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The hit-and-run 'informer'

Profile: Daniel 'Kneecap' Lambert

Young Blood: FG's Keira Keogh

Gerry Adams v BBC

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ALSO: Suzanne O'Connell's charity; Alan Clancy's taxing matter; John Magnier's new world; Dermot Desmond's trustees; Naeem Maniar's many hats; Roman Stern's Irish exit



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AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

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HIT-AND-RUN DRIVER AN 'INFORMER'

THE UNSTINTING state apology delivered in the Dáil recently by justice minister Jim O'Callaghan to the family of Shane O'Farrell – killed in 2011 near his Carrickmacross home by hit-and-run driver Zigimantas Gridziuska, who should have been in jail at the time – was welcomed by O'Farrell's family. So were the sincere speeches by not only Sinn Féin's Matt Carthy, a neighbour of the O'Farrells, and Mary Lou McDonald but also Fianna Fáil's John McGuinness among others. But when the Dáil chamber emptied and after journalists had time to digest the speeches – especially those by Carthy and McDonald – the elephant in the chamber remained silent and unspoken of, as if it were a field mouse. The allegation is that Gridziuska was not in jail at the time – despite being convicted of 30 offences in the 18 months before he killed O'Farrell – because he was a Garda informer.

Carthy described how locals believed Gridziuska lived a "charmed existence" up to the point he drove at O'Farrell. Just one reason for this belief is that the car he was in, with other known drug dealers, had been stopped by the drugs squad an hour earlier. The driver was judged incapable of driving and so Gridziuska was instructed to take the wheel of the car which had no tax, no NCT and bogus insurance. Why?

Carthy went on to say: "Gridziuska had arrived in Ireland with 12 convictions

from Lithuania. Time and time again, he committed crimes in Ireland. Time and time again, he walked free from theft, drugs and traffic offences. In 2008, 2009, 2010 and throughout the first half of 2011, he was repeatedly arrested and repeatedly brought to court and, repeatedly, he walked free.

"He committed hundreds of bail violations. Whenever he was returned to courts, gardai failed to notify the presiding judges of the facts of this man's criminal rampage. They mislabelled evidence and failed to tell the courts of outstanding warrants. When a judge demanded that further crimes result in a return to his court, gardai, it seems, simply ignored the call." Why?

The above description is not a complete or comprehensive catalogue of the incredible failings and benign Garda indifference to the offences of recidivist criminal Gridziuska, none of which has been challenged or contradicted by anyone and, significantly, not even An Garda Síochána; nor has the

Continued on page 4



Jim O'Callaghan

THE LIQUIDATION of a raft of firms next week turns out to be linked to one Ivor Fitzpatrick, the high-flying legal eagle, businessman and good pal of Charlie Haughey's, who died last year.

The Squire of Castle Howard had fingers in many pies and was reported to have been worth around €100m when he died in April 2024. His areas of expertise extended to the airline sector and he put in an eight-year stint as a director of Aer Lingus.

Apparently, during that time he was made aware of the inadequacy of in-flight wifi and so the wily operator set up an operation called Aeronet Global with Co Meath-based Brian Russell. It developed a wireless service that was licensed by the US Federal Communications Commission for flights in the US and was also adapted for use on cruise ships. There are a number of Irish companies registered with the Aeronet name, including Aeronet Global Communications Services Ltd, which was sitting on accumulated losses of €13.3m at the end of 2023. The current listed directors here are Russell and Jane Fitzpatrick, wife of Ivor. At a series of creditors' meetings at the Harcourt Hotel, D2, next week, this company and five other Aeronet entities will be liquidated, including one called AGC Safety Ltd.

Another familiar name who had been on the Aeronet board is Ulick McEvaddy, who knows a thing or two about making moolah from the skies.

NED O'SULLIVAN'S REVENGE

FANS OF Goldhawk are well aware of the disastrous IT project debacle in the Arts Council – including arts department secretary general Feargal Ó Coighligh, who told the Public Accounts Committee earlier this month that he only became aware of the €7m balls-up after being forwarded queries from *The Phoenix*. The most high-profile casualty has been council director Maureen Kennelly but her exit may not be tied to the wasted millions alone.

Another Arts Council controversy concerns Listowel Writers' Week, where Kennelly instigated a restructuring in 2022, including the disbanding of the long-standing volunteer committee. This upset assorted parties, most notably Fianna Fáil senator Ned O'Sullivan, whose wife, Madeleine, had been a stalwart of the festival for decades. Indeed, the FFER dropped into 70 Merrion Square for a chat with Kennelly (a former pupil of his in Listowel) but got the cold shoulder – something he hasn't forgotten.

There has been plenty of manoeuvring since then, with O'Sullivan landing on the Listowel board in April last year. Moreover, the then chairman and legal-eagle Éamonn Dillon was unceremoniously ousted and replaced on an interim basis by retired teacher Noel Keenan, one of the most outspoken critics of the Arts Council strategy.

The board was completely transformed for this year's festival, with O'Sullivan now sitting in the chair. He was front and centre when arts minister Patrick O'Donovan – who hails from up the road – arrived in Listowel on May 31. He duly announced a surprise €25,000 grant for Listowel Writers' Week, the first such handout from the department.

Ned was "truly grateful" and the move was seen as two fingers to the Arts Council – and Kennelly in particular. There was much discussion as to what O'Donovan might have in store for the director but it turns out she had been told her contract would not be renewed.

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AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

Continued from page 3

allegation made to the Dáil that Gridziuska was treated with kid gloves because he was a valued Garda informer.

O'Callaghan has firmly ruled out a public inquiry, as demanded by the victim's family, saying that he did not need "to wait for five years for an inquiry report to tell me about these failings". He added: "I must confront these failings in the criminal justice system."

The minister has a point about the time and resources required for a possible conclusion that may provide no more information than that which he already possesses. But the phrase about the 'system's failings' avoids the informer allegation. This issue does not actually require an inquiry and it lies submerged in the bowels of Garda files and that of the justice department, both of which have been accused of sullen resistance to scrutiny in this case.

The number of inquiries already held include those held by the Garda Ombudsman, which went on for an incredible seven years; an independent review mechanism process lasting 18 months; and a four-year scoping exercise.

Carthy told the Dáil that none of the above produced answers and probably served only to frustrate the O'Farrell family. But he also referred to the file on Gridziuska, held by the Garda National Crime and Security Intelligence Service, which would most likely reveal his role as an informer. He said the minister could direct that this file be published.

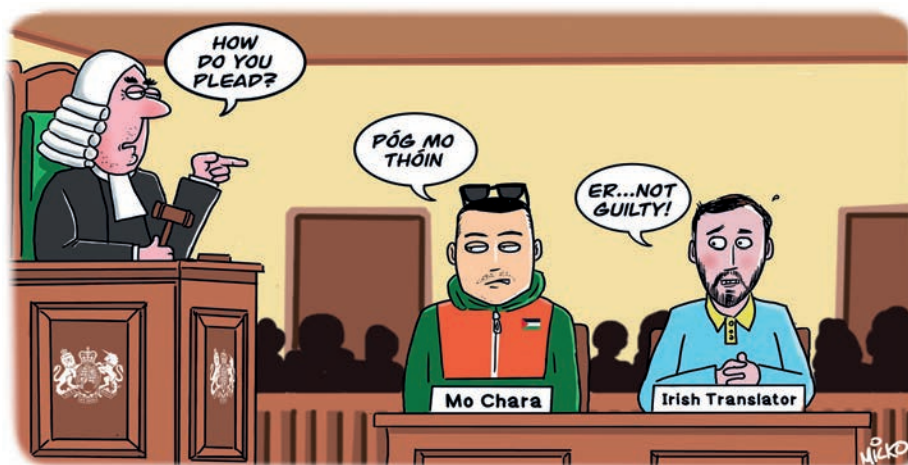
The file's full publication would mean that the fine speeches and applause for the family delivered in the Dáil were sincere and that fears of a lengthy wait for an inquiry's conclusion was not a substitute for real action and much-needed relief for Shane O'Farrell's family.

O'Callaghan is presenting as a reforming justice minister; how he handles this issue will say much about that ambition.

IS FINANCE MINISTER Paschal Donohoe becoming the Yosser Hughes of the European plutocracy? 'Gizza job' appears to be his mantra as he mingles with finance technocrats in the Eurogroup of finance ministers that he heads or is he plea being made on Paschal's behalf by his fans in the Irish media.

In late 2023 a chorus of media chants heralded his inexorable passage to the job of managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with inside information about his fast track to IMF HQ in Washington. Despite Paschal's usual modest refusal to talk up such a prospect, the Irish Times, amazingly, was able to reveal details of his private "preliminary discussions" about taking the post from incumbent MD Kristalina Georgieva, who

ASCOT LATEST



had apparently lost clout and stature in US circles. Georgieva was installed for a second term as IMF boss a short while later (despite the IT's inside track).

More recently the green jersey wearing media has been talking up Donohoe's prospects of taking the Eurogroup presidency for the third time in a row, a decision that must be made in the coming weeks.

But such is the demand for Yosser that there is now talk of him succeeding Christine Lagarde as president of the European Central Bank (ECB). Lagarde is heading for Davos to head up the World Economic Forum (WEF) and, according to "a source" of the Indo, "it is hard to see who would beat him" if he wants to replace her at the ECB.

The WEF gig is the latest in a long line of international jobs that Yosser has been tipped to acquire in recent years.

DPP MAN VERSUS TAOISEACH AND HACK

IAN BAILEY would not have expected to play a posthumous role in last year's general election but Taoiseach Micheál Martin's public endorsement of a book claiming that Bailey should have been charged with Sophie Toscan du Plantier's murder has provoked legal action by DPP official Robert Sheehan. He has sought a date from Dún Laoghaire District Court for an oral hearing to make application for summons that Martin and journalist Senan Molony allegedly conspired to breach his statutory and constitutional rights.

Martin made law and order one of his main general election issues and last September. Just weeks before the election was called, he attended the launch of Molony's book, *Sophie: The Final Verdict*, in which the author had some most unflattering things to say about the DPP's failure to prosecute Bailey. Molony felt it necessary to specifically single out Sheehan, the solicitor in charge of the Bailey file for some years and who dissected the Garda case against Bailey. Sheehan came to the conclusion that the DPP had no evidence to charge him.

In the book Molony wrote: "It seems to me extraordinary that a single lawyer in the DPP's office could effectively be a jury of one, deciding that each piece of evidence is not beyond all doubt, over and over again."

Molony went on to make a comment about

office politics in the DPP, before also saying that "zealous was the most charitable" way to describe the attitude of the DPP lawyer's treatment of the Garda file on Bailey.

Sheehan wrote to Martin (as well as various media outlets) complaining that he had been defamed. Martin replied at the beginning of the election to say that, in his complimentary comments on Molony's book (which certainly contained some uncomplimentary comments on Sheehan), he referred to the "system" and not any individual in the DPP office.

But Martin heaped unqualified praise on the book, which included Molony's allegation about the "single lawyer" who allegedly determined the DPP decision not to prosecute Bailey and which led to what Martin described as a source of "shame" and a "stain" on our society. Martin claimed that he had looked at the "details" of the matter, in which case he would surely have read the 44-page legal document written by Sheehan that eviscerated the Garda case against Bailey. He would also know, via many media reports, that Sheehan was the author of this document.

Martin also said: "We can ask for a proper review on whether decisions were reasonable that blocked the murder trial." (Goldhawk does not believe that Martin has made such a call since.)

Martin can argue that he referred only to the "system" but Sheehan is the only person in the book, described as being the "single lawyer" or "jury of one" responsible for blocking the murder trial.

Sheehan has researched legal precedents as well as the 2010 Law Report on Inchoate Offences and the Criminal Justice Act 2006 to show that a private individual can take a criminal prosecution. It will be interesting to see how Dún Laoghaire District Court responds to his initiative.

The ex-DPP lawyer has also sent emails to various media individuals asking them to say why they should not be similarly prosecuted. These include various RTE programmers (Joe Duffy, DG Kevin Bakhurst and others); Newstalk's Pat Kenny; Molony's book publishers, Hatchett Ireland; the Law Society and the *Law Society Gazette*.



Ian Bailey

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

NAEEM MANIAR'S MANY HATS

LIAM CUNNINGHAM was in the headlines this week for his spat with Conor McGregor after the latter mocked the actor's role in supporting the Gaza aid boat's attempt to breach the 18-year-old blockade. Cunningham has also been a regular critic of the government, particularly over current attempts to dump the triple-lock system, while another target has been Goldhawk's old friend, Naeem Maniar, who has been keeping his legal eagles busy lately.



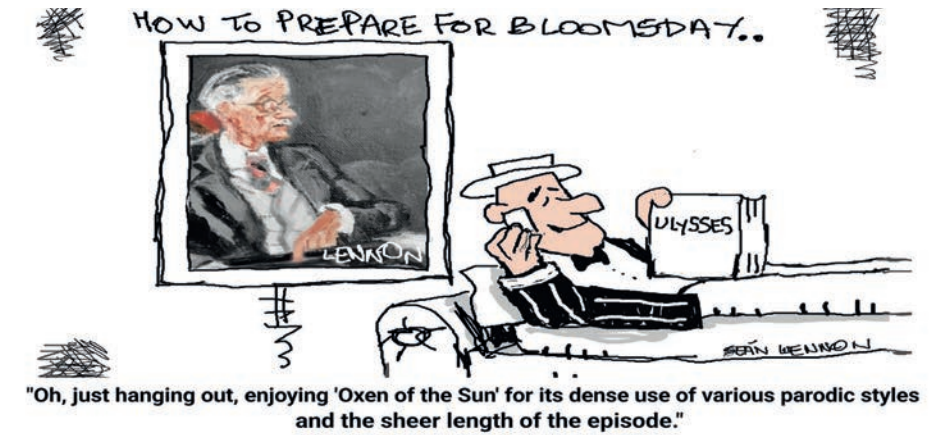
Liam Cunningham

Cunningham faced off against Maniar a couple of years ago after the latter adopted a pretty confrontational approach to the workforce in Iceland frozen foods stores (see *The Phoenix* 16/6/23). Celbridge, Co Kildare-based Indian moneybags Maniar was no stranger to the Iceland brand, which was taken back under the wing of the London-headquartered parent company in late 2013, after which Maniar's company changed its name to ACCHL and entered examinership. In 2023 Iceland ceased its hands-on role in Ireland, opening the door for Maniar to pick up the company that was operating the 27 stores here. But the changeover led to immediate staff disquiet over the future of their jobs and claims of delayed wages and poor working conditions. This resulted in industrial action at some of Dublin branches, and Cunningham tweeted that he was "proudly supporting the #Iceland workers on strike". He also turned up on site in Coolock.

