some sort of conniving supervillain.

Arnold does not fall into that last category but that does not mean the two ended their working relationship on friendly terms.

Arnold described their time as education officer as "a fraught year with consistent issues of a toxic workplace environment and workplace bullying".

Molnárfi, on behalf of the union, strongly denied any such bullying and instead asked people to focus on all the good work his union has done this year. And 'toxic' can mean many different things to many different people. A union divided in half with political turmoil at almost every turn – that can be toxic.

It shouldn't be forgotten, however, that Arnold has also endured allegations relating to disorganisation and accountability throughout their tenure. Projects passed on to others, delays in responses, poor communication – that too can be toxic (allegedly, of course).

Arnold has remained tight-lipped about the juicier details of their decision to resign, disappointing those who treat student union politics like the world's longest and most insufferable soap opera. But what is clear is that Arnold is leaving the union in a more chaotic place than this time last year.

Yet perhaps there is also some bravery in the decision to just up sticks and leave before your time is up, knowing when to go – or perhaps we've all been reading too many think pieces on Leo Varadkar lately.





## MARK GALLAGHER'S €10M MANSION

THE ADVERTISING by Sherry FitzGerald of a redbrick pile on leafy Ailesbury Road, with a cool €10m price tag, not surprisingly marks the property as one of the most expensive to hit the market in recent years. Given that the near 6,000 sq ft house is the Dublin abode of banker **Mark Gallagher**, who is these days focused on London private merchant bank Umbra Capital Partners, a move might not be all that surprising.

Separately, it turns out that the six-bedroom mansion is registered in the sole name of Gallagher's wife, **Gillian Lambe**. It was in Gillian's name that the extensive planning application was lobbed in back in 2016, a year after the couple acquired the impressive property from **Jona-**



Mark Gallagher

than and **Margaret Aird**.

The scheme involved extensive conservation works, roof repairs, the reconfiguration of the single-storey extension to the side, additional bathrooms and a new internal layout for the main house, with new French doors, windows and doors, and the removal and relocation of certain fireplaces, the provision of a new study etc, etc.

The new occupants will have use of a "hidden games room" and a "bespoke" two-storey Hampton conservatory, the latter of which was installed by the Airds back in 2006, after an appeal by Ailesbury Residents' Association against certain aspects that could give rise to overlooking. An Bord Pleanála gave this conservatory the thumbs-up but a first-floor terrace had to be removed.

The *Irish Times* was most impressed with the "extensive remodelling" that had been carried out at No 81, noting that the owners had "spared no expense to create a superb period home".

Clearly then, a pretty expensive undertaking but, nevertheless, the rather optimistic-looking €10m asking price suggests that a hefty profit could be generated for the registered owner, Lambe, given that the house had

been acquired for 'just' €4.4m at the end of 2014. (Land Registry documents show that the Ailesbury Road pile was registered in Lambe's name in 2018, with a charge registered by KBC Bank.)

Mark Gallagher would be familiar with substantial profits, having worked at the likes of Morgan Stanley, UBS and KPMG's private equity division, whose minted clients often cleaned up.

Since 2019, he has been *in situ* as chairman of Umbra Capital Partners, which was established in London by its Venezuelan managing partner, **Gustavo Diquez**.

Umbra describes itself as "a modern merchant bank... We are passionate about working with entrepreneurs."

The good news for clients is that Umbra's core values are "integrity, transparency and alignment".



Tony McCoy

## AINTREE ANTICS

WHILE ZILLIONAIRE Geneva tax resident **JP McManus** won his third Aintree Grand National last Saturday, with the **Willie Mullins**-trained *I am Maximus*, it was two former McManus jockeys – now turned pundits – **Tony McCoy** (sorry Sir

Anthony Peter McCoy OBE) and **Barry Geraghty** who found themselves the centre of attention on the opening day.

An 'off air' video of the boys previewing the races was mistakenly posted on Kempton Park's X account, in which the pair could be overheard in a foul-mouthed conversation and giving their selections, albeit with the help of a member of the production team.

The legendary McCoy is heard telling the camera team member to "pick two good ones" for him, while Geraghty, between expletives, is heard describing a race as being "a septic one".

A tweet of the video on the gambler **Gearoid Norris**-linked @icyestretro X account resulted in a swift copyright infringement notice from Wiggin legal eagles in London, acting on behalf of Racecourse Media Group Ltd. This is the outfit responsible for managing the media rights for assorted racecourses in the group, including the likes of Aintree and Cheltenham.

The angry missive demanded the "immediate and permanent" removal of the tweet, failing which action would be taken.

In typical 'icy' fashion, the reply to the lawyers featured a clip of Geraghty using a familiar two-word phrase that ends in 'off'!

## SUSAN O'REILLY'S 'APPARITION'

A "STUNNING beachfront house hovering over the water in Howth" has attracted a lot of attention over the last week. The unusual structure was the subject of a protracted planning process, which ended up proving more expensive than expected by its owner.

The Lake House is the property of retired HSE heavy-hitter Dr Susan O'Reilly, who came in for some harsh criticism a few years back when a report of hers emerged recommending the winding down of services in Midlands Regional Hospital in Portlaoise. She also had to deal with critics when building her house in north Howth.

The super-modern structure, which "hovers over the water like an apparition" and is known as the Lake House, replaced an old bungalow that had been built on the site at Claremont Road, backing onto Burrow beach. O'Reilly swooped in to pick up the unremarkable structure at

and its replacement with a new 2,800 sq ft two-storey split-level structure with a balcony was lodged in May 2012.

It immediately attracted the attention of neighbours, with letters of objection received from residents of Corbridge Terrace, which focused primarily on the balcony on the western side.

One of the submissions, from Brendan and Debbie O'Connor via PMK Architects, criticised the scale of the proposed new dwelling as well as the overlooking potential of the balcony/terrace.

and its replacement with a new 2,800 sq ft two-storey split-level structure with a balcony was lodged in May 2012.

It immediately attracted the attention of neighbours, with letters of objection received from residents of Corbridge Terrace, which focused primarily on the balcony on the western side.

The objection described the new development as representing

"a gigantic increase in scale for the site".

Happily for O'Reilly, Fingal County Council planners greenlighted the striking project, although a condition was that various windows were to be fitted with obscure glass. Of more significance to the applicant was condition No 16, which included the payment of an "unreasonable" €35,200 as a contribution towards the council's infrastructure costs.

This matter duly ended up before An Bord Pleanála (ABP) as a result of both first- and third-party appeals, with ABP confirming the grant of permission for the house, including the contentious balcony.

Not such good news for O'Reilly, however, was that not only was the council's levy not reduced to €9,400, as suggested by planning consultants Marston, but the figure was actually upped to €36,750.

Ouch!



The Lake House



## LYRA V BEYONCÉ

IT HAS been hard to avoid Irish singer **Laura McNamara** (aka **Lyra**) in recent weeks as the hype machine cranks up around her eponymous debut album. Given that she is a protégé of **Caroline Downey's**, the media profile she has attained, despite her limited chart success, should not come as a surprise.

Certainly, the campaign to keep Lyra front and centre has been impressive and last weekend there were even stories discussing how the plucky artist's record could well be overshadowed by the new album from, er, **Beyoncé**.

Whether Lyra can topple the global superstar next week is not a question anyone is asking seriously but the subject has proven irresistible to the hacks.

Of equal significance for Lyra is the big advertising spend behind her album, with full-page adverts and posters in prominent sites around the country. This financial muscle is another tool for Downey and partner **Denis Desmond**, who are the most powerful force in the Irish music industry. (On her recent Irish tour, Lyra performed at the Desmond/Downey-controlled Olympia Theatre.)

Predictably glowing reviews in the likes of *Hot Press* and a slot on *The Late Late Show* last weekend are par for the course, with **Patrick Kiely** noting that Lyra has been "selling out venues across Ireland and the UK". The good news for fans is there are still plenty of tickets left for next month's UK leg.



Lyra

## LARA HICKEY'S CLOSE-UP

THE FILM and TV business has long been one where 'who you know' features high on the lists of credits, even more so since the coinage of the 'nepo baby' phrase that gained traction

online and has been chucked around with abandon.