The Independent Workers' Union then found itself named as a defendant in High Court proceedings issued by Maniar's Metron Stores Ltd under industrial relations legislation, with some individuals also named, including shop steward Jeanette Joyce.

In September 2023, however, Metron collapsed into liquidation, owing unsecured creditors a whopping €37.5m and, according to filings from liquidator Joe Walsh, issues such as "employee claims, legal claims and potential litigation" were delaying the process.

Last year, Joyce was awarded €8,300 by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), which found she had been penalised in con-



nection with her trade union activity.

The resourceful Maniar has a number of other irons in the fire, including the highly profitable Centz franchise, although last year there was yet more controversy when Sarah Treacy, former legal secretary for that company, was awarded €77,000 by the WRC.

On top of this, Maniar has been keeping his legal advisers busy by lodging High Court defamation proceedings against both *The Journal.ie* and News Group Newspapers (publishers of the *Sun*).

The controversial businessman's latest encounter with the courts relates to proceedings lodged last Christmas by his CBTL Ireland Ltd (which operates the Brentwood Coffee group of cafes) against Tesco Ireland. This followed the supermarket giant's decision to take possession of five coffee shops located in some Tesco Extra stores, where it claimed there were substantial rent arrears.

While CBTL did manage to obtain a short-term injunction in April, on the grounds that an agreed protocol had not been followed, the end result was that Tesco has now taken possession of the cafes.

Never the quiet life for Naeem Maniar.

SETBACK FOR SUZANNE O'CONNELL

GOLDHAWK SPIES a winding-up meeting has been called for a charity called Outreach Moldova, which raised funds for orphans in the eastern European country that borders Ukraine. The writing was, however, on the wall for some time.

A message on the now-defunct social media platform for the charity stated: "After 25 years of caring for Moldova's most vulnerable children, Outreach Moldova is closing. Despite our best efforts, we could not sustain

our mission in these difficult times, as global crises have diverted attention and support elsewhere."

It is also the case surely that crises closer to home had an impact on the operation's ability to fundraise.

Outreach Moldova, which was founded in 2000, actually ceased its operations in the former Soviet republic at the end of last year, while the charity also cancelled its annual fundraiser in Trinity College, which had been due to take place in November.

The charity came under the spotlight a few years ago, having been the subject of an independent review requested by one of its major donors. That review raised questions about governance procedures and also advised that the composition of the board be reviewed.

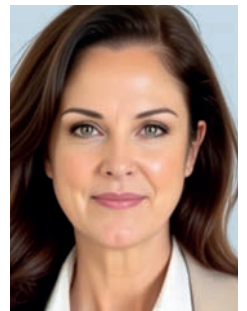
It was subsequently reported by the *Oirish Mail on Sunday* in 2022 that the charity had failed to comply with relevant tax and charity laws in Moldova for many years.

Outreach Moldova's chief executive was Suzanne O'Connell, who is Ireland's honorary consul based in Moldova. A former HSE doctor, she has been the hon con since 2018, reporting to the embassy in Romania (although plans have been announced to open an Irish embassy in Moldova this year).

The board's listed directors at the time the plug was pulled included chairman Jonathan McKibben, who had served as a trustee since 2013. More recent arrivals on the board included Eric Paulak, Darragh McDonagh and Kevin Quinn, all of whom were appointed at the end of 2023, while assorted members of the old guard stepped down last December.

The last accounts filed in the Companies Office for Outreach Moldova cover the year to December 2023 and were signed off in October last year, just over a month before operations ceased. These figures show the charity raised €4m that year, while a note from the directors states: "The board are aware that there is currently a deficit of €14,000 on the reserves at the year end and they are currently working towards bringing the reserves in line with the charities reserves policy."

It has now been decided to wind up the charity and a creditors' meeting to appoint Tom Murray and Anthony Glennon of Friel Stafford as liquidators is to be held next week.



Suzanne O'Connell



LIFTING THE LID ON MOUNTBATTEN

RICHARD KERR and Stephen Waring, two former residents of Kincora Boys' Home, were trafficked by Kincora warden Joseph Mains to members of a paedophile network in the 1970s. The ring included Lord Mountbatten. Kerr is now taking a case against the UK state, which is progressing through the north's legal system at a snail's pace.

Chris Moore, author of a new book entitled *Kincora: Britain's Shame*, tried to talk to Kerr in the early 1980s while working for BBC NI but Kerr had moved abroad. In 2014 Kerr contacted Moore out of the blue from Texas and agreed to give an interview. The BBC broadcast it in November 2014. Kerr was also interviewed extensively by Channel 4 News.

All sorts of dirty tricks were deployed to discredit Kerr. An attempt was made to lure him into joining forces with a charlatan called Carl Beech. Beech was posing as a VIP abuse victim but in reality he was a collector of extreme child pornography. Fortunately, Kerr sensed he was being set up and rebuffed an invitation to meet Beech in person.

Beech, who was in dire financial straits before making his sham abuse allegations, suddenly acquired more than £100,000, which he used to buy the first of two properties in Sweden (see *The Phoenix* 3/11/23). The British media portrayed him as the archetypal VIP abuse victim and a hero to boot.

Beech was eventually exposed as a fraud and jailed for wasting police time. It looks like his true purpose was always for him to be exposed as a liar, thereby discrediting genuine victims of VIP sex abuse.

In November 2016, Kerr received a letter, purporting to be from the Ulster Freedom Fighters, warning him to shut up. Crucially, a



Lord Mountbatten

link was established between the mock letter and an address of one of Beech's handlers.

Kerr also steered clear of Sir Anthony Hart's 2015-17 shambolic inquiry into sex abuse in NI. It was another good decision. Judge Hart criticised Kerr in his error strewn report. At one point Hart, who paid scant attention to detail, managed to contradict himself about an encounter between Kerr and Sir Maurice Oldfield of MI6 at Kincora.

Kerr became wary of the vitriol and took a step back from the limelight.

In 2018 Andrew Lownie, a Cambridge graduate and former Tory election candidate, learned about the Kerr-Mountbatten link from Dublin author and barrister David Burke. Kerr agreed talk to Lownie provided his name was not revealed in the book Lownie was researching about Mountbatten. Kerr's account appeared in 2019 as that of 'Sean'.

Moore's book describes how, in August 1977, Mountbatten abused Kerr and Waring in a converted boathouse adjacent to his castle in Sligo. Waring stole Mountbatten's signet ring during the encounter. Mountbatten contacted the RUC and officers recovered the ring at Kincora. The RUC interviewed the boys and warned them not to say anything about the incident. Waring was not charged.

He fled to Liverpool the following November, where he was apprehended by the police and placed on the *Ulster Monarch* ferry bound for Belfast. He fell overboard during the voyage. His body was never recovered.

Kerr is determined to pursue his High Court action in Belfast to achieve a modicum of justice for his friend, Stephen Waring.

CYBER INSECURITY

IRELAND WAS one of 41 countries participating in last month's Locked Shields 2025 in Tallinn, Estonia. The rationale given for Irish involvement in this "live-fire cyber defence exercise", co-ordinated by the Nato Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), was to ensure collective security and the protection of critical national infrastructure. How reassuring.

Shortly after Locked Shields, Irish representatives travelled to the Polish Cyber

Command in Legionowo to take part in Nato's annual Cyber Defence Pledge Conference, at which Nato allies and partner nations share experiences and exchange best practices in cyber defence. Equally comforting.

The exercise and conference took place in the same month that Russian hackers targeted Britain's defence ministry (the same period saw Ukraine's military intelligence agency launch a cyber attack on Russia's state-owned aircraft manufacturer, Tupolev). You don't have to be a member of a pinko pacifist group to suggest that lining up alongside such Nato entities offers a very false sense of security.

CCDCOE director Mart Noorma said: "In a world where cyber threats cross every border, Locked Shields proves that resilience in cyber space is built together... Bringing nations, experts and partners together in real-time defence is more vital than ever."

The Irish contingent at Locked Shields was part of a Irish/US/Bulgarian/Greek team of nearly 220 personnel. Ireland's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) in Dublin 4 hosted staff from the US and Bulgaria.

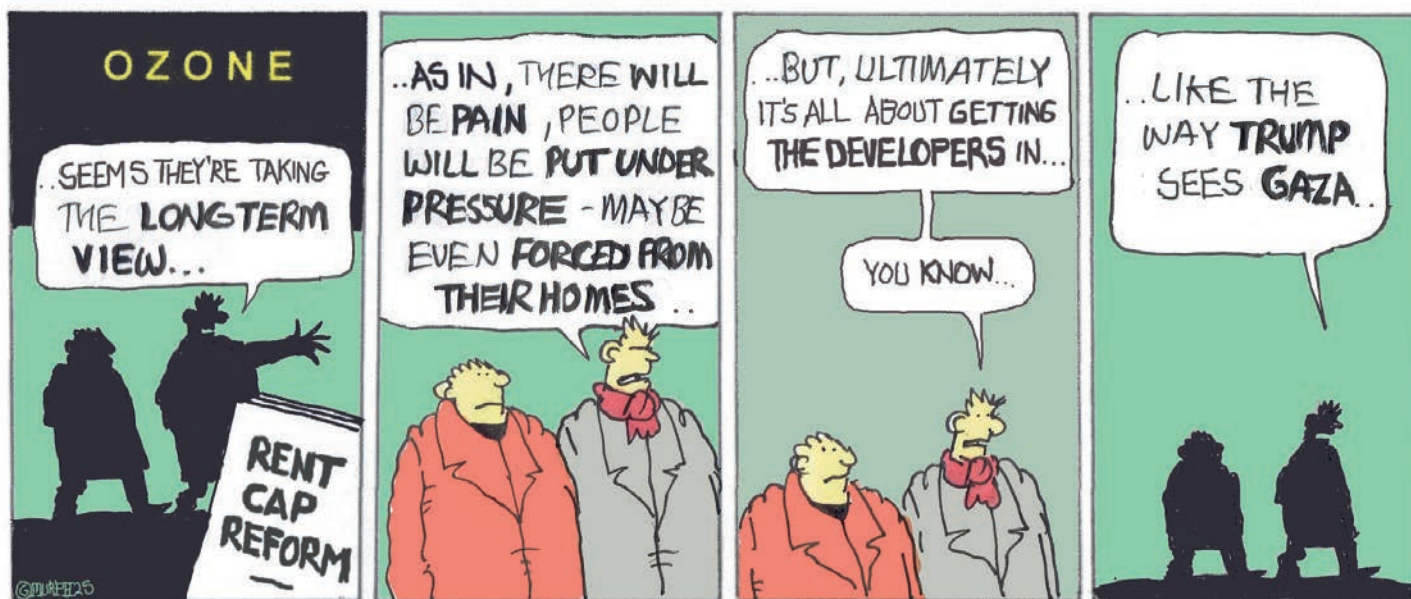
The exercise entailed a fictional scenario where vital services and critical infrastructure needed to be protected, as well as providing key military infrastructure such as air defence and battle management systems.

The NCSC led Ireland's participation but it also had support from the Irish Defence Forces and significant private sector support from Microsoft Ireland, ESB, Edgescan, Wiretrap, EY, KPMG, Threatscape, Fortinet, Segura, Flutter Entertainment and Synopsys.

Goldhawk wonders just how comfortable the NCSC, the Irish Defence Forces and those private sector companies were participating with Locked Shields partners such as Booz Allen Hamilton, BAE, Siemens, Palo Alto Networks etc. As defence minister and Tánaiste Simon Harris would know, all of these companies have substantial connections to Israel and its war on Gaza.



Simon Harris





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AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

PATRIOT GAMES
IN DONEGAL

DONEGAL MAN Niall McConnell has been central to anti-immigration protests in Monaghan and Donegal over the last two months. His links to loyalists and British fascists may help explain why much of his online content in relation to these protests targets Sinn Féin.

A sheep farmer from Castletfin, Donegal, McConnell has been active on Ireland's right-wing scene for over five years. He has a website and an irregularly published newspaper, the *Irish Patriot*, both of which publicise his political party Siol na hÉireann (SÉ). Recent years have seen SÉ colour party photo ops on Croagh Patrick and at Béal na Bláth, as well as footage of SÉ members parading statues of the Virgin Mary in Mayo and Down.

McConnell ran unsuccessfully in the Donegal constituency in general elections in 2020 and 2024 as well as in Lifford–Stranorlar in the 2024 local elections.

McConnell attended the national anti-immigration demonstration in April but his well-rehearsed schtick as a traditional Catholic and folksy farmer did not gain much traction on Dublin's streets. He has, however, been central to recent anti-immigration protests in Carrickmacross, Castleblaney, Letterkenny and Bundoran. He livestreamed the protests on YouTube and also posted clips of speeches made at the rallies on his channel.

McConnell's videos particularly target SF, claiming to expose SF in relation to immigration and "THE TRUTH about Matt Carthy & Sinn Féin Lies", and he regularly makes disparaging comments regarding SF on his livestreams.

McConnell is linked to prominent figures on the far right of British politics. Not only has he worked closely with loyalists Jim Dowson and Jolene Bunting, he is also particularly close to Nick Griffin. As a teenager in the 1970s, Griffin was active

in the National Front before he formed the International Third Position along with Italian fascist Roberto Fiore and Derek Holland from Ireland. Griffin joined the British National Party in the early 1990s and became leader at the end of the decade but was later expelled from the party.

Griffin has appeared on five livestreams that McConnell has broadcast on his SÉ channel on YouTube and Purged TV. He also shared a large amount of content on his Telegram account relating to both McConnell and SÉ. He has been effusive in his praise of SÉ, describing it as the most "effective real nationalist party in Ireland" and "as

Ireland's leading ethno-nationalist movement". Last June, in the build up to the local elections, Griffin even posted a surreal video of McConnell playing an anti-immigration ballad on his guitar outside SF's Letterkenny office.

Griffin is still closely associated with Fiore, who has also appeared on one of McConnell's livestream. It was evident on the stream that McConnell and Fiore share a conservative Catholic worldview.

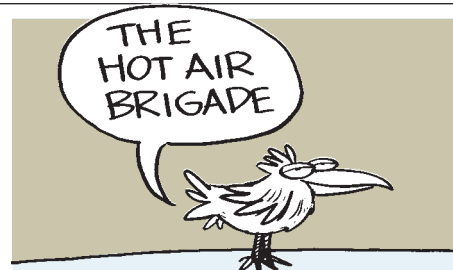
Griffin has claimed that this is a major advantage for McConnell, posting on Telegram: "Siol na hÉirann [sic] is trad Catholic, so the pencil-necked atheists hate it, as do the fags, & the sad victims of sex-abuse by liberal homosexual priests."

While promoting McConnell and SÉ, Griffin was also posting a large amount of loyalist content on social media. In recent years he has posted multiple videos of loyalist marches he attended in the north. He described in one post how he helped distribute 1,000 newspapers to those in attendance and claimed there was no way that "these people will be railroaded into a 'united Ireland' ruled by Communists obsessed with LGBTQ+, abortion & replacement immigration". He also claimed on another post there was no prospect of what he described as "Westminster traitors" forcing loyalists into a united Ireland.

Griffin has also repeatedly condemned the prosecution of British soldiers over Troubles-related killings. Like his acolyte McConnell, he is also forthright in his condemnation of SF, claiming British soldiers were being hounded, "while old IRA operatives rule Northern Ireland". In other posts he described Irish republicans as being "Marxist traitors of Sinn Féin" and "the cowardly Marxist scum of the IRA".

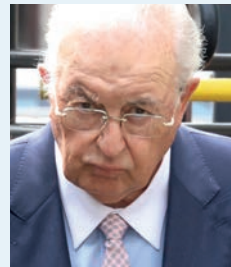


Niall McConnell



"Money doesn't mean much to me. It's just to keep the score, that's all." Asked if he was a billionaire and not a millionaire, Magnier said: "I hope so."

John Magnier giving evidence in the High Court, Sunday Independent



John Magnier

The racehorse breeder said he had people to advise him. Asked if he was resident in Switzerland, Magnier said: "Honestly, I don't understand it myself like I should." **John Magnier explains to the court the challenges of offshore tax residency, Sunday Independent**

Maureen is truly of the arts. For her, the role of Director was a vocation, not merely a job. Her commitment and passion were evident every day, and are widely acknowledged across the sector.

Arts Council chairwoman Maura McGrath on outgoing director Maureen Kennelly

I believe that disly Dave, as he was known in the old AIB Bankcentre, even grew a beard for the trek. **Nick Webb on former bank boss David Duffy's Camino trip, Sunday Times**

Unlike most other Irish journalists, I was given a copy of the letter and it was harsh: comparing the proposed legislation to the speech laws in the likes of China and Iran. **Ian O'Doherty on his 'special' access to JD Vance's letter to the Irish ambassador to the US, Irish Independent**

Like any political symbolism, nails provide a jumping off point to open conversations and build community around complex concepts that may feel too big to approach without a supportive prompt. **Andrea Horn of Tropical Popical on fingernail art, Irish Examiner**

The recent action just copper-fastened what I pointed out in last week's column. **Pat Spillane lauds his clairvoyance, Sunday World**

The maqluba he ate in Palestine in 2013. This was a marrying of the timely (the politics of the West Bank at the beginning of the 2010s) and the universal (the falafel made by everyone in the greater region)... Forget the pre-Socratics, Bourdain more than anyone understood this organising feature of the universe. **Finn McRedmond on Anthony Bourdain, Irish Times**

She sings with the whispered intimacy that comes only after midnight at a sleepover. **Catherine Prasifka on Taylor Swift, Irish Independent**

Having finally decided to tell her story, Miriam approached it with characteristic wholeheartedness, and she writes with such candour, intelligence and generosity that readers will be totally captivated. **Publisher Patricia Deevy on Miriam O'Callaghan's upcoming autobiography**

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



GOVERNMENT DATA BULLIES

IN A chilling public display of loyalty to our Big Tech overlords, Fianna Fáil heavyweights have been putting the boot into a senior civil servant who dared to question the divine right of data centres to monopolise Ireland's precious resources and scarce infrastructure.

Oonagh Buckley, secretary general at the Department of Environment, Climate and Energy, recently warned that, since data centres had used up all spare electricity capacity, Ireland would have to choose between AI and building new homes.

The fact that runaway data centre growth is ramping up fossil fuel burning and Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions has so far not provoked major protests. But could the impact on our ability to provide housing be the spark

that finally incites a groundswell of public and political resistance to these energy vampires?

Buckley's brave intervention echoed warnings from numerous experts and state agencies. But Micheál Martin apparently knows better. Within hours he told journalists that her "presentation is not true". Jack Chambers followed up by dismissing what he called Buckley's "binary simplicity".

Once these two had shot the messenger, MEP Barry Cowen kicked her while she was down. In an oped for the *Indo* he made a dig at Buckley, trotted out tech industry talking points and banged on about delays in offshore wind delivery, which is irrelevant to the grid capacity issue Buckley was highlighting.

In fact Buckley's analysis aligns closely with a warning from the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities (CRU) that "data centre demand could significantly impact [ESB Networks'] ability to accommodate demand connections required to support Government policy targets such as 550,000 new homes by 2040".

Last month it was revealed that a major new substation in west Dublin, built to serve future housing needs in Dublin and Kildare, is being almost entirely used by data centres.

New substations are built at great expense to electricity bill payers but grid connections are on a 'first-come, first-served' basis and tech giants are proving adept at grabbing most of them.



Micheál Martin

Another shocking – but relatively under reported – revelation by the CRU this year was that data centres are consuming 50% of electricity in the Dublin/Meath region.

Aside from housing, another impact of data centres, which may incite the public anger that climate considerations have not, is the increased cost in household bills.

To pay for grid upgrades, €101 was added to every household electricity bill last October. Eirgrid, in its Transmission Development Plan, named data centres as key "policy drivers" for this grid upgrade spending.

As Daragh Cassidy of price comparison site Bonkers.ie told the *Indo* in March, it would be "ridiculous to think [data centres] don't impact on prices." Bonkers, even?

"ROADS ARE also important for environment, this doesn't get said often enough." That was Micheál Martin's hot take in Galway last week as he pledged support for the city's planned ring road. He said the health and environmental benefits of new roads are often overlooked. Indeed.

In 2023 the High Court quashed the road proposal due to non-compliance with the government's 2021 Climate Action Plan but supporters are determined to revive it.

A transport department report predicts the ring road would create heavy congestion at new junctions along the N6. It warns that congestion may be temporarily reduced but by 2040 the "overall level of congestion in the city will rise given the higher volume of vehicles on the road".



NOD IS AS GOOD AS A WINK

LAST MONTH Winston 'Winkie' Irvine, the top UVF boss in Belfast's Shankill district, was jailed for 30 months, half on licence. That sentence, for possession of a haul of guns and ammunition in his car boot, sparked outrage across the political divide in the north.

Former UUP leader Doug Beattie called it "bizarre". Other politicians have asked the director of public prosecutions to consider whether it was unduly lenient and appeal to the High Court for it to be increased.

Irvine's co-accused got five years. Why?

The judge said there were "exceptional circumstances" in Irvine's case, "namely his work for peace and his charity work in the community." In short, Winkie managed to con the court as successfully as he had conned the various people who provided the court with character references.

Irvine exemplified the ambivalent attitude of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and, indeed, Dublin's foreign affairs department towards loyalist paramilitary gangsters. For years everyone knew Irvine was the boss of the UVF's largest unit in the Shankill, B company, comprising several hundred men.

The BBC had even run a programme about it over 15 years ago, naming Irvine.

Yet Winkie was appointed to various influential bodies dealing with housing and community projects. He was regularly in contact with NIO ministers and had their mobile numbers. He was to the forefront in negotiating with senior police during riots, despite having 22 criminal convictions – including assaulting a police officer. Incredibly, he was even flown to Afghanistan to advise on dealing with the Taliban.

Since 2009 he had cultivated the image, in his own words to the court, of "a trusted interlocutor". He masqueraded as someone engaged in trying to get the UVF to decommission its weapons and "transition" to exclusively peaceful means. He was feted north and south. The Irish government funded him to do a master's course at Maynooth.

It was all a front and the police knew it.

His downfall came in March 2022 when B company organised a bomb hoax during a speech by Simon Coveney in Ardoyne. The PSNI and MI5 knew it could not have happened without the approval of Irvine. He was arrested but released without charge. He was kept under surveillance because the police knew about his clandestine real life and in July 2022 they caught him red-handed.

Of course Irvine could persuade the UVF to stop rioting and unblock roads. They were his men and he had ordered them to riot or block roads after stand-offs at Ardoyne about Orange marches. He pretended to

mediate between police and rioters, receiving concessions from the police in terms of deployment. He pretended to negotiate with the UVF in the Shankill to keep the peace in return for financial help from the NIO and Stormont, which he and his men managed to the detriment of the Shankill community.

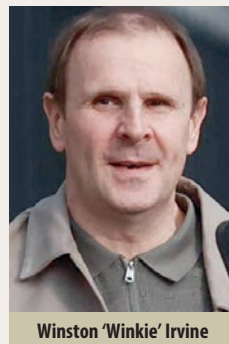
In all this subterfuge and double dealing, Irvine was the most successful but by

no means the only gangster in Belfast or other parts of the north. Curiously, neither Winkie nor any of the other "community workers" by day/gangsters by night ever managed to persuade the UVF or UDA to decommission their weapons or stop drug dealing or other illegal activities. Yet Irish government-sponsored organisations such as Cooperation Ireland continue to pump money into front groups for loyalist paramilitaries. Have they not noticed it has made no

difference whatsoever to their activities of the past 30 years?

In 2016 Stormont set up the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) to inquire into paramilitaries. Each year it produces a do-gooder report on the continuing illegalities. Nine years later there are more paramilitaries than in 2016 but, incredibly, this year the IMC proposed that the two governments consider "scoping" the prospect of appointing an "interlocutor" to discuss transitioning with paramilitaries.

Why should the paramilitaries do that? What's in it for them when they're doing so well as it is?



Winston 'Winkie' Irvine



MARTIN WRONG ON ISRAELI WAR BONDS

HEATED POLITICAL polemic on the Occupied Territories Bill (OTB) a fortnight ago saw the Government contradicted on the legal front, at home and abroad, over its excuse to delay the OTB, which relied, erroneously, on EU trade law. But when finance minister Paschal Donohoe said his hands were tied when it was demanded that he block the Central Bank from approving a prospectus for Israeli war bonds, he was in direct contradiction with Central Bank governor Gabriel Makhoulouf. In a letter to an Oireachtas committee, the governor said it could decline to issue Israeli bonds if “national restrictive measures” were invoked, something that would provide a “legal basis to do so”. These contradictions would appear to be black and white examples of the Government’s disingenuous arguments justifying its refusal to move on these two fronts. Taoiseach Micheál Martin, however, has provided the opposition, Mary Lou McDonald and Palestinian campaigners with a slam-dunk demolition of his own argument for doing nothing about Israeli war bonds.

McDonald opened the Dáil debate on Sinn Féin’s bill to prevent the Central Bank from approving documents on bonds issued by Israel by saying most people would be horrified to learn that the Irish Central Bank had been doing so. She appeared to have enraged Martin when she said the Government’s reasons for refusing to do so were “exposed as bluff” and that the Taoiseach had used the same tactic when opposing the OTB.

Martin responded by saying there was “a false narrative being peddled” by the SF leader around Gaza. He stated: “The latest now is this issue of the Central Bank’s role in issuing prospectuses. The deputy and I know that the Central Bank does not approve, issue, sell or oversee the sale of Israeli bonds. The deputy knows that.”

He added: “But the truth does not matter in this... We are not regulating or endorsing anything.”

Ceann comhairle Verona Murphy pulled the two apart before Mary Lou could take out that most informative letter from Makhoulouf to the Oireachtas finance committee, composed as far back as last December. He wrote that “I agreed to look closely at the questions relating to the Israeli bond programme” and cited the “national restrictive measures” (ie Government measures) that would provide

the legal basis for refusing to approve the prospectus for issuing the bonds.

From Martin’s point of view, however, the most disconcerting words from Makhoulouf were: “In my view, the law is clear and the Central Bank has to *approve* a prospectus for the offer of securities to the public where it meets the required standards... The law is also clear that our *approval* should not be considered an endorsement of the issuer or of the securities.”

In his angry riposte to McDonald, Martin had said “that the Central Bank does not *approve*, issue, sell or oversee the sale of Israeli bonds”.

The Central Bank governor appears to agree with Mary Lou but sure what would he know?



Gabriel Makhoulouf

COUNTER-COLONIAL CATHAL CROWE

FIANNA FÁIL TD Cathal Crowe has been making strident statements about the global issues of the day but all politics is local.

Last February, on the third anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Crowe spoke fervently about the hurt still felt in Ireland at the very existence of the northern state in a Dáil speech equating Ireland with Ukraine. This sounded like support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity, although the cynical Goldhawk had reason to believe that it was also a statement aimed at FF leader Micheál

Martin and Crowe’s party ‘colleague’ in Clare, Timmy Dooley TD, rather than Vladimir Putin.

At the time Dooley – who had lost his Clare seat to first-time TD Crowe in 2020 – had just been returned to the Dáil and had also been appointed a junior minister, unlike backbencher Crowe.

Crowe knows that his traditional FF-type republicanism will have irked revisionist Taoiseach Martin and his acolyte, Timmy, and is getting himself onside for the likely jousting between justice minister Jim O’Callaghan – also a trad FF republican – and other leadership contenders when the time comes.

A more provocative soundbite from Crowe followed last month when he accused the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) of being worse than the British Army in Ireland as they never bombed or shot Irish civilians, a remark he apologised for with some haste (the bit about the Brits, that is, not the IDF).

Crowe’s global target here was undoubtedly Benjamin Netanyahu but the suspicion is that he was again thinking locally as well as globally. This suspicion is based on the sterling, energetic defence of Israel that Timmy mounted in the Seanad in late 2023, when the Israelis were getting into their stride by exercising their “right to defend themselves” with the slaughter of infants and other civilians in Gaza.

After some very militant pro-Israeli speeches from various FF senators, Dooley compiled a 16-point motion, 12 of which denounced Hamas (“murderous... vicious... cruel” etc), saying that it would “happily sacrifice thousands of Palestinian lives”. One said that Palestinians had the right to humanitarian aid but Dooley’s motion contained not a single criticism of the IDF.

The motion was so unbalanced that it derailed efforts by senator Frances Black to draft a cross-party motion on Gaza.

Hasty intervention from FF ministers saw Dooley’s motion replaced by a more judicious government version that was duly passed (see *The Phoenix Annual 2023*).



Timmy Dooley

THE FIRST ITEM

RED NETWORK, a far-left group claiming around 40 members, announced this week that it had voted “unanimously” to leave Richard Boyd Barrett’s People Before Profit and “set up a non-dogmatic revolutionary socialist party”. The break-away group took one of PBP’s 12 councillors, south Dublin county councillor Madeleine Johansson, who was co-opted in 2016 and elected in 2019 and 2024. Far-left personality Lázló Molnárfi – one of the more radical presidents of Trinity College Dublin’s Students’ Union and who was instrumental in the successful campaign to divest Trinity



"At least some of us will have somewhere to live."

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

from ties with Israel – is another who has defected to the new group.

Johansson and James O'Toole, founders of the 'Reds' in 2020, were members of PBP since its inception as a front organisation for the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) in 2005. The latter party became the Socialist Workers' Network in 2018.