A recent name firmly establishing a second-generational presence in the film and TV business is **Lara Hickey** (see *The Phoenix* 4/11/22), daughter of **James Hickey** – former star performer at Screen Ireland

(SI) and legal eagles MOPs, and current board member and negotiator at producers' lobby group Screen Producers Ireland (to name but a few of his hats).

Lara's younger brother, **Jack Hickey**, is a fellow actor and producer, with whom she incorporated production

company Copper Alley Productions as a 50:50 venture at the end of 2014.

Jack is listed as creative director, while daddy, James snr, came on board here as a director in 2019, immediately after he stepped down as chief executive of SI after 11 years.

Lara is also co-director of X-Pollinator – a development initiative "for female, trans and non-binary talent" – alongside co-director and founder **Katie Holly** of Blinder Films. Hickey also recently popped up as the producer of the new Storyhouse screenplay shindig for Element Pictures.

Happily, X-Pollinator is strongly backed with funding from SI, as was the recent Storyhouse festival.

While Jack was one of 30 early stage producers selected for SI's Emerge development programme (sorry, "bespoke initiative") this year, La Hickey's own undoubted accomplishments will presumably be garnished with her producer credit on Element's forthcoming Cannes entry, *September Says*, based on **Daisy Johnson's** novel, *Sisters*, and backed by the BBC and SI.



## TONY'S FAILED APPEAL

THE RECENT overturning by the IHRB appeals panel of the referral committee's findings on trainer **Tony Martin** is not the first significant setback for the trainer.

It will be recalled (see *The Phoenix* 5/4/24)

that, following an appeal by the IHRB on the grounds of "undue leniency", the panel chaired by retired judge **Peter Kelly** overturned a decision by barrister and RTE board member **Susan Ahern et al** to suspend a six-month training ban for Martin. The referral committee had ruled after the trainer's horse, *Firstman*, had tested positive for lidocaine in January 2023.

As a result of the March 28 appeal ruling, however, three

months of the suspension kicks in on May 15.

It was the third time in four years that a horse trained by Martin had tested positive for a banned substance, with both *Moonmeister* and *Patsy's Honour* having been disqualified for positive drug tests. In the case of *Firstman*, Martin blamed the paper bedding used at Dundalk (see *The Phoenix* 12/1/24).

Following the failed test at Dundalk, the IHRB sprung a surprise raid on Martin's training premises, when his vet, **Donncha Houlihan**, happened to be present.

Houlihan (the 100% owner of Greenmount Equine Hospital, which is "based at the edge of Limerick Racecourse") had absolutely no role in Martin's latest controversy. His name did feature in the IHRB inspection report on the grounds that "products including bottles of [pain medicine] 'Bexco Sarablock' were obtained from the car of Mr Donncha

Houlihan MVB". Significantly, Sarablock does not contain lidocaine.

Houlihan would be familiar with the IHRB referrals process

courtesy of certain clients. He was, for example, vet to trainer **Denis Hogan**, whose licence was suspended for a period of three months in October 2022 when *Ballyadam Destiny* failed a drug test for triamcinolone acetonide (TCA) and dexamethasone. It was determined at the hearing that Hogan had not taken all reasonable steps, having failed to heed Houlihan's advice that there was a withdrawal time of 40 days for TCA.

Separately, in May 2019 Hogan's horse, *Turbine*, tested positive for the anabolic steroid nandrolone, with Houlihan explaining that the nag may have been administered laurabolon (a product containing nandrolone) in error at his Greenmount Equine Hospital.

On the grounds that the treatment had been administered to *Turbine* instead of the horse stabled next door, Houlihan accepted responsibility and, therefore, Hogan escaped any ban for the error.

## O'BRIEN'S OBSTACLES

WHILE TRAINER **Aidan O'Brien** supplied three of the five runners in Leopardstown's Group 3 PW McGrath Ballysax Stakes, it was **Adrian Murray**

who provided the shock 50/1 winner, *Dallas Star*. It presumably proved very satisfying for newly freelance rider **Seamie Hefernan** to deliver on Amo Racing's charge, in what is customary seen as a Derby trial.

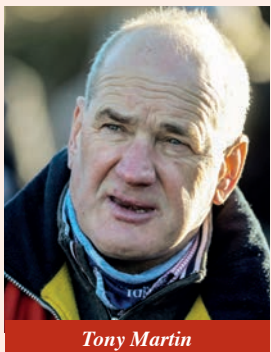
**Kia Joorabchian** and his advisor, **Robson Augiar**, will now have strong hopes for the former **Dominic Ffrench Davis** inmate.

Worryingly for Ballydoyle, another of its staying three-year-olds, odds-on favourite *Illinois*, folded quickly in the straight. This followed the odds-on shot *Capulet* having suffered the same fate 24 hours earlier in Chelmsford's Woodford Reserve Cardinal Conditions Stakes (the final leg of "The Road to the Kentucky Derby Series").

This race was won impressively by **Sean 'Ballymore Homes' Mulryan** and wife **Bernadine's** *Bracken's Laugh*. Sold for 200,000 guineas to former jockey **Ted Durcan** and the horse's trainer, **Richard Hughes**, at last year's Tattersalls Guineas Breeze-Up Sale, the son of *Zoffany* provided jockey **Finley Marsh** with his biggest success to date.

The horse will now head to Chester for the Dee Stakes – a race that O'Brien has won in five of the last six outings.

It could prove quite the contest.



Tony Martin

PUNCHESTOWN  
2024  
Festival

# DRAMA FROM START TO FINISH

30.04.24

04.05.24

[punchestown.com](http://punchestown.com)





# Irish Examiner

## Harris Targets Housing Targets

SOCIALLY MEDIA personality and part-time Taoiseach Simon Harris has announced his commitment to deliver "like, loads of houses, yeah?" to the people of Ireland by 2030.

Speaking in a TikTok video, he said: "If all of our followers give us a like and subscribe at the next election it would mean the world to us. We could then do things like build houses for everybody, because it's so not fair for anybody



to not have a house to go to – unless they're a Shinner TD."

In a post shared through his Snapchat, the Taoiseach declared: "Guys, Fine Gael are like the Uber Eats of politics, we have a strong track record in delivery – 50,000 houses a year is totes doable. We have nothing if not a strong track record on major infrastructure projects.

"Now, I've some unfortunate news about the National Children's Hospital budget and another delay to the Metrolink..."

### UNITED IRELAND TO COST €20BN A YEAR SHOCK

**HARDLINE LOYALISTS** have reacted angrily to a new report estimating that Irish reunification would cost around €20bn a year for two decades.

Interviewed on RTE's *Mourning Ireland*, TUV leader Jim Allister said: "This nightmare vision would mean exorbitant taxation and widespread impoverishment for nationalists while forcing millions of God-fearing British citizens to live under an oppressive foreign regime.

"Sinn Féin dictators are hell-bent on forcing unionists into a booming economy where there's full

employment and generous social welfare – and this will result in a dystopian future with pensioners starving in the streets."

Meanwhile, the DUP's interim leader, Gavin Robinson, said: "Public money should be directed towards funding Northern Ireland's urgent needs rather than wasting billions of pounds to placate all these Shinners."

#### URGENT NEEDS (IN FULL)

- ✓ Legal costs for ex-leaders
- ✓ That's it

### COSGRAVE TO LIMIT CONTROVERSY

Having returned as CEO of the Web Summit after a six-month absence, **Paddy Cosgrave** has revealed ambitious new plans to limit his controversies to five or six per day.



While the announcement has been met with some scepticism amongst the tech community, the combative entrepreneur insists the target can be met.

"Clueless tech reporters

doubting my ability to steer clear of controversy!" he posted on X. "Typical of the political reporters in this country, most of whom are shamelessly in bed with FF/FG establishment. Will post

more later, after I've read more of the Pulitzer-worthy reporting in *The Dutch*. Also have to attend emergency Web Summit due to some controversy or other I caused earlier... Doh!"

"On another planet" Mary Lou McDonald

"Terrible Si-Fi" Holly Cairns

## 3 PARTY PROBLEM

IT IS A PROBLEM THAT HAS LONG BAFFLED POLITICAL SCIENTISTS: JUST HOW LONG CAN THREE ERRATICALLY MOVING BODIES, JOINED TOGETHER BY FORCES UNKNOWN, SURVIVE WITHOUT DESTROYING ONE ANOTHER. WILL THEIR NEW STAR ATTRACTION, UNDERSTOOD BY EXPERTS TO LACK ANY GRAVITY, PROVE ENOUGH TO SAVE OR DESTROY THE FRAGILE BALANCE?