While the stated reason for the split is a disagreement over entering a left-government led by Sinn Féin or giving critical support from outside, a 14,500-word blog post in February points to deeper disagreements with PBP's direction. The Red Network faction has argued that PBP needs a political programme to inform its parliamentary strategy and accuses the leadership of seeing things the other way round.

Further ideological disagreements are aired in Johansson's recently launched book, *Class War Not Culture War*, criticising the Irish left's penchant for identity politics.



Madeleine Johansson



"We don't target civilians.
All our bombing raids are completely indiscriminate."

This debate has divided many on the left globally, including in TD Ruth Coppinger's Socialist Party, leading to TD Paul Murphy leaving the SP in 2019 and resurfacing in PBP more recently.

Criticism in Red Network's founding statement of PBP's "student moralism and performative politics" is positively Judean but it does point to a series of mis-steps by PBP, whose political divisiveness and electoralism sometimes undermines Irish left politics. PBP candidate Bríd Smyth's EU election run in Dublin last year only had the effect of

unseating Clare Daly.

The Red Network is simply the latest in a series of splits within Trotskyist groups that have held court on the Irish left since the 1990s. Whether such splits are relevant in efforts to form a united left majority behind a Sinn Féin-led government is not at all certain.

THE PHOENIX
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OOH AH, YOU'RE IN THE 'RA, SAID THE BBC

THE BBC must cough up millions and lose face over its astonishing decision to broadcast an allegation of murder against Gerry Adams, citing on television just one anonymous source. But the reaction of the southern legal and political ruling classes to the Adams libel action tells its own story. While much was made by some of the relative youthfulness of some jury members, the crucial characteristic of both jury members and the Dublin legal establishment was class, not age.

The normal style of aggressive, cross-examination of the BBC's lead senior counsel, Paul Gallagher – a former attorney general and a luminary of the Four Courts – was a feature of the case. Even the forum of the Four Courts is something that itself symbolises the founding fathers of post-treaty Ireland. And Gallagher's apparent disdain for such as Adams is historic, exemplified by his dismissal of the 1916 Rising as unrepresentative and violent.

Add to this the spectacle of that most distinguished witness for the BBC, Michael McDowell – another former AG, justice minister and leader of the 'right-of-centre' Progressive Democrats – and the scenario in many people's minds in the High Court was that of establishment Ireland out to 'get Adams'. (Coincidentally, McDowell's son, Hugh, was on the BBC's legal team).

This may or may not have been an accurate image but it was supplemented by another BBC witness, rugby player Trevor Ringland (sure did he not wear the green jersey?), who left the Unionist Party to join the "all-inclusive NI Conservative Party", as Adams's defence lawyer sarcastically noted.

As against that, Adams's legal team completed the picture by bringing in the

extremely popular folksy warbler, Christy Moore, who later chatted amiably with his mate, good old Gerry, outside the court.

In fact, McDowell Snr unintentionally helped Adams by acknowledging that "hatred" was one word that could describe his attitude to the Sinn Féin man and went on to admit that Adams was central to the Good Friday Agreement.

This was a crucial moment as it confirmed



Gerry Adams



Michael McDowell

the Adams argument that he did have a reputation other than that of merely an IRA gunman, false or otherwise. But what the BBC also found hard to overcome was that its *Spotlight* programme had relied entirely on anonymous information to accuse an elected politician of premeditated murder.

The *Irish Mail on Sunday's* Mr Angry, Ger Colleran, was especially angry at the outcome and complained loudly that the so-called defence of "fair and reasonable publication on a matter of public interest" turned out to be worthless. Goldhawk's considered legal counsel is that this was likely because the jury thought the BBC evidence was not 'fair and reasonable'.

Interestingly, it was the Irish media – rather than Irish editions of the British media – that rent their garments and gnashed their teeth at the appalling result in the Four Courts and over a week later the *Sindo* was still ranting. That well-known political sage, Declan Lynch, was horrified at the BBC's defeat and offered compensation by comparing the bog Irish RTÉ's "mediocrity" with the BBC's "brilliance" down the years.

It took the *Irish Times* nearly a week to calm down and, ironically, it was moderate-unionist commentator Newton Emerson who brought his colleagues to earth. Emerson pointed out that "the BBC said in court it had corroboration from five other confidential sources, but it had not mentioned this in the programme, to be fair to Adams. The court was unimpressed by this argument, and little wonder".

Even the *Sunday Times* expressed the grounded view, two days after the case ended, in an editorial – something on which the chaps in London always exercise a vigilant eye – saying that the fact the BBC relied on anonymous sources "may not have helped its defence".

If the BBC and its own lawyers had, in the first place, looked at this case with an objective legal eye – instead of reacting politically – they would perhaps have seen that they were on a sticky wicket. And there will surely be a stern *post mortem* at the Beeb about how the programme came to be made with such flimsy evidence in the first place.

As it transpired, this became a battle between the BBC and Adams; between republicans and a northern section of the British media. But it also became a bitter contest between the Dublin establishment and their *bête noire*, Gerry Adams.



CONFLICTS AT DE PAPER(S)

CORK'S ATTACHMENT to 'de paper' may soon be realised literally as one of de two newspapers, the *Irish Examiner* and the *Echo*, could be facing extinction. That's what some analysts believe is the agenda behind moves by the *Irish Times*'s owner to combine the news desks at both papers.

This comes just a few months after managing director Deirdre Veldon had to contend with some bolshie commentary from the Cork journalists about unflattering comparisons with the salaries of local litter wardens and themselves.

A raft of similar complaints was also voiced when Dee wandered into the newsrooms of the two papers late last year, triggering further unflattering comparisons – this time between the MD and a certain Blueshirt politician who innocently wandered into a Kanturk shop at that time.

A more recent source of discontent has been the 5% pay raise offer under consideration by the hacks, which again has seen an unfavourable comparison – this time with the 22% rise in inflation in the last five years.

The meeting last month was to announce and explain 'Project Cork', which centres on the merging of the two newspapers' news desks – something that comes close to completing the ongoing merging of the newspapers.

A measure of the new aggression by *IT* management was its response to the request by the hacks' union – the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) – that the meeting be

postponed. This was because the NUJ's two senior representatives in Cork were both on assignment out of the office that day. 'Niet' was the response to this outrageous request. A similarly negative answer came back from Dee when the union asked if it would be possible for NUJ officers to access the meeting remotely, setting the scene for a sullen meeting between Veldon and the staff in Cork.

There was more unsettling info when the hacks were informed that the merging of the two news desks would result in that delightfully crafted management euphemism, namely "voluntary partings" of journalists. How many, Veldon and her accompanying finance officers, would not say. Nor would they say if compulsory 'partings' would follow, although they were "not on the table" at present.

When questions like these were raised, Dee called on her head of finance, Mikey Sheehan – formerly a member of management at the Cork newspapers – and he effectively told his former charges that the company's financial problems were in Cork, not at the *IT*. This, he explained, meant that the 'real capital's' newspapers would have to bear the brunt of cuts coming down the line.

Further evidence of the *IT*'s future intentions comes with the decision of the *Examiner*'s editor, Tom Fitzpatrick, to exit from the scene. This is despite Fitzpatrick being offered the job of editing the two newspapers (itself an indication of a future single entity).

Underlying the growing belief that the *Echo* will be sacrificed in the short to medium term is what the Cork journalists and NUJ members believe is the *IT*'s unwillingness to be open about its plans and how the scantiest information has to be prised from them with a crow bar.

'IRISH TIMES' CRIES HALT IN GAZA

AMONG THOSE scrambling to get onside with the increasing revulsion at the slaughter in Gaza is the *Irish Times*, which recently editorialised against Israel's now openly genocidal attacks on Palestinians.

Perhaps anxious to disassociate the newspaper from the slander that Irish people and Palestinian supporters are antisemitic, the leader writer graciously allowed that not "all protests are driven by hatred of Jews", as claimed by some.

The author, however, did argue that "antisemitism can be found among some elements of the anti-war movement" as "violent attacks in the US have shown". But, overall, the editorial was critical of the horror and suffering inflicted by Israel.

These remarks – spurred by critical gestures and even actions by some of Israel's western allies recently – are some distance from the Israeli depiction of Ireland as a country rampant with antisemitism. But that is a picture the *IT* has promoted with its opinion columns and reports of alleged antisemitism in Ireland in the last 12 months or so.

Just a week before the editorial was published, the *IT* gave space to Oliver Sears – the Dublin-based art gallery owner and founder of Holocaust Awareness Ireland – to pen the latest of 15 articles, usually defending Israeli policy, commissioned by a generous *IT* in recent years. Sears constantly refers to his family's Holocaust background as part of his polemic against critics of Israel.

But as a member of the Jews for Palestine group, Dr David Landy, puts it, Sears is "not above using his own pedigree to criticise the arguments of those who disagree with Israeli policy in Gaza" (see *The Phoenix* 10/1/25).

Sears has also decried using even the term 'boycott', never mind an actual economic and cultural boycott of Israel. He argues: "For Jews, the very term 'cultural boycott' cannot be separated from the discrimination by the Nazi regime from 1933 that led to book burning, the Nuremberg Laws and the illegality of every aspect of Jewish life, including and especially life itself."

In his latest *IT* column, Sears condemns the recent "demonising [of] Israelis, Zionism and Jews" and tells the readers that "I have warned about the global rise of antisemitism".

While Sears also condemns Israel using starvation as "monstrous", he singles out the "regimes in Israel, Gaza, Iran and surrounding countries" (all Arabs, of course) as collective villains of the violence. But he reserves most of his condemnation and demands for Hamas in a lengthy article penned just eight days before the editorial revising the newspaper's line on Gaza and rejecting the antisemitic argument.

That Sears has been given the freedom of the *IT*'s opinion columns to spread his pro-Israeli line, with the newspaper invariably advising readers of his pedigree each time, is one thing. But the Jews for Palestine group has sent many letters to the newspaper, with only two – written by individual members, not the group – being published since the war in Gaza began in October 2023.

During the same period, the Jewish group has requested several times that the *IT* publish opinion pieces from it, some written by TCD academic Landy. Not one has been published.

Why has the newspaper favoured so blatantly one Jewish voice over another group of Jewish voices?



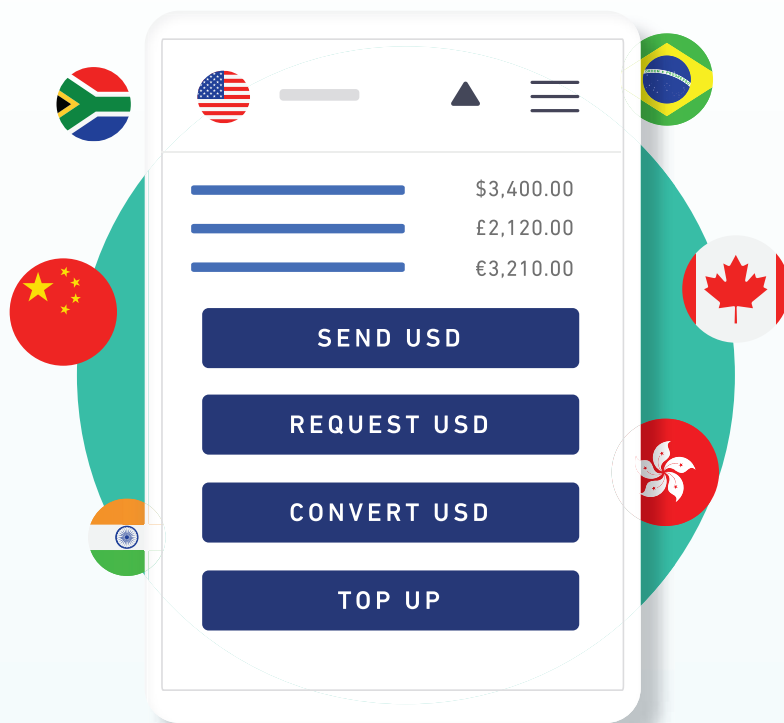
Deirdre Veldon



Oliver Sears



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Daniel Lambert

AS MANAGER of the Irish-speaking, hip-hop/rap trio Kneecap, Daniel Lambert has found himself increasingly in the spotlight as he is called upon to defend the group over their pro-Palestinian commentary and messaging. These values appear to align with the passionate and pragmatic Dubliner's own views on the subject and his measured defence of the band has helped to diffuse some of the more hysterical commentary. Then again, that might have been helped by the fact that he studied conflict resolution in college. Can he resolve the conflict with western authority and others enraged at their pro-Palestinian stance?

Now 38, Lambert grew up in Glasnevin and, aside from his involvement with Kneecap, he is chief operating officer of northside Dublin's Bohemian Football Club and co-founder, with his sister Grace, of Bang Bang café in Phibsborough. Known as a straight talker who doesn't suffer fools, he also has a sharp eye for business and holds a degree in business studies from DCU.

Lambert went from being a volunteer at Bohs to a board member in 2011, and became COO in 2020, having seen off 27 other applicants for the job. Football is in his DNA as his grandfather, Jack O'Byrne, was a founder member of the Irish Soccer Referees' Society and his dad, Stephen, set up and ran a club in Dunsink in Finglas.

Lambert hit the ground running on his appointment, immediately arranging to meet then sports minister Catherine Martin to discuss plans for a modernised multi-purpose community stadium at Dalymount Park. His powers of persuasion were clearly working, as Bohs was allocated €24.7m in funding last November for the development as part of the government's large-scale sports infrastructure fund. The redevelopment project is estimated to cost approximately €40m and is due to open in 2028.

When he took over the role, Lambert told the *Irish Daily Mail* that, alongside winning Premier Division matches, there was an inherent importance in being active in a community club and flying the flag for Phibsborough and the catchment area, which embraces Cabra, Glasnevin, Ballymun and Finglas. It was a good strategy in terms of helping to persuade the government to crank open its coffers.

Lambert told *Business Plus* that, having taken inspiration from German club St Pauli, his

commercial strategy is to get the club to use its community work, charitable donations and history to create a connection with its fanbase. "Our values piece is Palestine, Refugees Welcome and Focus Ireland," he said.

Visiting Bohemian FC's offices in the "brutalist Phibsboro Shopping Centre", visitors spot the "latest issue of *Revolutionary Communist* magazine, a Kneecap scarf, a miniature statue of Lenin's head and a print

showing Bob Marley in heaven sporting a Bohemian's jersey with a halo".

The strategy is paying dividends as, under Lambert's watch, Bohs has enjoyed a surge in merchandise sales, going from €100,000 in 2014 to €2m in 2024. Its

turnover a decade ago was just under €1m, compared with €4.5m in 2024. Bohemian FC sells between 20,000 and 30,000 shirts per year, with two-thirds now being shipped outside of Ireland.

Lambert's parents were regular Dubs, who left school early but were entrepreneurial. His mum was an interior designer, dad Stephen had his own clothing business and, as a family, they enjoyed examining potential business ideas.