MARTIN HARRIS RYAN

### IRELAND TO RECOGNISE PALESTINE ...BUT NOT JUST YET

Tánaiste Micheál Martin has pledged that he will bring forward proposals for Ireland to recognise the state of Palestine, but not while Government TDs are risking their political lives on a daily basis.

Speaking in the Dáil and looking even more mournful than usual, Mr Martin said: "While the tragic conflict in Gaza is terribly complex, I have always empathised on a human level in both an emotive and vague way.

"But we should not add to the horrendous suffering of ordinary



people on the front benches. Morale is desperately low as we wait for US President Joe Biden to tell us what to do."

Taoiseach Simon Harris said: "It would be very easy to sweep all this under the rug to avoid flak over the coming months – so that's what we're doing."

### BACIK'S ASYLUM PLEA

Vulnerable people should be given shelter

Still trying to merge with the Soc Dems?





### TUBRIDY REVEALS FIRST BOOKS TO BE COVERED ON NEW PODCAST

**How To Disappear** by Dee Forbes

Fascinating insight into RTÉ payment saga, which I had some experience of. Shame about last chapter being blank due to Dee's failure to appear before PAC.

**RTÉ Pay Saga** by Public Accounts Committee

Definitely a rough read and not one for the faint of heart, especially for those of us caught up in the controversy. Some harrowing sections, particularly the chapter about barter accounts and Renault sponsorships.



**The Genius Of Noel Kelly** by Ryan Tubridy

Fascinating observational account of one of the greatest showbiz agents of all time. I'm his biggest fan!

(That's enough Tubridy - Ed.)

### TAOISEACH HARRIS OUTLINES HIS POLITICAL PRIORITIES:



- Climate change:** Make a few digs about low-energy Leo
- Finance:** Don't bet on any progress on health or housing
- Justice:** Blueshirts hoping Harris can bail them out
- Agriculture:** Fine Gael keen to avoid reaping what it sows
- Education:** Writing on the wall for the Government
- Social Protection:** Only a few ministries to dole out
- Defence:** Expect plenty of indefensible ones from Cabinet

### THOSE POSSIBLE GAELIC FOOTBALL RULE CHANGES

- Leinster counties to be given 15-point head start on Dublin
- Players to be given additional training in hand-to-hand combat
- Club championship games to go on double bill with UFC/WWE bouts
- Additional bars to be opened in grounds for bouts of lateral passing
- Tackle crisis of mass brawls (ie there aren't enough of them)

### NURSERY RHYMES FOR OUR TIMES

Taoiseach Simon met a pieman,  
Going to the Dáil  
Smirked Taoiseach Simon to the pieman,  
I'm the leader of you all!

Said the pieman unto Simon,  
Check the polls when you've a minute  
You'll see why Leo called time on  
The job - to drop you in it!



Hey diddle diddle Micheál's in the middle  
Of halting "false ads", he alleges  
But will Google be pleading  
They are no more misleading  
Than Fianna Fáil's election pledges?!

### Catholic Church "downsizes"

by Des Perate

Pope Francis has introduced the most radical revamp of Irish Catholic Church structures in more than 900 years. As a result, two west of Ireland dioceses are to lose their bishops.

The announcement was made last night by the Papal Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Bunga Bacardi.

Speaking outside a deserted cathedral in Tuam, he said that bishops are rattling around in churches much too big for their needs.

"As in all families, things change for us when congregations grow up and leave for good," said the archbishop.

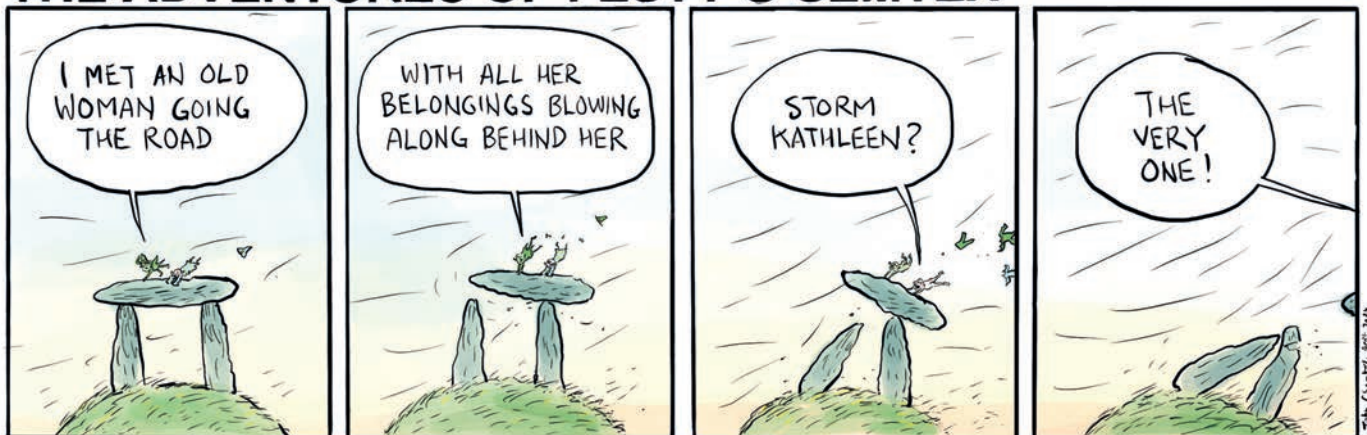
"But downsizing really solves the issue of clerical loneliness and social isolation - caused by empty pew syndrome."



### DONNELLY TURNS SOD ON RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE

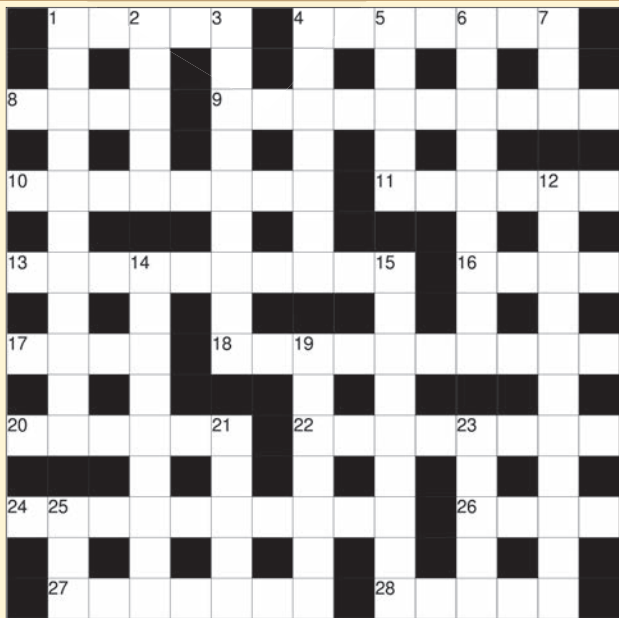


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Crossword by Procrustes

**ACROSS**

- 1 Old musician can travel without tour leader to non-stop dance gig before Lent starts. (5)
- 4 It's never too early for dam to play a role in what she must do to nourish her offspring. (7)
- 8 It's hard being treated as not truly precious among Episcopalians. (4)
- 9 Such loose erotic chat would not be tolerated by a government like Iran's! (10)
- 10 As you'd expect, oral testament included area where body parts will be found. (8)
- 11 Appalled that tag has been tampered with. (6)
- 13 One with an unhealthy pallor passed it around. That should be forbidden! (10)
- 16 Blow it! This instrument, making a comeback will touch directly on others in the orchestra. (4)
- 17 So you will have managed to solve at least one clue! (4)
- 18 Warning shout before craven one is fouled, possibly, but not only, at Craven Cottage. (6,4)
- 20 The deal is broken, by the principals we are told. (6)
- 22 What a savage! Putting trash can back into waterway! (8)
- 24 It's a big deal in the east when title-holder gives fit man drug to upset him! (5,5)
- 26 Is Leinster House upset on seeing how both hawks and doves have filled their own nests? (4)
- 27 Wild lad rode up to that gentle, sweet grandmotherly figure? (3,4)
- 28 Sudden large swelling giving rise in hospital to an on/off situation for operator. (5)

**DOWN**

- 1 How agitating helps dine until their strength and energy levels have been restored. (11)
- 2 I leave famous heavyweight in charge of boxer's medical attendant or his servant. (5)
- 3 It's exactly how an American would write a volume in measured terms to a friend. (9)
- 4 Keeps out of sight. Such tales are not true but they're not tall ones either. (4,3)
- 5 Achieve a merger of two small companies before a drink is served, a nightcap often. (5)
- 6 Be totally indifferent to fate of small bird mangled in collision with US military helicopter. (9)
- 7 Did the old high priest from Shiloh live in celibacy? No; he begat two nasty sons. (3)
- 12 A rustic, bucolic type is Brian, but Sue, perversely, is most definitely not. (11)
- 14 Despite varieties of beans ad, it does not mean that one indulged one's appetite for them. (9)
- 15 On bumpy road, combined UK/Irish rugby team on tour is proverbially as dead as them. (9)
- 19 If ulcer bursts, the resulting pain is going to be a hellish one. (7)
- 21 Not all get about a thousand red flowers to remember this engagement, and others. (5)
- 23 In other words, gets annoyed and worked up about work-shy one who does nothing. (5)
- 25 Place where citizens always seems to be on the brink of massive civil unrest, but not quite. (3)

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**LAST ISSUE'S SOLUTION:**

**Post only to: CROSSWORD COMPETITION, Phoenix Magazine, 44 Lr Baggot St, Dublin 2, Ireland**

**Across:** 1. Pagan. 4. Acrobat. 8. Eros. 9. Fradulent. 10. Kilogram. 11. Emetic. 13. Stationary. 16. Imam. 17. Inca. 18. Saturnalia. 20. Hermes. 22. Pastoral. 24. Montessori. 26. Iris. 27. Messina. 28. Elgin. **Down:** 1. Persistence. 2. Gusto. 3. Nefarious. 4. Anaemia. 5. Ridge. 6. Ballerina. 7. Tin. 12. Imagination. 14. Teammates. 15. Yorkshire. 19. Tapioca. 21. Sushi. 23. Owing. 25. Ohm.

LAST ISSUE'S WINNER: Clodagh Fennelly, Portarlington, Co Offaly

*Craic & Codology ... Craic & Codology ...*



**England's Lionesses Tamed by Irish Throw-ins!**

Football fans across the island were cock-a-hoop at Ireland player Megan Campbell's extraordinary throw-ins against England. As one fan, Jenny Blinkers, put it: "The Sassenachs had no idea what hit them. She was throwing the ball 38 metres, every throw-in was like a corner. She's deadly!"

Writing in the *Irish Times*, Fintan O'Toole eulogised the player, saying: "Megan has created a synthesis of association football and the Poc Fada in her elongated throw-ins. This mishmash of English and Irish culture means that every time she launches her trademark throw-in, she is reaffirming an optimism for greater Anglo-Hibernian co-operation."

It went largely unnoticed in the Irish press that Ireland lost 2-0.



**World reacts to death of OJ Simpson**

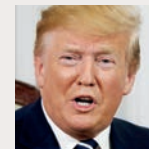
**Benjamin Netanyahu**

His ludicrous attempts to try and deny appalling acts of murder meant he would have made an excellent spokesperson for my government. He became synonymous with a pair of gloves but my hands are too bloody to wear those things.



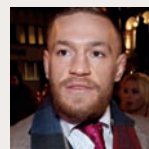
**Donald Trump**

OJ started out as an American icon but ultimately became a hate figure for half the country because of his behaviour. He did spend nearly a decade in prison for stealing some memorabilia, which is pretty harsh considering I'm still free after trying to steal an election.



**Conor McGregor**

The Juice was regarded as a great offensive player but, in fairness, I don't think he was half as offensive as yours truly can be. I think all the money and fame went to his head and it created a deluded sense of self-entitlement but, you have to give him some credit, he was a much safer driver than me.



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## Philips delivering bland taste at Greencore

NO DOUBT there were high hopes in Greencore that the new CEO, Dalton Philips, would be able to revolutionise the company. It certainly hasn't worked out that way and the latest figures are far from reassuring. Moreover, it is hard to see where Philips even wants to take the UK sandwich giant.

Philips was appointed boss in spring 2022, before his starring role in the Dublin Airport debacle when the north Dublin facility proved woefully incapable of dealing with the numbers of post-pandemic passengers hungry for international travel.

The DAA chief executive had overseen the redundancy of around half of the airport's staff at a cost of €100m, when the smart move would have been to temporarily lay off workers until the numbers began to creep up in 2021. The result was total chaos at Dublin Airport on May 28, 2022, when the operation had to be effectively shut down, with 10,000 would-be passengers stranded outside.

Matters were not helped by the revelation that Philips had used the special executive lounge that day to fly to Dubai. This service allows minted passengers to avoid security queues and delivers its customers by car to the aircraft.

Whether he would have still landed the Greencore job post-debacle if that gig had not been already nailed down is impossible to judge. Philips was appointed by chairman Gary Kennedy, ex-AIB finance director and chairman of Goodbody stockbrokers.

The timing of Philips's appointment did give the new man a six-month lead-in time before he actually took up the role of Greencore CEO in September 2022. Nevertheless, he has failed to shine there since.

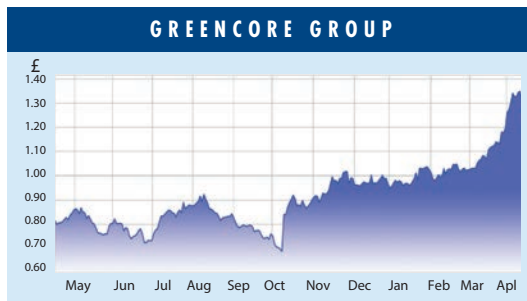
Philips was thus *in situ* for the whole of Greencore's last fiscal year, which ran to the end September 2023. On the surface, his report for those 12 months looks reasonable, with sales up 10% to £1.9bn and operating profit up 6% to £76m.

Trading margins, however, did

fall 20 basis points to 4%.

Disappointingly, the new CEO did not bother to compare last year's results with Greencore's last normal pre-Covid trading year to September 2019. For the record, in the 12 months to September 2019 the group actually recorded lower sales of £1.45bn so, on that front at least, Philips has not done badly at all. Revenue, however, is rarely a reliable indicator of performance.

At the far more significant bottom line, the 2023 figures are desperately disappointing, with last year's £76m operating profit comparing poorly with the £106m turned in in 2019.



As a consequence, the trading margin collapsed from 7.3% to 4%, while pre-tax profits were down 37% from £92m to £58m. Moreover, at the crucial earnings-per-share level, earnings almost halved from 16p in 2019 to 9.3p last year. This is simply a dreadful result.

Philips does boast an impressive-looking track record, having worked for the Jardine Matheson conglomerate, the giant American Walmart group, the dominant Canadian Loblaws supermarket chain, Brown Thomas, Boston Consultancy and, before joining DAA, the William Morrison supermarket group, the fourth largest in the UK.

In its last full year under Philips, to January 2015, Mor-



Dalton Philips

risson's profits just on halved to £440m, forcing the group into an impairment provision of £1.3bn and a pre-tax loss of just on £800m. The then chairman of Morrison advised shareholders that the situation "required a change in leadership".

(Philips's successor as CEO, David Potts, took over in March 2015 and said he would "set about injecting new pace into the turnaround" and, remarkably, identified £1bn of savings to be made by restructuring its head office and rationalising the group's retail chain. Potts's record in recent years, however, has not impressed.)

After Kennedy announced Philips as the new Greencore boss, he noted: "There are many things about Dalton that impress me. He has a strong track record of leading dynamic consumer-related businesses and he has an outstanding knowledge of the grocery sector. He is an excellent leader, very effective communicator and has a great awareness of all stakeholder interests". (Last year, however, Kennedy resigned as chairman, a month before his death at the age of 65 after a short illness. He was replaced as Greencore chair by Leslie Van de Walle.)

During his five-year stint in Dublin Airport, Philips made several structural changes, in particular "consolidating" food and beverage concessions into larger tender packages "in order to be more proactive in the strategic

management of this important element of passenger experience".