COLOURFUL CAREER

Lambert's past career was colourful. After his stint at DCU, he worked in pharmaceutical sales, which was well paid but didn't give him career satisfaction. He decided to buy a Land Rover and drove to and from Mongolia with a friend for six months. He told RTE's *The Business* that he encountered a few hairy moments, including being arrested in Kazakhstan "for no reason [other than] to bribe us". Having been put into a cell, an interpreter was brought in who advised Lambert and his friend that they needed to give the arresting officers something so they coughed up and were set free.

On another occasion, our heroes had to give soldiers in a Russian military helicopter mini bottles of Jameson whiskey to avoid any hassle there.

Back on home ground, Lambert chose the rather safer route of embarking on a master's in DCU on international conflict and security, where he focused on the Nato action in Libya. He then joined the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and took a post in New York as a political advisor to the UN General Assembly in 2013.

He decided to return home because, while he felt the DFA was filled with "really brilliant people", he wasn't enamoured with the idea of being in a system for 30 years that was "pretty hierarchical" and was about longevity and slow-moving processes.

At that point, he wanted to do something completely different so he opened Bang Bang café with his sister, Grace. The café is named after Thomas Dudley, the eccentric elderly man who was famous around the Dublin streets in the 1950s and '60s. Because of his love of cowboy films, he could be regularly seen hanging from the back of double-decker buses and trams staging mock shoot-outs, which earned him his nickname.

The idea for the café came to Lambert when he was living in Brooklyn and saw interesting cafés and



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bars with cool and meaningful names that were tucked away in residential streets. When Bang Bang opened, customers told Lambert about their memories of Dudley, including one customer who was involved in his burial 40 years earlier. Lambert subsequently organised a fundraiser to erect a headstone at the burial site and hosted an event to mark the occasion, which was attended by the lord mayor and a couple of hundred people.

Daniel also set up a company called Mossaddegh Ltd with his partner, Radie Peat, from the band Lankum.

He is a director of Up and Away Media, which is owned by Jamie Goldrick. Lambert produced and Goldrick directed the 2020 short documentary *Up & Away*, about the 1973 IRA Mountjoy helicopter escape, told through the eyes of four men who were in the prison that day.

Kneecap was formed in 2017 by three friends, known as Mo Chara, Móglaí Bap and DJ Próvaí. Lambert's association with them came about when he met the band in a Belfast pub and was fascinated when he overheard them speaking Irish. They got chatting and he invited them for lunch at Bang Bang when they were in Dublin the following week and the friendship blossomed. Within a couple of months, they were chatting about ideas and the band subsequently invited Lambert to manage them.

Lambert has done an impressive job of getting the band out there as they have featured in the *New York Times*, the *LA Times* and *Variety* magazine, among other widely read media. Kneecap were on the crest of a wave when their semi-fictionalised Irish-language origin movie starring Michael Fassbender won a Bafta in February 2025 and the Spirit of the Festival prize at this year's Celtic Media Awards in Cornwall.

CONTROVERSY

But in April the group drew criticism, following their set at US music festival Coachella, for displaying screens with pro-Palestinian messages and accusations against Israel about the war in Gaza. Their subtitles accused Israel of genocide and called for Palestine's liberation, which caused the band to be dropped by their US visa sponsor and booking agent, Independent Artist Group.

Specifically, the band was accused of displaying the flag of Hezbollah, the Lebanese political and militarist organisation deemed terrorist by many western countries.

Former *X Factor* judge Sharon Osbourne weighed in on the controversy, calling for Kneecap's US work visas to be revoked for taking "their performance to a different level by incorporating aggressive political statements".

The band's pithy and effective response was that "statements aren't aggressive, murdering 20,000 children is though".

Speaking on RTÉ's *Drivetime*, Lambert said the band showed "bravery and conviction".

"If somebody is hurt by the truth, that's

something for them to be hurt by but it's really important to speak the truth," he said. "Thankfully the lads are not afraid to do that."

Talking to Miriam O'Callaghan on *Prime Time*, Lambert criticised British prime minister Keir Starmer for saying that Israel had a right to cut food and water into Gaza.

"You have a band being held to a higher moral account than politicians who are ignoring international law," he said. "Children are starving to death and we've spent six or seven days speaking about Kneecap and less than a day speaking about 15 executed medics."

BALACLAVAS

Kneecap's logo is based on the balaclavas worn by paramilitaries during the Troubles, and DJ Próvaí often wears an Irish tricolour balaclava in public. On RTÉ's *The Business*, host Richard Curran queried Lambert on the band singing 'Get Your Brits Out'. He also wondered about the repercussions of unveiling a mural of a PSNI Land Rover on fire ahead of performing to 10,000 people at Féile an Phobail in 2022, captioned: "Níl Fáilte Roimh An RUC."

Leaders of the DUP, UUP and Alliance were among those who condemned the group and Curran pointed out to Lambert that, while these actions were opening up the Irish language in a different way to lots of new people, it might be closing it off to

others as well.

Lambert's defence and protection of his charges is always calm and measured, and his response was that controversy is subjective and that people, "especially in the North, love to be outraged".

He claimed the actions mentioned above could be interpreted in two ways and that it was "quite satirical" that DJ Próvaí wears a tricolour balaclava. The burning car and slogan was "looking back" and he disagreed with northern justice minister Naomi Long when she said that the band was stoking sectarian tensions.

Lambert insisted that the band is totally non-sectarian and that the song 'Get Your Brits Out' is about a night out with the DUP. "The DUP have probably been the best marketing tool Kneecap's ever had because they just have to say anything and they [the DUP] will jump on it," he said.

According to Lambert, the band get people from all sides of the community at their events and have far more in common with somebody from the Shankill Road than somebody from south Belfast or Killiney. He says that the band's core message is about having a system in Ireland that serves the working class far better than it does now, rather than "anything about green or orange".

Lambert is certainly a man with a persuasive vision and a diplomatic eloquence that will serve Kneecap well. While history will prove who was on the right side of the various causes the band embrace, his steady hand on the rudder will likely be needed to navigate the choppy waters dissenters are generating for some time to come.



TIOCFÁIDH ÁR LAW

DERRY MAGISTRATE'S Court heard the case of a young woman who, on May 29, was found in an intoxicated state, lying on the road and yelling republican slogans. It was reported to the court that, while responding to a call out at 2:40am, a police car was flagged down by a pedestrian, who had noticed the defendant, Leonie McLaughlin, of O'Gara Villas, Moville, lying in the road. Believing she may have been knocked down, the officers assisted her off the road and on to the footpath. She then began yelling "tíocfaidh ár lá" and "up the IRA". The pedestrian who had flagged down the police car said that McLaughlin was seeking attention from the police. Defence solicitor Paddy MacDermott told the court that his client had "drank too much" on the night in question. Judge Ted Magill described McLaughlin's actions as "utterly unacceptable" as she had interrupted the police on a call-out. She was handed a two-month suspended sentence. *Derry News*

OH BROTHER!

A 52-YEAR-OLD Graiguecullen man appearing before Carlow District Court was ordered to carry out community service after becoming "very agitated" towards gardaí. Ruben Obadia of 5 Brotherton, Sleaty Road, Graiguecullen, pleaded guilty to engaging in threatening and abusive behaviour and refusing to provide his name during an incident at Aldi in Graiguecullen on July 29, 2023. Sergeant Hud Kelly said a garda approached Obadia in the supermarket, leading to the defendant becoming agitated. He refused to co-operate with the officer in question and, when asked to provide his name, replied "no comment" and "fuck you". Obadia's solicitor, Alex Rafter, said that his client felt singled out by gardaí because his brother was well known to them. Judge Geraldine Carthy ordered Obadia to carry out 180 hours of community service in lieu of two months in prison. *Laois Nationalist*

FISTICUFFS

A DRINK-DRIVER who became abusive towards gardaí when he was pulled over was convicted in *absentia* in Macroom District Court. Inspector Anthony Harrington told the court that on December 10, 2024, officers noticed a silver Audi "driving erratically" on the N22. The car kept stopping and starting, switching between lanes and at one point almost drove into a ditch, according to Harrington. The vehicle was stopped and gardaí noticed the driver, Trevor Horgan (33), of The Hermitage, Macroom, was slurring his words and smelled of alcohol. He was arrested and became abusive at Macroom Garda Station, telling officers: "Take off these handcuffs and we'll see who's the big man." When the defendant eventually calmed down and was breathalysed, he was found to be more than three times over the legal limit. Judge Treasa Kelly fined Horgan €500 for drink-driving and disqualified him for three years. *Echo*

• Suitable contributions to: *The Phoenix*, 44 Lower Baggot St, D2, or email bogcuttings@thephoenix.ie



Keira Keogh

Guaranteeing the succession is always a fraught task in politics but 37-year-old Keira Keogh managed to climb back from a poor local election outing to hold Michael Ring's Fine Gael seat in West Mayo at the general election.

FG has had a strong grip on this constituency since the watershed election of 2011, when Fianna Fáil collapsed and FG took four of the five seats on offer. But Ring's retirement and the failure of former TD Michelle Mulherin to regain any momentum posed a big question about the party's chances and who could do it for them.

FG was confident that Castlebar-based Alan Dillon would hold his seat and indeed he did as FG took a commanding 35% of the first-preference vote. FG put up four candidates – spreading its chances – in what had been restored as a five-seat constituency but it had to dig deep to find candidates.

Independent councillor Mark Duffy from Ballina was persuaded to join FG just before the general election and was added to the ticket by party HQ, joining Dillon, Keogh and Martina Jennings from the south of the county.

Ring enthusiastically championed Keogh in Westport and pulled out all the stops to ensure that she put up a major challenge.

In the event, Keogh was third placed of the FG candidates but was only 200 votes behind Ballina's Duffy. She overtook him on transfers, with the elimination of the Green and People before Profit candidates, and never looked back.

Duffy, however, remains a favourite for FG. He got a party nomination for the Seanad and won a seat on the labour panel. As a well-regarded community activist, his presence in the Oireachtas will keep Keogh on her toes.

Keogh's family have been associated with Ring for many years but Keira herself has little political experience. FG's electoral blurb describes her as "a proud Mayo woman who grew up immersed in the hospitality industry at The Helm in Westport Quay, which instilled in her a strong work ethic and community spirit".

The blurb continues: "A passionate and dedicated behaviour consultant, Keira has 18 years of experience working with neurodiverse children."

Keogh was chosen to chair the Oireachtas children and equality committee – probably on the basis of her work with children rather than her being immersed in a pub – but has already taken a semi-independent line, insisting publicly that the annual report of the children's ombudsman is a "roadmap for action" not talking.

"This report is a sobering read," she said. "As a TD – and someone whose career prior to politics was centred around children – I find it shameful to see how so many of our children have been failed."

Ring, of course, was very much his own man and only toed the party line when it accorded with his own views. Keogh seems to understand that she too needs to make sure that the electorate considers her in a similar light if she is to fend off the challenge from Duffy.

Duffy's weakness is that Ballina's strong man is FF's Dara Calleary. The latter always had the edge over Castlebar's Lisa Chambers, a Micheál Martin favourite, who has now retired from politics following yet another defeat in last year's election.



Keira Keogh

Calleary's stock has risen in FF as he has rolled up his sleeves and got to work in his ministerial briefs in social protection, rural and community development, and the Gaeltacht.

A committed Irish-speaker, Calleary has gone down well with language activists and he hopes that this will stand to his credit when debate resumes about future party leadership.

He has Ballina sown up – a problem for Duffy – but Calleary's big problem is to find a running mate who can get elected without damaging his own vote.

In 2024, FF scored 20% first preferences, enough for one seat but nowhere near the mark for two. This vote was a small drop on the 24% FF scored in 2020 and on the 27% it scored in 2016.

FG, however, has been declining as well and Sinn Féin – so far – has been unable to get much above 20%.

In a five-seater, on current percentages, FG will take two, FF and SF will take one each,

with one other up for grabs. In 2024, Aontú's Paul Lawless took the last seat, just ahead of former FG but now Independent Patsy O'Brien.

In 2020 O'Brien, from Claremorris, was expelled from FG after a party inquiry found that he had sent pornographic material to a female party worker but it was noted that, when FG's Jennings (also from Claremorris) was eliminated, the largest share of her transfers went to O'Brien.

Lawless scored 6% first preferences but is clearly vulnerable to any SF resurgence if the party was able to get back to earlier opinion poll ratings.

SF's second candidate, Swinford councillor Gerry Murray, is very well liked but the party just didn't have the support to put it in with a chance of two seats.

Murray is very much a party man for whom the best interest of the party is more important than what's best for him personally. He is solidly supportive of successful SF TD Rose Conway-Walsh.

Interestingly, although Murray is a left-wing, social progressive, his transfers went mainly to Aontú – almost certainly because of its nationalism rather than its anti-immigration stance.

Aontú's Lawless did draw in an anti-immigration vote but his base remained the more traditional republican one that Aontú generally appeals to. If SF got the edge on Aontú in the next election – Murray was 800 votes behind Lawless in 2024 – the latter's transfers would be more likely to go to SF than to anyone else. But SF would have to up its game considerably to be able to challenge for two seats.

O'Brien's vote, of course, is mainly an FG one and although his return to the FG fold looks very, very unlikely, it can't be ruled out. If he were to return, he would pose a challenge not only to Lawless but to Keogh as well.

Keogh was 600 votes ahead of O'Brien on first preferences but she was decidedly more transfer-friendly. She looks to have his measure but will need to watch out for the challenge from Duffy.

Her position as chair of the Oireachtas children and equality committee gives her the basis to enhance her profile – and indications are already there that she intends to use it for that end – but Duffy is an energetic campaigner and he can be expected to use his position on the Oireachtas transport committee to highlight the many complaints that Mayo voters have concerning transport and road connections in the county.

The next election may be some years away but it's battle on already in Mayo.



IMMA'S HALF DOZEN

ARTS MINISTER Patrick O'Donovan is seeking applications from worthies looking to fill no less than six upcoming vacancies on the **Ali Curran**-chaired board of Imma.

At the end of last year two vacancies were filled, with UCC architectural design academic **John McLaughlin** and consumer affairs expert **Rhoda Lane-O'Kelly** appointed for five-year stints.

The latter is the head of the Consumer Goods Forum and boasts an address in Paris. Describing herself as "a seasoned executive", Lane-O'Kelly added an executive master's in cultural

leadership to her CV in 2024, so presumably she has plenty to offer at board meetings.

When the two vacancies were advertised last year, it was noted that the estimated time requirement was a chunky 75 (unpaid) hours per annum. The good news is that this time around the successful candidates will only have to commit a paltry 32 unpaid hours a year.

The previous advert highlighted two areas where essential experience was being sought – "strategic communications/brand building" and "physical infrastructure development/capital programme management".