In 2020, he completely reversed the policy that had been adopted by DAA to avoid the airport having a dominant food and beverage operator, which had been the case in the late 2000s. Nevertheless, he gave SSP 24 additional food and beverage outlets, both airside and landside in the airport, to give it a dominant position. Coincidentally, after Paddy Coveney jumped ship from Greencore in 2022, he became CEO of SSP.

### NEW ROLE

Other Philips legacies at DAA include the building of a second €500m runway (as part of a costly €2bn development plan), the budget for which did not include the €200m cost of building a tunnel underneath the new runway. Given the 32 million passenger cap imposed by Fingal County Council, the whole expensive expansion project looks impossible to justify in the absence of assurances that the cap would be lifted.

When taking on his new role in Greencore, Philips said: "I already knew about the fantastic work that Gary Kennedy, Emma Hynes and Kevin Moore were doing in leading the business

*Continued on page 26*

Reference the Market Abuse Regulations 2005, nothing published by Moneybags in this section is to be taken as a recommendation, either implicit or explicit, to buy or sell any of the shares mentioned.



# I-Res results would have swung outcome

JUST WHEN the Vision Capital Corp (VCC) boss Jeffrey Olin was on the verge of pulling off a coup at the EGM for I-Res Reit in February (see *The Phoenix* 9/2/24) and would presumably have won out at the upcoming AGM on May 2, he surprisingly got cold feet. Instead of putting up his five board nominees and voting off the bulk of the existing board – a task clearly eased by the exit of CEO Margaret Sweeney and chairman Declan Moylan – Olin agreed to a compromise outcome. But although he did seek to have three of his nominees imposed, the I-Res board called his bluff, particularly in relation to the very well-informed Colin Lauder (ex head of research at Goodbody), and the result has been a green light for just two VCC suits – Dick Nesbitt (ex Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce) and proxy adviser Amy Freedman. This represents a hell of a result for the I-Res board, who were on a very sticky wicket, given the figures then in the pipeline.

In timing the requisition for the EGM for February 16 last, the board of I-Res, under outgoing chairman Moylan and outgoing CEO Sweeney, pulled off quite the manoeuvre. The board would have been aware that there was really bad news coming down the tracks but this did not break before the high-stakes EGM.

Only a week later, on February 23, that the company confirmed a pre-tax loss of €114.5m and a reduction in the critical net asset value per share of a totally unexpected 12%, with this falling from 160c at the end of 2022 to 131.7c as of December 2023.

The I-Res board had a three-month window to time the holding of the EGM and they could have easily scheduled it to have taken place after the results were announced or, indeed, brought forward the results, given the critical nature of the information.

In such a scenario, it is hard to see how Olin and his activist VCC outfit (which held 5% and was supported by I-Res's original founders and fellow Canadian property investors, Capreit, which then sat on a chunky 18.7%) would not have won the day.

As it was, the dissidents secured 40.91% of the vote to remove Moylan, 40.05% to remove Sweeney, 46.8% to remove CFO Brian Fagan, 40.83% to remove Joan Geraghty and 40.57% to remove Tom Kavanagh.

The turnout was huge, with 73.97% of the total issued capital actually voting on the day – a level that is two or three times what would be normally expected.

Clearly, the I-Res board did a fantastic job at securing shareholder support, something it

would surely have found significantly more challenging if the 2023 results had been known in advance of the vote.

With the AGM now deferred to May 10, it is likely that the event would have proved something of a bloodbath. There is certainly no advantage for shareholders in having been kept in the dark about the 2023 results.

Indeed, the figures underwrite Olin's criticism of the I-Res board and its management for lack of focus, inefficiency, excessive executive directors' salaries and exces-

sive costs generally, as well as poor property estate management.

Moneybags has regularly pointed to the evident flaws in I-Res, in particular the odd appointment of Sweeney as CEO in November 2017. Coming from having previously managed Dublin Airport and with no background in property management, it is hard to see what exactly marked her out. Capreit was already *in situ* and overseeing the I-Res business under contract for a generous fee – and not just managing the group's near-4,000 apartment portfolio but initiating all the acquisitions.

Although the Capreit contract was only terminated in January 2022, Moylan strongly praised his CEO for her achievements, highlighting in particular the acquisition of the 850-apartment



Eddie Byrne

Marathon portfolio in June 2019 for €285m. This was actually an acquisition that was identified, initiated and managed by Capreit.

The fact that Sweeney was being paid a remarkably generous €1m pa salary at the time was one indication of the failings of the board when it comes to value for money. She handed in her notice before Christmas, with the contract therefore set to expire at the end of this month, immediately before the AGM. Moylan exits the following month.

It is even harder to accept Moylan's assertion that the I-Res management is best placed to "lead the future of the company and has taken strategic decisions over the last number of years which have delivered value, protection and enhancement for shareholders".

The whole point of terminating the Capreit contract was the

nature of the relationship, which benefited the Canadians to a huge extent. Not only were all the running costs of the I-Res operation incurred by Capreit covered but, on top of this, there was a fee of 3% of total rental income plus 1.5% of the gross value of the portfolio. This worked out at a €6.6m pa bonanza, without any performance requirement attached.

## INEFFICIENCY

Moreover, in the last full year under Capreit management (2021), the total operating and administration costs of running the I-Res, including the Capreit fee, was €27m. With Sweeney in full control, the total operating and administration costs came to €30.5m last year – ie more than 10% higher and evidence of significant inefficiency and a bloated cost structure.

*Continued on page 26*



"Isn't that about when I hired you, Dingle?"

## Stocks & Shares

*Greencore continued from page 24*

since Paddy Coveney stepped down in March but what I was less aware of was the strength and depth of the team at absolutely every level of the company.”

Despite the plámás, however, none of these execs are still with the group, with Philips having appointed Lee Finney as COO just one month into his reign.

Greencore remains one of the biggest sandwich manufacturers in the world, producing 779 million sandwiches last year, as well as 132 million chilled ready meals and 45 million chilled soups. The giant operation only operates in the UK market, however.

### STRATEGY

In the 2023 annual report, Philips says of Greencore’s strategy: “We are one of the UK’s leading convenience food producers. We have built this position through long-term partnerships with major UK retailers in attractive product categories.” This is hardly a statement of strategy.

He continues: “Our strategy is focused on accelerating financial return and delivering growth.” Again this is not a strategy but rather a description of normal trading.

Strategy relates to having a vision for the future with plans

of up to 25 years but Philips, despite his Harvard MBA, does not appear to understand what strategy is or maybe has decided that it is most beneficial to simply let the company drift along on its current path.

At least former CEO Coveney had a strategy to turn Greencore into “the leading international manufacturer of convenience food” and went about implementing his strategy with the \$750m takeover of Peacock Foods in the US. But this ended up looking more like an attempt to make sense of the \$100m the group had already spent building up operations across the Atlantic, where it boasted sales of £223m in 2016 but losses of £2m pa.

Even with the Peacock acquisition, Greencore achieved US sales in 2016 of only \$881m and trading profits of \$33m, representing trading margins of 3.7% – only half that achieved at the time in the UK.

Selling out of the US only two years after buying Peacock just about got the group out intact but, having already sold off its leading convenience food business in Belgium and its huge European malting business, Coveney left Greencore a pale shadow of its former self, trading only in the UK.

On the basis that Coveney



Leslie Van de Walle

knew what he was doing when invading the US market, investors pushed Greencore’s shares (now quoted only in London) up to just on £3 in 2016. They fell to a low of 60p in December 2022 but have since recovered to £1.32, at which price they are trading on a price/earnings multiple of 14.4.

The update on the first quarter of 2024 has not given shareholders much to get excited about, with *pro forma* revenue not even flat when compared to the first quarter of the previous fiscal

year. For those investors who rate Philips and believe he will get Greencore generating the margins it was delivering in 2019, this would require almost doubling current trading profits to £140m. That scenario would put the shares on a prospective p/e of 8 and almost certainly drive the share price up significantly.

For those with less faith in Philips and who expect him to simply muddle along without any discernible stated strategy, the shares will not be going anywhere any time soon.

*I-Res continued from page 25*

Sweeney should surely have been able to manage the whole operation at the same rate as Capreit did, excluding its chunky €6.3m fee. This means the costs should have come in at €20.5m rather than the €30.5m.

In his annual review, however, Moylan says Sweeney “made an outstanding impact and has been an exceptional CEO since assuming the role in 2017. It has been a pleasure working alongside her. Margaret leaves the business well positioned for the future.”