The minister is now looking to fill six vacancies, although by the end of this year only five terms will have concluded. Next month will see both business suit **John Cunningham** and risk management expert **Margot Lyons** complete seven years on the Imma board, while in December fundraiser **Mary Apied**

and former Convention Centre chairman **Dermot Dwyer** complete a decade each in situ. Writer **Eva Kenny's** first term will also conclude then.

It seems that a sixth vacancy is being advertised now because artist **Gerard Byrne** will complete his decade as an Imma director next February. Clearly, O'Donovan is planning rather further ahead than his predecessor as minister, **Catherine Martin**.

For the upcoming vacancies, seven areas have been highlighted where experience is being sought –

"corporate governance/financial expertise; finance and accounting; professional artist with international experience; strategic fundraising and philanthropy; climate and sustainable transition; legal; and public relations/strategic comms".



Rhoda Lane-O'Kelly

WHILE THE Arts Council has been getting both barrels recently for rather obvious rea-

sons (clue: €7m IT debacle), it is rarely criticised by its clients for equally obvious reasons. Certainly, the smart move is to only question the modus operandi on Merriem Square after you have been cut loose.

Last week, one-time Abbey Theatre artistic director Ben Barnes fired a salvo at the funding agency, ostensibly regarding its disproportionately Dublin-focused spending record but actually to highlight the fact that his Four Rivers theatre group in Wexford had seen its approx €200,000-a-year grant "inexplicably" slashed to zero this year.

This was apparently on the grounds that other applications were "more compelling", which must have hurt the hapless Ben, who presumably knows a compelling argument for funding when he sees it.

It turns out too that Barnes also wrote recently to both the Arts Council director and chairwoman – Maureen Kennelly and Maura McGrath – to give the Merriem Square mafia some tips on funding projects outside the Pale. The gals, however, may have had other things on their minds.



MAGNIER'S NEW WORLD

DISCONTENT WITH Coolmore's near stranglehold on Irish racing had been a talking point at bloodstock sales in recent seasons but that has all changed. But the result is a significant hike in prices for top-quality horseflesh.

Tattersalls and Goffs sales have seen records tumble, with Sheik **Mohammed al Maktoum's** Godolphin, **Kia Joorabchian** and **John Stewart's** Resolute Racing among those pushing sales prices to new heights.

At this year's Tattersalls Ireland Breeze-Up Sales, prices increased by 21%, with a new record for the top-priced lot – a son of *Night of Thunder*, who

realised €580,000. The two-year-old was consigned by **Gay O'Callaghan's** Yeomanstown Stud and was purchased by **Anthony Stroud** of Stroud Coleman Bloodstock, one of 10 lots he acquired at the sales.

Stroud is well-known as Godolphin's 'talent spotter' and was responsible for the purchase of al Maktoum's recent Newmarket 2,000 Guineas winner, *Ruling Court*, who is by Coolmore USA sire *Justify*. Stroud, on behalf of the sheikh, outbid Coolmore for the €2.3m colt at the Arqana Breeze-Up sale. (The soft going last weekend ruled *Ruling Court* out of the Epsom Derby, for which he had been a favourite.)

Al Maktoum had ceased buying progeny of Coolmore sires back in 2005 but, following the departure of his last bloodstock advisor, **John Ferguson**,

Stroud issued the directive to find "nice horses without restrictions on their sires". It is a policy that's certainly now paying dividends for the boys in blue.

It is not only on the racecourse that Magnier and his entourage are meeting stiff re-

sistance, as the current high-profile (ie super expensive) Barne Estate schmozzle in the Four Goldmines is showing. The developer and moneybags owner of Newtown Anner Stud, **Maurice Regan**, looks to have summed things up rather nicely with his recent quip: "John Magnier will have to get used to not getting things his own way."

CURRAGH'S HEAVY GOING

CURRAGH RACECOURSE head honcho **Brian Kavanagh** struggled to find some good going wherever he could among the attendance figures after the recent underwhelming Tattersalls Guineas Weekend Festival.

Overall numbers for the three-day event were down again but poor weather got the bulk of the blame. **Anthony Kamin-skas** of AK Bets, however, was once again critical of the facility, with rails colleague **Brian Graham** also proving pretty vocal.

Graham, who has two rails pitches at the Curragh, voted with his feet by choosing to attend the Downpatrick races instead of the opening night of the Curragh's Guineas triple-header. It looks to have been a wise decision.

Certainly, AK Bets, which recently took over the on-course betting office at Listowel racecourse, had plenty of time to share videos of the sparsely populated Curragh stands. One video – captioned: "This is what no consequences to failure looks like" – got a big thumbs-up.

Despite all the criticism, an upbeat Kavanagh continues to put the Co Kildare venue's best face forward, which is not surprising given that the Curragh redevelopment programme ran more than 25% over budget and cost €81m, of which the Irish taxpayer contributed €36m. This figure is in addition to the annual government subsidy (€79m in 2025).

There was some good news for the public in south Co Dublin – 800 new social and 'affordable' homes are to be built on part of Leopardstown racecourse's very large car park – space that is not required as attendances there have also fallen.

Last year, Leopardstown – a Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) racecourse – also received a kicking from Graham and his colleagues. Change is in the air as chief executive Tim Husbands has since exited to be replaced by interim boss **Vicki Donlon**, commercial manager of all four HRI racecourses since 2021.



John Magnier



DER KAISER'S TRUSTEES

DERMOT DESMOND'S favourite charity, the Chester Beatty Library (CBL) – where he is a trustee “for life” – is set to get some new blood courtesy of arts minister **Patrick O'Donovan**.

This week is the deadline for expressions of interest from suitable candidates to fill three upcoming vacancies on the 12-member CBL board of trustees, which has been chaired since the end of 2017 by former European Commission secretary general **Catherine Day** (who is also chair of UCC these days).

Three board members are appointed by the minister and the outgoing trustees are former RTÉ exec **Clare Duignan** (currently a director of the *Irish Times* and Fáilte Ireland), number-cruncher **David Gillett** of GBW Accountants, and former Irish ambassador to Japan and the Netherlands **John Neary**.

The three amigos were all appointed in 2018 for an initial five-year term before being reappointed in 2023. According to the department, O'Donovan is seeking replacements with experience in areas such as finance, cyber security and (most importantly perhaps) fundraising – “preferably internationally”.

The new trustees will be expected to devote around 12 days a year to the CBL gig, including attending events and committee preparation with remuneration of absolutely zilch on offer, as is the case for just about all Irish state-sponsored cultural gigs.

HYLAND'S GRAVE CONCERN

THE ASSOCIATION of Irish Racehorse Owners (AIRO) held its recent AGM in the near empty Irish Thoroughbred Breeders' Association headquarters in Kill, Co Kildare, where chairman

David Hyland warned about the number of owners leaving the sport of kings, a trend he is “gravely concerned about”.

Hyland claimed the exodus was down to poor levels of prize money but, despite his assertion that racehorse owners are “leaving the industry in droves”, the state agency, Horse Racing Ireland (HRI), recently issued

figures that show the number of active racehorse owners rose by 1% last year, with new ownership figures apparently up 4%, while so-called owner retention rates also increased slightly.

It is unclear what statistics AIRO and HRI are relying on but, presumably, they are rather different given the disparity in outlook.

The owners' AGM saw the status quo retained at AIRO, with Hyland re-elected into the saddle and **Caren Walsh** landing another term as vice-chair, while **John Weld** and **Sandra Fox** were re-elected to the board yet again.

The good news for the handful at the AGM is that last year AIRO

turned a €15,000 deficit for the 12 months into a €15,000 surplus, but this was primarily down to a reduction in “magazine expenses” from €33,000 to just €3,000. Legal and professional fees also fell from €7,000 in 2023 to a welcome nil last year.

The figure for “events expenses”, however, was up €14,000 to just over €94,000. No doubt a large chunk of this was accounted for by the annual AIRO awards bash that again took place in **John Magnier's** fabulously expensive Cashel Palace hotel in Co Tipperary last November.

The costs associated with the annual shindig were the subject of griping at the 2024 event, with the 2023 accounts showing that €54,000 had been splashed out on “awards expenses” that year – representing a whopping 20% of the association's income.

Happily for the Squire of Coolmore, AIRO returned to Cashel Palace last year but the cost is not so clear in the latest annual report. Instead of an entry under the heading of awards expenses, the €94,000 figure now published covers unidentified “events expenses”, which presumably includes the likes of the annual golf tournament. (This year's iteration was held last month in the impressive surrounds of Mount Juliet.)



Dermot Desmond

ROMAN STERN'S EXPENSIVE ADVENTURE

GOLDHAWK NOTES that number-cruncher **Roy Scannell** of Moore Ireland has just been installed as liquidator of a company called SWR Properties Ltd. This was once the entity behind the sprawling Liss Ard estate outside Skibbereen, Co Cork, which was acquired by the wealthy **Roman Stern** at the start of the century before being offloaded four years ago at a knockdown price.

The 163-acre Liss Ard estate (featuring a famous ‘Sky Garden’ and a 40-acre lake) was put on the market initially back in 2016 with a price tag of €7.5m and, despite a chunky 33% being lopped off the asking price, it failed to budge. In 2019 the price was slashed again to €3.5m.

It had once been owned by a controversial ecological charity called the Liss Ard Foundation that featured in these pages many moons ago, having been set up by German businessman **Veith Turske** (see *The Phoenix* 15/1/93).

Liss Ard Foundation, funded by Fáilte Ireland, put the property on the market in 2002 with a guide price of €6m, which was when Swiss moneybags

Stern swooped, before pumping millions into the 19th-century house and estate.

In order to make a few bob from the expensive investment, Stern had converted Liss Ard to a holiday getaway and wedding venue, initially offering rooms at around €150 a night in the main six-bedroom house, while the 10-bedroom lake house was listed separately with Airbnb at around €2,500 for a weekend stay. There are also mews properties on the estate.

At the start of 2021 an entity called St Dominic's Properties Ltd (SDP) acquired the estate, with the Liss Ard name registered to the firm in April that year. The shares in the Irish entity are listed as being held by California-based **Robert** and **Colin Best**, who have 51% and 49% of the company respectively, although **Michael Johnston**, also based in sunny California, is the Bests' business partner

in their burgeoning real estate development and hotel outfit, which also acquired a property in France.

The December 2023

accounts for SDP show accumulated losses of €1.1m after a loss in the 12 months of €620,000, while assets (Liss Ard) were valued at €7m after a substantial renovation programme was carried out.

US companies 13 Beechwood Properties LLC and Cypress Avenue Properties LLC were shown to be owed a combined €7.6m.

Six years after finally selling Liss Ard, Stern has now decided to wind up the company he set up for the project. It was initially called Liss Ard Property Holdings and Developments Ltd but the name was changed to SWR Properties in 2021 after the sale was agreed.

The latest documents filed in the Companies Office date

back to September 2021, when the listed directors were Roman, local legal-eagle **Bill Holohan** and general manager **Aidan Shannon**. Also on board were Roman's father and brother, **Herman** and **Timo Stern**, while all the shares were held in Roman's name.

The last accounts here only cover the year to the end of December 2021, when the company lost €187,000, leaving it sitting on accumulated losses of €6.1m. The property was listed in the accounts as having a valuation at that time of €5m, while Roman Stern was owed €11.2m, so it looks like he has taken something of a bath here.

Meanwhile, down in Portugal, where Roman spends much of his time, the minted businessman owns the upmarket Martinhal Hotels and Resorts operation with his wife, former Singaporean management consultant **Chitra Stern**, who is the face of the business.

Another Stern undertaking is United Lisbon International School, a posh educational facility, which presumably has proved a better financial bet than Liss Ard.




Roman and Chitra Stern



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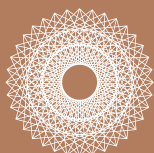
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Irish Independent

Scenes of Pride as historic day remembered

There was widespread jubilation throughout the country as ecstatic landlords took to the streets to celebrate the Government's proposed relaxing of rent-pressure zones.

Property owner Rob Tennant exclaimed: "This is an occasion for celebration. After so many years campaigning, lobbying and fighting for what's right, the Government is finally changing this antiquated and regressive legislation."



While another, one Phil Holmes, added through tears of joy: "I know I speak on behalf

of all my renters when I say that we could not be more thrilled by this development."

Meanwhile housing minister James Browne said of the news: "These pressure zones were getting a bit too stifling – particularly the one around Leinster House. Hopefully now that the Government has given in to the demands of these landlords, they'll stop allowing us to live rent free in their heads."

That Gerry Adams case

FOLLOWING ON from Gerry Adams's landmark court action, BBC deputy news editor Mike Madeup has refused to confirm that anyone would be disciplined over the libellous programme.

"This disgraceful attack on free speech was clearly driven by a political agenda," said Mr Madeup, "which is why all those responsible – ie us – should be bailed out immediately by the



NI licence payers. "As to the question of accountability, you'll have to ask my boss, the head of news, but at the moment he's busy not resigning."

Meanwhile, Mr Adams repeated his claim that the entire case was about "putting manners" on the BBC: "It's about time they showed a bit of proper respect for me, my teddy bear, my woolly jumpers, denials, etc, etc."

Michael D Higgins's presidential archive in full

■ Labour Party membership card (expired)

■ Soapbox, well used

■ Collection of decent poems (someone else's)

■ Letters from respected world leaders and Micheál Martin

■ President's shortest speech (64 pages)

■ Note about only serving one term

■ Messages of congratulations (self-authored)

PRIDE MONTH JOY



Micheál Martin

This is one of those times when you just have to put on a very serious face, furrow your brow and speak in hushed tones. Pride month is another shining example of my shared island concept. Reaching out, inclusivity – all that jazz. Not that my support is any more heartfelt than other people's, mentioning no names, such as Mary Lou and Simon, of course.



Conor McGregor
McGregor Month

would be a better idea! Not that I'm bothered by the bloody LGBCDE lot. I sometimes even play Elton John's *I'm Still Standing* (for president – geddit?). But Irish people hate flashy attention-seekers addicted to drama. And I know what I'm talking about. Now, I'm off to tweet some slurs.



Bono

Me, me, me, me, me... and U2!
(That's enough pride - Ed.)

JOHN MAGNIER
The Purchaser?

MAURICE REGAN
The Purchaser?

MAX BARRETT
The Judge

From the producers of *Low Ball*, *Swiss Retreat* and *Stuffed Envelopes*...

NOBLAND

THE FIGHT FOR THE BARNE ESTATE

JOHN MAGNIER HOPES HE IS A BILLIONAIRE.
MAURICE REGAN KNOWS HE IS ONE.
WHEN THE STAKES ARE THIS BIG, THINGS ARE GOING TO GET UGLY

SHOCKING DOC ROCKS NATION



It's an outdated institution representing the worst of Irish culture

But enough about RTÉ

Arts Council contract shock!

IRELAND'S ARTS world has been turned upside down by the sensational news that Poormee Kennelly is stepping down as Arts Council boss.

A tearful Ms Kennelly openly admitted that she was in no way responsible for the €6.7m IT project fiasco. "It is all too easy to make me the scapegoat just because I was in charge throughout almost the whole process," she said. "What about my predecessor? What about the chair who cleared off to Boston? What about that Green Party arts minister who's yesterday's news. What about the awful weather, Trump, the housing crisis?"

New minister Patrick O'Gettitude said: "My decision to set up another expensive inquiry will show how media-friendly decisions can boost my own meteoric career."

STARK EPA WARNING



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has called for urgent action to address the threats to Ireland's climate over the next few years, with the flagging energy of coalition chief among the concerns. In a further worrying development, the agency says the country's exposure to extreme long-windedness from ministers is at a critical level.

"There's a climate of fear in Government as TDs fret about losing their seats," said an EPA spokesman. "They all want to protect their environment and stop damaging leaks to the media. Flooding is also a major concern as the coalition threatens to become a complete washout. Certainly, with housing still an abject disaster, the Government is taking on a dangerous amount of water."

TRUMP'S MILITARY PARADE EXCLUSIVE!



Goldhawk profiles this year's 'Love Island' favourites



Gerry Adams

Enjoyed a profitable day in the sun recently when he emerged with a very nice figure after things worked out really well in the High Court. Revealed a little kinky side to his personality when he said he was determined to put manners on the BBC.

RTÉ to pay for what happened to him.



Shane Ross

Proved during his time in Leinster House that he has absolutely no qualms about hooking up with strange political bedfellows in order to indulge his ministerial desires. Currently in the news for trying to flog his house but could be tempted to head to the villa.



Ryan Tubridy

Doubts remain about his ability to maintain meaningful relationships following a dramatic split with his professional soulmates in Donnybrook a few years ago. It remains unclear if he still wants



Kevin Bakhurst

Caught with his pants down after it was revealed RTÉ spent an absolute fortune – [That'll do – Ed]

'I'm in charge of housing shambles,' insists Browne

Housing minister James Browne has insisted the housing shambles is completely his responsibility, after the secretary general of his own department said there was no need for a housing tsar.

"Let me be clear, the only person responsible for this catastrophe is me," said a defiant

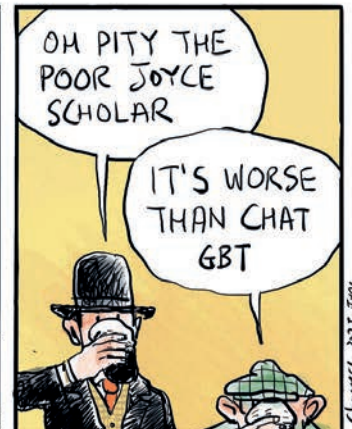
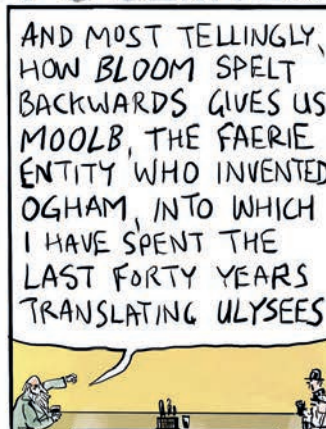
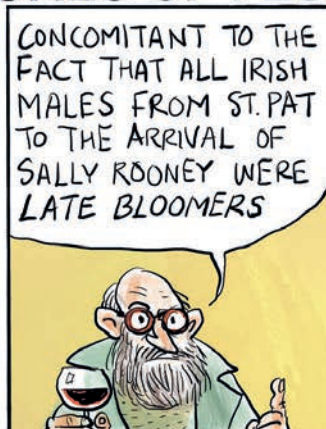
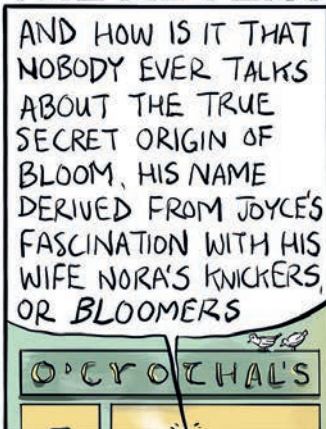


Browne. "Other people might be weighing in but my mortifying track record speaks for itself. People can rest assured there is a steady hand in control, as I and the rest of the Government maintain our long record of running the country into the ground."

TUBRIDY'S RTÉ REPAYMENT DEBATE HEATS UP



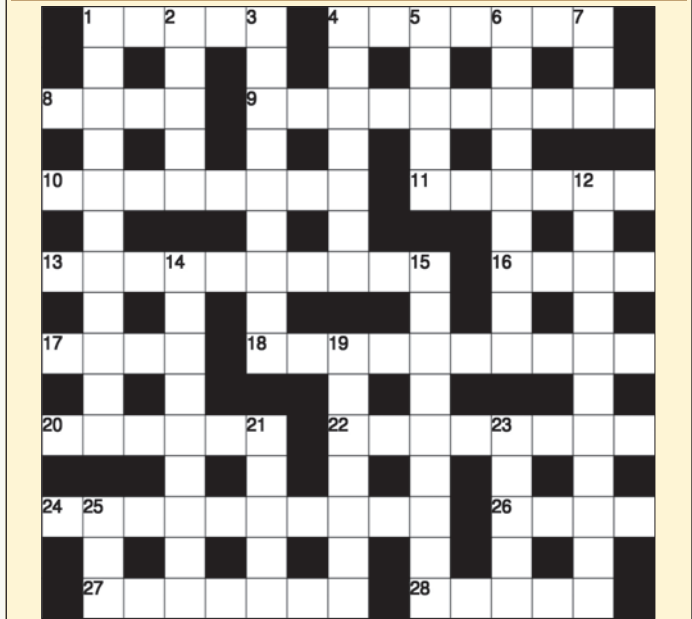
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Crossword by Procrustes

ACROSS

- 1 State prosecutor initially accepts secret number for copying precedent. (5)
- 4 Mistakenly lit to burn (though not calories) while trying to lose weight. (7)
- 8 Measure the area behind the building. (4)
- 9 Cheekily suggest that it has been badly tuned inside. (10)
- 10 These people would experience real trouble if major terrorist group was surrounding them. (8)
- 11 Order the most lightly cooked steak on the menu in the Connemara Restaurant. (6)
- 13 Be philosophical when bad stuff in chest and throat leads to a nervous symptom. (10)
- 16 It does tend to be in the brain. (4)
- 17 IRN BRU is made in Scotland 'from girders' but this drink is made in Italy 'from cast-iron'. (4)
- 18 On this will depend whether the threat most worrying will get even hotter or cool off. (10)
- 20 Peripatetic, pathetic Hanks role accepts state of Phoenix will pay over the accepted price. (6)
- 22 Forces clergyman to take common tea without milk, sugar or any other fancy stuff. (8)
- 24 Disturbing bears in the winter means that one does really like them. (10)
- 26 You know it's going to get soundly beaten when I leave. (4)
- 27 In other words, it's wishy-washy and a bit boring but if that changes one could get irate. (7)
- 28 Damaged sails fixed by using hemp. (5)

DOWN

- 1 Eat hens' mash, incontinent and when under it, one will be senseless. (11)
- 2 Look at the state of the US when national leaders have left for another country. (5)
- 3 Flyer feels it, having sinned by eating 80% fruit instead of the usual 100% fish. (9)
- 4 It is put into account of one's topside spin? (7)
- 5 Duck! Or old communist that is coming up will get you down! (5)
- 6 Though he may sound smug on air, interference makes it sound like he knows nothing. (9)
- 7 End up with sticky, gooey stuff, possibly in the hair, when you get the leg over. (3)
- 12 How boring are the movements of sea snail, not in any way exciting or newsworthy. (11)
- 14 Could such a dedicated bon vivant ruin peace negotiations? (9)
- 15 And so it comes about that you won't fail when using them to get on the course. (9)
- 19 Become aroused when your one-time spouse gave an example. (7)
- 21 It's insulting to a gay guy to have to fork out to have the Poles admitted. (5)
- 23 Disputed goals feature in home fixture for Nigerian National Team. (5)
- 25 Mr Levin says it's all over the Royal Navy: there's a hostile subversive group inside! (3)

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LAST ISSUE'S WINNER: Angela Walsh, Cabinteely, Dublin 18

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



HOW MICK O'LEARY COULD SPEND HIS €100M BONUS

- Pay one month's rent on Dublin apartment
- Cover cost of new OPW project
- Pay one year's salary for RTÉ presenter
- Cover 12 months' salary for housing tsar



NEW GARRON NOONE SHOCK

After posting a recent clip in which he claimed he's actually American, Irish TikToker Garron Noone has further shocked fans by claiming he's a comedian. "I may have come across as a guy posting ropy social media content,"



said the enigmatic Mayo man. "But my chief occupation is making people laugh – usually by claiming I'm a comedic genius. Nonetheless, my underwhelming output should continue to guarantee me Late Late Show slots."

EMERGENCY APPEAL



A mere two years ago Ryan was a happy old Fogey enjoying a happy working life while comfortably ensconced in the warm embrace of the national broadcaster.

The 'national treasure' was renowned for encouraging a love of nature, with many fleeing outdoors as he delivered lengthy monologues on his views of the world on weekday mornings.

Sadly, Ryan was involved in a car-crash relationship with an automobile company. The sudden halt left him nursing a bruised ego, a very sore back hand and a dislocated grin. He also lost his job.

Ryan emigrated in search of work and has so far managed to avoid paying back the large sum of money he received but soon he may have to do so. His greedy former employer may even bring him to court! **Can you help?**

Please give what you can to **Give Ryan A Break (GRAB)** and help put the smile back on Ryan's face.

Scribble Box

A woman with long blonde hair is lying back in a wicker chair, smiling and stretching her arms above her head. She is wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans. The chair has thick, light-colored cushions. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window with white frames. The overall mood is relaxed and sunny.

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Ovoca Bio transformation will boost market activity

IN WHAT is still called Ovoca Bio, CEO (for the second time) Tim McCutcheon – who is also the largest shareholder with 22% – has shifted the focus of the failed biopharma business into, unsurprisingly, the mineral exploration business. What is clear is that this development will stimulate a jump in the market's level of interest in the company.

A former investment banker (who specialised in the Russian mining sector), McCutcheon has been on the board of Ovoca Bio (previously Ovoca Gold) for the last 16 years through its various iterations, most of which were in the gold and silver sectors, serving as CEO from December 2009 to May 2012, when Kirill Golovanov took the top job.

The deal McCutcheon now has on the table is the acquisition of 100% of a company called Tadeen International, the parent company of Horizon Mines SARL, which is registered in Morocco and holds a portfolio of mineral exploration licences in that country.

The proposal is that Ovoca will acquire Tadeen in a share deal that will result in the latter's shareholders ending up with a 40% stake of the enlarged share capital of Ovoca Bio. After that, there is to be a (presumably modest) fundraiser to add to the company's existing €3m of net cash.

The current intention is to name the new enlarged group Talisman Metals plc to reflect the change in focus to exploration activities.

It looks like Davy has been edged aside, partly as a result of Ovoca Bio cancelling its Dublin listing, opting to focus wholly on London's AIM.

London broker Beaumont Cornish has been installed as financial adviser and nominated adviser. It will lead the reverse takeover and readmission (the shares are currently suspended) on to the AIM and will also act as the London broker.

Because of the size of the acquisition relative to Ovoca Bio's

own market value, as well as the resulting fundamental change in the company's business, the shares were suspended on May 7, when the planned reverse takeover was announced. Under the AIM's rule 14, before readmission, an admission document must be published and shareholder approval will be required.

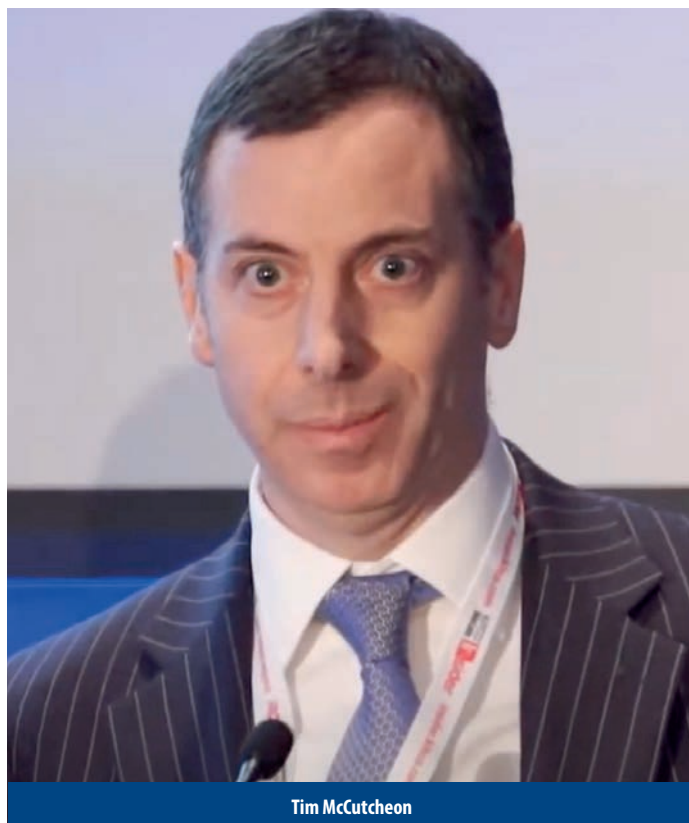
In March, prior to last month's announcement of the planned acquisition, McCutcheon made



an important management change with the appointment of Leah O'Donovan (ex-Grant Thornton) as Ovoca Bio's new chief financial officer. She is a heavyweight with 15 years' experience in the financial services industry.

Six months earlier, Golovanov stepped down as CEO and handed over the reins to McCutcheon, who acquired all of the Russian's 22% shareholding. Golovanov had made a gallant attempt to develop Ovoca's then mineral resources, particularly the company's gold prospects in inhospitable far eastern Siberia, where he managed to bring resources up to indicative stage before selling these on to the giant Russian Polymetal gold and silver mining outfit quoted in London.

The then CEO also tried to get into the oil industry in Siberia and, when that didn't work out, he changed focus to the pharmaceuti-



Tim McCutcheon

cal industry on the back of a Russian 'blockbuster' drug development programme that he believed would prove seriously profitable in the west.

The drug development programme Golovanov acquired was Orenetide, a synthetic peptide designed to treat female hyperactive sexual desire disorder, from which 10% of pre-menopausal women in Europe and the US suffer. In February 2021 he received marketing approval by the Russian health ministry – although this carried little weight outside that country – and

phase two clinical trials took place in Australia and New Zealand at a total cost of €6m.