He also asserts, since the termination of the Capreit contract: “We have strategically invested in the creation of our virtually integrated operating platform.”

The results suggest that this has had no positive impact.

One of the striking disclosures in the 2023 accounts concerns what was understood to have been the €20m (approx) sale of the big Rockbrook site in Sandyford, which directly adjoins I-Res’s residential presence in the Beacon South Quarter, where the company has 691 apartments. This sale had been rightly criticised by Olin as “representing the sale of one of the crown jewels in I-Res”.

The annual report, however, discloses that the actual

net proceeds from the sale was just €14.6m. This means that Sweeney sold off this site with planning permission for 428 apartments in early 2022 for a figure that equates to only €34,000 per apartment site, when the going rate in Sandyford was €200,000 per site.

### OVERDUE STEP

Sweeney was at the time seeking to raise a decent chunk of capital through disposals and, given the covenant constraints placed on Reits in relation to the maximum debt permissible relative to net assets, she would not have been in a position to develop out the valuable Rockbrook site.

What she should have done, of course, was offload other less valuable I-Res assets that would not have resulted in missing out on a €75m profit down the road.

In Sandyford, such a strategy would have resulted in the group owning over 1,000 apartments there at some stage. It is much easier to let, manage and supervise a big concentration of apartments in an area like this. It would have made more sense to sell the total of 50 apartments owned in Cork.



Jeffrey Olin

The appointment of Eddie Byrne as the new CEO last month does, at least, look like an overdue step in the right direction. Unlike Sweeney, he brings with him property expertise, having been joint MD of Quintan Developers, which landed planning permission for 5,000 houses during his reign, of which 1,500 have been built.

Byrne was previously MD of Hudson Advisors, which advise overseas property investors in Ireland. Before that he was chief portfolio officer of the big Dutch Propertize group focused on Belgium and the Netherlands. He could possibly shake things up and inject some dynamic

portfolio management thinking into how I-Res is run, but it may be too late.

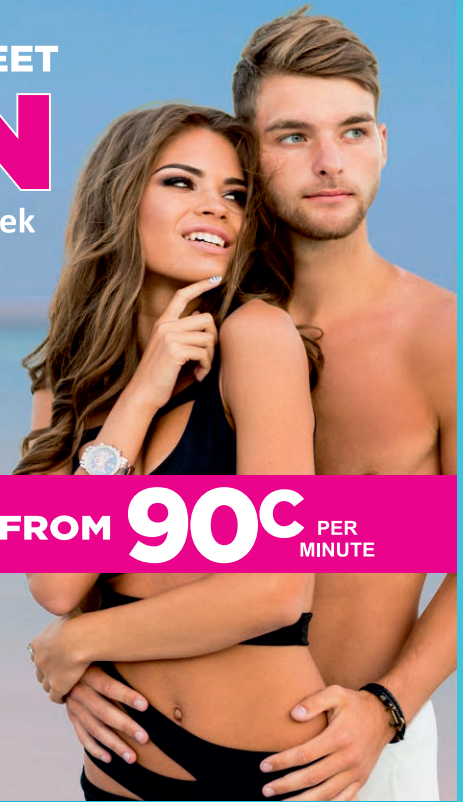
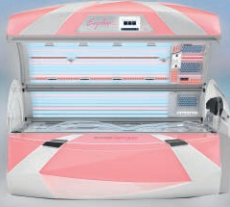
Capreit wants to get out at almost any price, having sold down its shareholding from 18.7% to 11% over the last three months when I-Res’s shares were down to €1. Setanta too has reduced its stake from 5% to 4%, but there are also a slew of new investors who have been picking up this stock in advance of the AGM.

If VCC had secured control, there would have been real movement. With the shares currently trading at a 30% discount to net asset value, there really was only one way they could go.

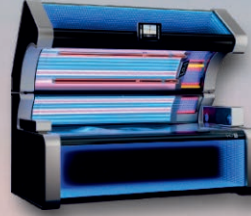
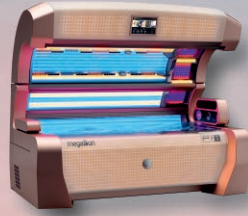
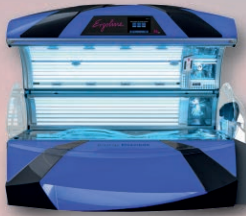
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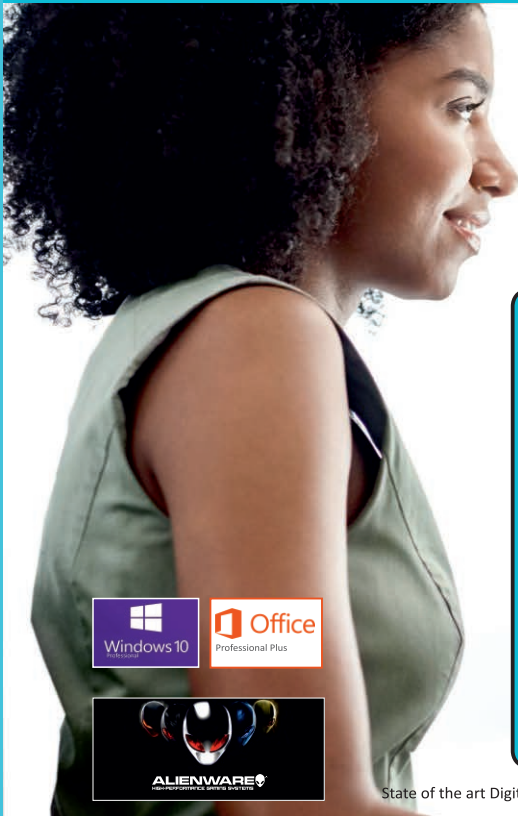


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*'ESB's aim is to help companies deliver significant savings, revenues and carbon emission reductions'*

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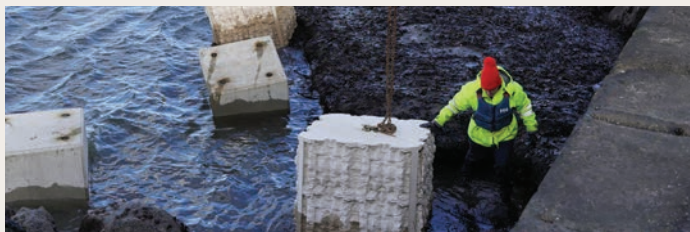
infrastructure is estimated to generate approximately 7.9GWh of clean, renewable electricity annually, meeting up to 20% of the energy requirements of MSD's site in Ballydine, Co Tipperary.

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**Dublin Port Company (DPC)**, in partnership with University College Dublin (UCD), has launched an innovative initiative to enrich biodiversity along the Great South Wall, marking a significant advancement in eco-engineering and sustainability practices.

While artificial structures like seawalls and rock armour have been essential for protecting ports worldwide, they often lack the biodiversity of natural rocky shores, posing challenges for marine ecosystems. Recognising this, UCD researchers collaborated with DPC to pioneer a solution that combines ecological principles with engineering expertise.

Central to this effort is the deployment of large habitat units along the Great South Wall, strategically chosen for their potential to support marine life. These units, incorporating a natural topography design inspired by Ringaskiddy, Co Cork, represent a pioneering achievement in eco-engineering.

The design process drew from a comprehensive study conducted under the Ecostructure project, with Dublin Port's pivotal involvement. This study evaluated 32 natural

rocky shores and 32 artificial shoreline sites across Ireland and Wales, assessing both biological diversity and physical topography. Leveraging advanced techniques like photogrammetry, the project team developed 3D models to guide the creation of engineering-standard habitat units and wall panels.

Crucially, these habitat units integrate natural topography into eco-friendly concrete, reducing carbon footprint while maximising biodiversity potential. Collaboration with industry partners CubEX and MODULAR Cubed underscores the fusion of academic research with practical application.

UCD researchers will conduct thorough monitoring over the next two years to evaluate the effectiveness of these habitat units in enhancing marine biodiversity. By studying diverse species, including invertebrates and fish, the project aims to uncover valuable insights into large-scale eco-engineering approaches.

Despite losing its title as the world's longest seawall, the Great South Wall retains its significance as one of Europe's longest, symbolising a legacy of maritime engineering.

## SMEs and Trends in Accounting in Ireland Today

**Moore Ireland** is a leading Irish provider of accountancy and advisory services for smart, commercially ambitious enterprises seeking the highest standards in client service and expertise. The firm is ranked in the Top 10 accountancy practices in Ireland, employing over 140 staff, with offices in both Cork and Dublin.

Specialising in servicing the SME sector, the firm is seeing ever-increasing complex requirements in this area as SMEs deal with challenges such as:

- The regulatory environment in which they operate
- Access to funds and the cost of funds
- General uncertainty due to geopolitical risks
- The well-known shortage in skills

Ned Murphy, Managing Partner, Moore Ireland, comments: "In this context we are seeing a strong demand for tax planning services in areas of succession, mergers and acquisitions, and general expansion.

"As SMEs face new demands, our service offering is increasing to meet these demands. We are now in a position to offer services in new areas which are becoming increasingly important. These include, for example, ESG, cyber security and gender reporting. This is in addition to all of the usual standard compliance requirements.

"Last year we partnered with our Moore firm in London, Moore



Ned Murphy, Managing Partner, Moore Ireland

Kingston Smith, and Waterland Private Equity and are pursuing a policy of expansion through the acquisition of accountancy practices in addition to our usual organic growth. We aim to be the number one choice of SMEs in Ireland and are already seeing the benefits of the partnership with Moore Kingston Smith.

"The environment in which we work is changing as a result of technological advancements, regulatory change and the service requirements demands from clients referred to above."

Embracing these changes, Moore is poised to capitalise on the prospects presented by its expansion, heralding a new era of growth and innovation in the accounting sector.

[www.mooreireland.ie](https://www.mooreireland.ie)

## Bank of Ireland: Supporting Farmers Through Wet Weather Challenges

*Eoin Lowry, Head of Agri Sector, Bank of Ireland Business Banking*

As the wet weather persists **Bank of Ireland** is encouraging under-pressure farmers to swiftly engage with their accountants, financial advisers or banks to explore the range of flexible financing options available to help them deal with the ongoing impact of sodden on-farm conditions.

We understand that this is a particularly challenging time for farmers coping with the unrelenting wet weather and Bank of Ireland is here to help.

As the leading lender to Ireland's agriculture industry, we know that farmers require a level of flexibility when engaging with their financial providers and we are keenly aware of the current concerns facing them including:

- Increased costs driven by a very long winter and inclement spring
- Cost overhangs from 2023 due to weak farm gate prices and ever-rising input prices
- Available cash balances used



Eoin Lowry, Head of Agri Sector, Bank of Ireland Business Banking

up – farmers now dealing with decreased cashflow

- Farmers forced to provide supplementary feeds to livestock, whilst the sowing of crops remains on hold as the country waits for a sustained dry spell

Bank of Ireland has an experienced team of agri advisers ready to assist and continues

to engage with key agriculture industry stakeholders to alleviate the pressures on farmers. Agri loan applications are being prioritised, speeding up the time from initial application to money hitting farmers accounts, and we also have a range of flexible financial supports on offer including:

- Providing overdraft extensions
- Offering flexible term loans
- Retrospectively financing previous investments made from cashflow

These measures are designed to help farmers, with targeted loans allowing increased financial breathing space and helping to spread the cost of additional inputs such as straw or fodder over an agreed and flexible term.

There are a range of ways to contact Bank of Ireland and I would underline the need for farmers not to panic and to continue looking after themselves and their families. The rain will stop falling eventually and, with the right financial plans in place, we can ensure that agri businesses nationwide can look forward to brighter days ahead.

For further details please visit [www.businessbanking.bankofireland.com](http://www.businessbanking.bankofireland.com)



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## Oliver Tattan's new venture

THE MULTI-HATTED **Oliver Tattan** is getting back into the health insurance game, in tandem with Aviva, although the name of the new venture remains under wraps.

Enniskerry-based moneybags Ollie has been around the block as far as health insurance is concerned, stretching back to his stint as chief executive of VHI, before he jumped ship to work for **Dermot Desmond** at the Daon biosecurity operation. This was followed by a run in Irish Life Health, which had been essentially created by the merger of the health insurance companies Tattan had helped to found, Vivas Insurance (sold to Aviva for big bucks) and GloHealth.



Oliver Tattan

The new venture, therefore, is Tattan's third health insurance rodeo and he is joined here once again by his old buddies, **Jim Dowdall** and **Stephen Loughman**, both of whom were in at the ground floor in Vivas Health and GloHealth.

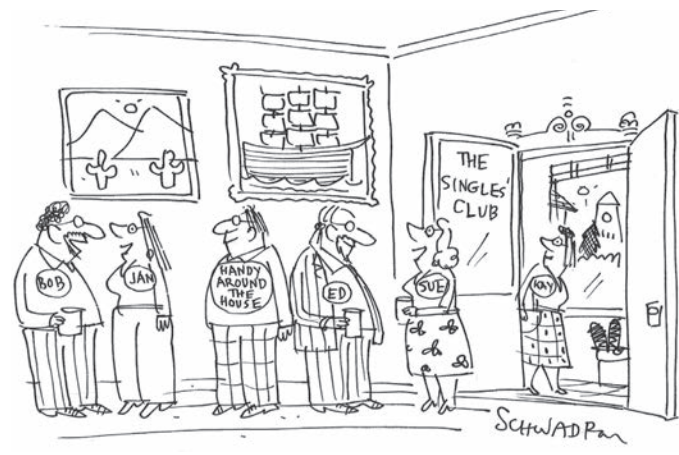
While the trading name of the new venture is not yet known, the limited company that has been incorporated to start signing up hospital contracts is called Douglasdale Ltd and the shares were initially split evenly between the three amigos.

The big bucks for this latest venture, however, is being provided by giants Aviva and the latter has just invested €1m to take a 71% stake in Douglasdale, while assorted heavy hitters from the insurance company

have now popped up on the board – **Barry Cudmore**, **Declan O'Rourke** and **Stephen McCarthy**.

Another familiar name set to have a starring role in the brand new business is ex-Vigo Health boss, **Ruth Bailey**, who is also well known to Tattan, Dowdall and, especially,

Loughman, who was the principal in Vigo.



These days, Tattan is *in situ* as chairman of an insurance IT platform development outfit called Fadata, which is headquartered in Munich and has offices around Europe. The latest figures here don't look particularly healthy though, with accumulated losses topping €36m and shareholders being tapped for funds. The group is controlled by the private equity giants Riverside, where Tattan is an adviser.

*AT A time when RTE is facing severe budgetary constraints, it is interesting that the latest round of programme funding from the media commission contains only a single project for its main channels among the dozen*

*biggest winners. Virgin Media TV (VMTV) has four shows, including the top three by value, while TG4 has four, and there's also one for RTEjr.*

*The first Montrose-destined drama offered funding is a second series of The Gone, which is produced by Katie Holly's Keeper Films and features well down the list, with a meagre €18,000.*

*This compares with the highest funding offer of €400,000, which has been nabbed by a reality TV show, rather than any film or drama series. The moolah is for the second season of bilingual dating game Grá ar an Trá, fronted by Gráinne Seoige for VMTV 1 and produced by Cuán Mac Conghail's profitable Macalla Teo. A business built*

## Dennis O'Brien's 'Love Island' presenter

IN GLASGOW last week, Capital Scotland radio listeners had their first taste of a brand new breakfast show presenter after the station was forced into a change a little quicker than anticipated. For owner **Dennis O'Brien**, the Scottish station represents a high-profile effort to grow his share of the UK radio market, which he entered back in 2014.

Former *Love Island* contestant **Laura Anderson** has slipped into the Capital Scotland breakfast show slot that was surprisingly vacated recently by singer and social media star, **Tallia Storm**, after barely one year *in situ* as **Fat Brestovic's** co-host on the radio programme.

The potentially very good news for O'Brien *et al* at Communicorp UK, owner of the station, is that "bubbly" Anderson brings with her an impressive 1.5 million followers on Instagram. If enough of them follow their gal on to the airwaves, it could prove quite the listenership boost.

A few years back O'Brien's Communicorp Group splashed

out £35m to acquire eight UK radio stations from the Global Media and Entertainment group: Smooth East Midlands, Smooth North West, Smooth North East, Real Radio North West, Real Radio Yorkshire, Real XS, Capital South Wales, and Capital Scotland. The eight represented a combined 2.8 million listeners at the time and the Real stations were duly rebranded under the Heart franchise. While Communicorp UK owns the assorted stations, they are operated under licence by Global.

While O'Brien sold his Communicorp Group in Ireland to the German Bauer Media Audio outfit in late 2016, his Communicorp UK company is still very much in the radio business. Dinny holds the controlling stake here through an Isle of Man entity called Stangar Investment Holdings,

which ended up with the bulk of the Communicorp Group stake.

The radio market across the Irish Sea is a competitive one and last year O'Brien announced an expansion strategy that would see the introduction of local breakfast, daytime and weekend programming on some stations, starting with Capital Scotland. The signing of Storm at that station was considered quite the coup but she announced her exit recently, due to "exciting upcoming work in London".

The latest accounts filed for Communicorp UK were signed off last September and cover the year to the end of 2022. They reveal that the group has been struggling as a result of "the generally weaker economic environment in the UK".

This situation caused profits to drop to £866,000 from £2.15m in 2021, while the

operating margin more than halved from 9.1% to just 4%. Nevertheless, accumulated profits stood at a healthy enough £11.6m.

There was, however, good news for the four directors of the company – local boys **Mark Lee** (CEO) and **Colin Everitt** (COO); **Pat Claffey**, investment director of O'Brien's Island Capital; and the billionaire's long-time right-hand woman, **Lucy Gaffney** (who arrived on the board at the start of 2017, after the Bauer buy-out in Ireland). Despite the profit collapse, directors' remuneration at Communicorp UK jumped from £780,000 to £1.42m, with CEO Lee seeing his take almost double to £933,000.

While Dinny's IoM vehicle owns the vast bulk of the shares, directors hold small individual stakes in Communicorp UK and in 2022 they also acquired a 30% stake in a subsidiary operation called Communicorp UK Digital Investments Ltd, which holds the Voiceworks (Sport) podcast and GOMO Outdoor advertising businesses.



Laura Anderson



Gráinne Seoige

largely on **TG4** omissions, *Macalla* did well during the pandemic by producing **RTE2's** Home School Hub.

Paul Donovan's *Deadpan Pictures* – comedy specialists and makers of *Moone Boy* – secured an offer of €00,000 for a series called *Video Nasty*, also for *VMTV1*, with backing already locked in from the likes of *BBC*.

Paul Hayes's *Tua Films*, a separate business to his higher-profile *Magamedia* vehicle, also scored an offer for €00,000, for the film *Sonc*, for *TG4* his project looks to follow the pattern of funding used effectively for the recent *Cine4* series of films, including *An Caillín Ciúin* and *Tua's* own *Foscadh*, with the bulk of the funding sourced more or less equally from the media commission, *TG4* and *Screen Ireland*, and some additional dosh funnelled through the *Section 81* tax scheme.

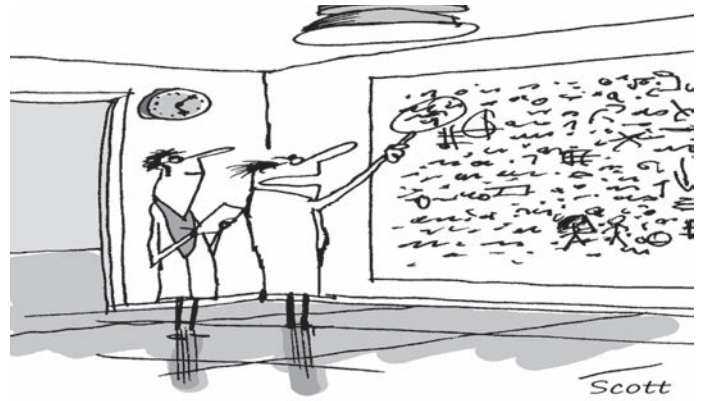
## Suzanne Gilhooly's jewels

GOLDHAWK NOTES that the taxman has registered a judgment for a less than blingy €2,400 against a company called C&S Jewellery Ltd, where the principals are husband and wife team **Charlie Cullen** and **Suzanne Gilhooly**. While the amount is almost insignificant, this judgment follows a larger €30,000 hit last summer on another entity, the Swiss Watch Club, courtesy of the UK-registered diamond and jewellery wholesaler World Shiner (UK) Ltd.



Suzanne Gilhooly

Cullen has a knack for generating media attention and, for instance, popped up in the *Sunday Times* as an example of jewellers and watch sellers



“Eureka! I've discovered a new pronoun!”

who have been benefiting from the activity of social media influencers.

This is because, the *ST* gushed, “Generation Z in Ireland are investing in high-end watches worth more than €10,000 as influential TikTok accounts fuel a boom in the popularity of pricey timepieces”.

The last accounts for Cullen's 100%-owned Swiss Watch Club business (based at Castlemarket, off D2's Drury Street) reveal a profit of €82,000 in 2022, although Cullen still threw in a loan that year of €141,000.

There was also a chunky €¼m loan provided by Dalkey-based moneybags **Barry O'Sullivan**, who registered a charge against the company at the start of this year. His loan (plus interest) is repayable in three instalments,

starting at the end of January this year.

The company secretary at the Swiss Watch Club is Gilhooly, who is also listed as the controlling shareholder in C&S Jewellers, with an 80% stake. This company was initially called Charlie Cullen Ltd, before changing its name in 2014, when it also registered the name Cullen & Co – a jewellery business that operates out of the same D2 premises.

Oddly, no accounts have been filed here since back in 2018, at which stage Gilhooly was owed €240,000 by the company and fellow director Cullen was owed a more manageable €20,000.

Now, the dreaded Revenue can be added to the list of creditors, even if the amount involved wouldn't get you a ring.

## Purcell Construction's €150,000 offer

ALMOST THREE years on from the liquidation of Megard Ltd, the company involved in the construction of the Hyde Square apartment block in Dublin 8, the residents are still engaged in legal negotiations over compensation. An offer has been put on the table by a subcontractor but it is well short of the potential final repair bill. Among the plaintiffs here is the Irish Haemophilia Society, which has a two-bedroom apartment and separate bedsit in Hyde Square for use by members travelling to Dublin for early hospital appointments.

In June 2021 Megard Ltd, which was owned by Galway developer **Gerry Purcell** and his wife, **Mary**, collapsed into liquidation. The move came as a surprise to the occupants of a number of apartments in the D8 complex developed by the company, which were the subject of High Court proceedings at the time.

The litigation against the Purcells' company had been

lodged by 26 plaintiffs in 2019 as a result of fire safety issues that led to some of the residents in Megard's 82-unit apartment development in Kilmainham being presented with large bills for repairs to roof damage. As a result, they voted to sue Megard (and the subcontractor, Purcell Construction), although by that stage the Megard property was under the control of a receiver.

Gerry and Mary Purcell were the only listed Megard directors, holding 94% of the shares, with fellow Galway-based players **Michael Bane** and **Liam Coyne** holding the balance. The shares in Megard were allotted to the Purcells, Bane and Coyne in 2006 “in consideration for the transfer of undertakings

by Purcell Construction Ltd”, which had been set up in 1988, and where Bane was the largest shareholder until 2022 when he sold his shares to the company and exited the board. As a result, the biggest shareholder is now Galway-based **Derek Timlin**, while significant stakes are held by **Gerard Dolan** (Galway) and **Tom Whelan** (Mayo).



Michael Bane

Purcell Construction was named as a defendant in the 2019 proceedings but it issued a statement at the time noting it was “not the developer or vendor of the apartments; it played no role in construction design and following a management buy-out it is now under new ownership”.

The last accounts filed for Megard before its liquidation

showed accumulated losses of more than €6.3m at the end of April 2019, leading Ulster Bank to appoint a receiver to the Hyde Park development.

The December 2022 accounts for the hugely successful Purcell Construction are rather more impressive and the shareholders here shared a healthy €3m dividend on foot of revenue for the 12 months of over €60m. Despite the bonanza, the company was still sitting on accumulated profits of €5.2m at the end of 2022.

Although the coffers may be overflowing at Purcell Construction, the residents of the defective apartments are unlikely to benefit significantly and the contribution that is now being offered to conclude the proceedings is just €150,000. This is well short of the near €1m required to fund all the necessary works but, given the company's denial of any liability and any role in construction design, it seems unlikely that the offer will be accepted.

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