In 2023, however, the whole project was written off at a further cost of €5m.

In a cleaning-up exercise, McCutcheon has now sold the vehicle that held this drug asset, the Bermuda-registered Silver Star Ltd, meaning Ovoca Bio has completely exited the biopharmaceutical business.

Another asset that Golovanov had invested in was Taymura, which involved a loan from Ovoca Bio (10 years ago) of \$6.3m to Siberian oil explorer LLC Taymura. There was a right to convert the loan into equity but instead Ovoca Bio got zilch and it did not receive any compensation after years of litigation, despite being initially awarded \$1m by a Russian court in December 2016. (That ruling

was then reversed on appeal and, bizarrely, Golovanov agreed to repay the \$1m, possibly to protect the other Russians involved in Ovoca – Mikhail Mogutov, Leonid Skoptsov and Yuri Radchenko.)

McCutcheon doesn't seem to have too much hope in getting anything back from the Taymura deal, noting: "The company also expects to shortly conclude the Taymura litigation as previously outlined in the 2023 annual report and accounts."

Now planning to explore for copper and silver prospects in Morocco, McCutcheon is steering Ovoca in a completely new direction. While he spent many years in Russia in the mineral resource sector, the CEO has also worked in the natural resources sector in America (north and south) and Africa, and no doubt has built up quite the contacts' book.

McCutcheon's plans should bring some interest back into Ovoca's shares. One issue that should disappear is Euronext's requirement that all nominee holdings end up as Euroclear nominees, which means that shareholders have no idea what is happening on the share register.

In Ovoca, McCutcheon is shown as a shareholder with 22%, while Euroclear nominees hold a

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.

Stocks & Shares

Smooth sailing for ICG boss Eamonn Rothwell

PROBABLY THE most noteworthy aspect of the accounts for Irish Ferries owner Irish Continental Group (ICG) in recent times has been CEO Eamonn Rothwell's very generous remuneration package in the face of underwhelming performance. Based on the latest figures for the first four months of this year, ICG is on course to improve on 2024 – but that is nothing to boast about.

The corporate governance code recommends a maximum term of nine years *in situ* for the chair of a quoted company to ensure, for example, that the incumbent retains an independent stance, particularly in relation to a long-serving CEO. In ICG, the very successful John McGuckian has been a director for 37 years and has been the €150,000 pa chairman for 21 years. Rothwell has been CEO for 33 years and is sitting on a 19% stake in ICG, currently worth €162m.

The current share price of €5.26 is still more than 10% down on the peak €6 price the shares hit back in 2017. This is not the kind of performance from a CEO that any chairman should be happy with.

The investment advisory body, Institutional Shareholders Services (ISS), has previously highlighted McGuckian's bizarrely lengthy chairmanship but this year the ISS recommended all shareholders vote against ICG's remuneration plan due to "a lack of clarity from the company over the targets on which the chief executive's bonuses are based".

In 2023, Rothwell trousered a total remuneration package of €3.1m, which represented no less than 5% of ICG's net profit of €61.6m. Last year, net profits were down 3% to €59.9m but Rothwell saw his total remuneration package rise by a chunky 42% to €4.47m, representing an even larger 7.5% of net profits. The CEO also scooped €4.7m in dividends courtesy of his 19% stake.

The ISS is right to query the relative bonus components of Rothwell's pay, in particular how he was awarded a short-term 199% bonus (the maximum allowed is 200% of base salary) when ICG's net profits went backwards.

It is even more difficult to understand how the CEO warranted a long-term performance bonus of €2.23m last year, when the maximum allowed is €1.47m – twice his base salary. Only in "exceptional situations" can the Daniel Clague-chaired remuneration

committee award 300%, which it has done in this case, again when net profits went into reverse.

Notably, however, there is "an existing contractual annual bonus arrangement" in place with Rothwell "in lieu of the arrangement" outlined in the annual report.

When it comes to analysing ICG's performance, the problem for investors is that the company is essentially three different businesses.

The first is the Ireland-UK ferry business operated on the Dublin-Holyhead route by the *Ulysses* ferry, which can carry 1,342 cars and the *Dublin Swift* fast ferry, which can carry 251 cars; as well as the *Isle of Innisfree*, which runs the service from Rosslare to Pembroke in Wales, with capacity for 600 cars.

The second ICG business is



the Ireland-France route (Dublin to Cherbourg), where the group has two ferries – the *WB Yeats*, with capacity for 1,216 cars, and the *Isle of Innisfree*, which can carry 500 cars.

The third division is the UK-France route from Dover to Calais, where ICG pounced when P&O ran into choppy waters as a result of a move to outsource its crews. Capacity here has been upgraded with the acquisition of the *Spirit of Britain* ferry (since renamed *Oscar Wilde*) in June 2024 for €89.4m. This seems a high price for a 15-year-old ferry built in Finland in 2010.

The payment terms are odd too – ICG will pay €20,000 per day by way of charter for 730 days, after which the boat can be purchased in June 2026 for €74.8m.

The *Oscar Wilde* can carry 1,059 cars, while the 28-year-old



Eamonn Rothwell

Isle of Inishmore carries 855 cars on the same route. Due to the short 90-minute sailing time, ICG can now operate 20 services a day on the Dover-Calais route.

The three different ICG operations should really be reported on separately but Rothwell combines them so it is not possible to know the level of contribution from each one.

Despite Storm Darragh, which hugely impacted the key Holyhead port in December 2024, ICG's ferry division did quite well, almost certainly driven by the three ferries on the Dover-Calais route.

Total sales of the whole ferry division were up 5.1% to €433m and operating profit increased 4.4% to €54.4m to return healthy trading margins of 12.5%.

Rothwell also includes ICG's

chartering revenue inside its car ferry business, although it has nothing to do with running car ferry operations. The €10.8m earned from chartering last year artificially boosts the car ferry division's returns, where the real profit is €43.6m. Rather than the 12.5% margin reported for the car ferry business, the actual trading margin for this operation, after stripping out the chartering revenue, is 10%.

ICG's container freight business runs freight services only from Belfast, Dublin and Cork to Rotterdam but, surprisingly, not to the UK. Last year this business shipped 318,000 standard containers, a 15.4% increase on 2023, but total revenue here rose only 4.8% to €204m, implying a 10.6% reduction in freight rates to €640 per standard container.

Rothwell does advise there was "a weak rate environment" but, given the double-digit increase in

Continued on page 26



Stocks & Shares

Ovoca Bio continued from page 24

whopping 61% of the equity. This blinds investors to the make-up of the shareholders.

Davy Crest was shown as a shareholder back in June 2020, when it was sitting on a 6.42% shareholding, while Pickco Trading held 8.96% and BBHISL held 8.6%. Citibank, meanwhile, had 4.25% and State Street was on 3.76%.

It was also clear that Michail Mogutov, the then Ovoca chairman, sold all of his 11.6 million shares to then CEO Golovanov, who topped this up to a near 20 million shares, representing a 22% stake.

LACK OF CLARITY

In June 2020 Leonid Skoptsov held 11.6 million shares, a near 13% stake, while Yuri Radchenko also had 11.6 million shares but, once he stood down from the board five years ago, it was not possible to follow this stake, apart from it ending up in Euroclear's nominees, who at that time were sitting on a 20.6% stake.

The position now is that, other than McCutcheon's 22% holding, investors have no idea who owns what, with Euroclear nominees holding a 61% stake, while only Pickco Trading is still shown separately.

With Ovoca pulling out of the Euronext exchange and focusing on its London AIM listing, the lack of clarity around Euroclear nominees should be resolved and it will be possible to again see a breakdown of all institutional investors.

Ovoca had been trading at around the 15p mark when there was hope that the clinical trials being carried out in New Zealand and Australia would pay off so that the Orenetide drug it was developing could be sold in Europe or North America. Once the trial results came out in September 2023, the share price collapsed to around 1p, even though this represented a 67% discount to the €3m cash the company held.

Now that McCutcheon has kick-started the change in direction, when the shares will be again listed on the market after the proposed Moroccan mineral



Kirill Golovanov

exploration deal is presumably greenlighted, Ovoca shares are certainly going to attract more interest.

Just how significant this turns

out to be will be determined by the next deal the CEO does but, pre-suspension, the shares were clearly trading at bargain-basement levels.

ICG continued from page 25

volume, it is surprising that rates should fall.

The net effect of this was that the operating profit here dropped by 9.8%, to a reported €14.7m, to return trading margins of 7.2%.

Moreover, Rothwell operates quite a distorting cross-subsidisation strategy, whereby ICG's car ferry division owns the freighters and leases them to the freight division. Taking into account the €10m lease fee, the container business actually earned an underlying return of €24.7m and rather more respectable trading margins of 12.1%.

SPACE SHARING

A significant development last year was the 'peace treaty' with P&O, which allows for space sharing on each other's car ferries for freight and passenger traffic, the effect of which will be to significantly restrain price competition on the route.

Meanwhile, there doesn't appear to be much evidence of intense competition on the Irish Sea. Next weekend, Stena Line is quoting €309 for a car and four passengers from Dublin to Holyhead, with Irish Ferries quoting €319. On the Rosslare to Pembroke route, Stena Line is quoting €315 and Irish Ferries €319.

It is also notable that the prices on the far less popular Rosslare to Wales route are as expensive as the Dublin-Holyhead route.

Rothwell notes that the total roll-on-roll-off (RoRo) freight market between Ireland and the UK and France and on the Dover-Calais route last year rose 0.2% to 4.3 million units, with Irish Ferries accounting for 767,000 trucks, up from 724,000 in 2023 – an increase of 6%. This was "primarily driven by further market presence on the Dover-Calais route".

This leaves ICG with an apparent 17.9% market share.

This is not really helpful, however, given that it is understood that ICG carries roughly 50% of the business across the Irish Sea but clearly has a much smaller market share on the English Channel and around 20% of the direct Ireland-France traffic.

When Brexit sailed over the horizon, Rothwell surprisingly ordered a new €165m day car ferry from a German ship yard, which he planned to put on the Dublin-Holyhead route. He did not, however, take significant steps to refocus on continental Europe, leaving space for five ferry companies to grab the major increase in the RoRo business to avoid the UK land bridge.

ICG's market share on the prime direct route to continental Europe is now down to well below 25%, a market that ICG previously dominated.

The good news for Rothwell is that the big ferry he ordered for the Dublin-Holyhead route was never delivered as the German ship yard went into liquidation.

In the current year to date (to



The 'Oscar Wilde', which operates on the Dover-Calais route.

May 3), ICG has reported a 7.1% drop in car ferry traffic to 140,000, while RoRo truck traffic was down 0.6% to 259,000, at least partly explained by the storm-inflicted problems in Holyhead, which came back into operation in mid-January this year.

Rather surprisingly, the container freight business to continental Europe showed a hefty 28.6% uplift to 132,800 standard containers, which looks remarkable and is possibly driven by the huge push to get goods into the US before Donald Trump's tariffs kick in. Oddly, there is no direct freight route from Ireland to the US.

This has pushed up total rev-

enue to May 3 by 7.1% to €190m, with the car ferry division more or less static at €119m, while the container freight business has shot ahead 17.6% to €80.9m.

On the basis of last year's earnings per share of 36.3c, this leaves ICG shares, at the current price of €5.26, standing on a trailing price-earnings multiple of 14.5 times. Given the performance in the first four months of this year, the group is trading ahead of last year and, assuming profit margins have been maintained, this is not a bad rating. With ICG capitalised at €847m, it is trading at nearly three times its net equity base of €322m.

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Wolfpack stubbed out

WITH VAPING very much on the rise here and around the world, Goldhawk was interested to see that a company called Wolfpack Wholesale Group Ltd (WWG) had come a cropper with the taxman. Established by a couple of former gamblers, it looks like this bet on vaping was made a little too early.

WWG is the company behind the VapeWild brand that was established here in 2016 by Texas-based **Eric Turner** and **Matthew Wiener**. The two Texans are the listed directors of WWG, although until January 2020 there was also an Irish director in place in the form of Co Wicklow-



Eric Turner

based **Robert McHugh**.

The shares in the Irish entity were held by Wolfpack Wholesale Inc, which is registered in Plano in north Texas, and the Irish venture was essentially a bet on the European vaping market, with the name VapeWild.eu registered by the company.

This particular gamble was not the only bet the two boys have placed – both Turner and Wiener were professional poker players before deciding to invest in what is referred to as the e-liquid sector.

Apparently “seeing an opportunity in the growing e-liquid market”, the boys “went all in” and formed Wolfpack Wholesale in 2013, “focusing on prime-quality, American-made e-liquids”.

The good news for “e-liquid enthusiasts” was that Wolfpack stocked “nothing but the best juices that deliver the widest array of tastes and sensations”. So good was the product that long-term smokers among Wolfpack’s own family members “discovered the difference that vaping can make”, and



Social(ist) Media

Turner and Wiener were “proud of making a life-changing impact through a commitment to excellence”.

Turner was also a high-profile figure in, er, National Vaping Day, which he described as “a day of advocacy and awareness for our industry”, while Wiener was a board member of the Vapor Technology Association.

A statement from the company back in 2016 noted: “A world without vaping is a world that VapeWild plans to fight against.”

Alas, despite the wonderful array of tastes and sensations, VapeWild closed its doors in 2021 and the last accounts filed for the Irish company, WWG, only cover the year to the end of 2017. A loss

of €166,000 was recorded that year, leaving accumulated losses standing at €474,000, while creditors (mainly the Texan parent entity) were owed €900,000.

A note from the directors states that WWG “has received confirmation from its parent company that it will not seek repayment of its loan... and will provide additional loans should the need arise”.

Rather late in the day, it appears, the Revenue lodged a summons in the High Court against WWG in January this year and has now registered a judgment against the company for €110,000.

Looks like a busted flush for its poker-playing directors.

Alan Clancy's taxing matter

ONE OF the most high-profile players in the club and bar scene in Ireland, and especially Dublin, in recent years has been **Alan ‘House’ Clancy**, who is associated with numerous well-known venues. Alas, one of his many companies has come to the attention of the dreaded taxman, who is seeking to have it liquidated in the High Court later this month.

Clancy is well known on the social scene and married **Jacqueline Given** – sister of former Republic of Ireland and Manchester City goalkeeper **Shay** – on New Year’s Eve 2022 in Doonbeg. The guest list featured assorted familiar entertainment and sporting faces, including the likes of GAA stars **Joe Canning** and **Bernard Brogan**, golfer **Shane Lowry**, and ‘celebs’ **Brian Ormond** and **Pippa O’Connor**.

The Westmeath-based businessman oversees quite the empire today, with his Nolaclan group behind hospitality businesses such as the House operations in Dublin and Limerick. Also part of the group are 37 Dawson St, 9 Below and Xico – all in D2 – The Gables bar/restaurant in Foxrock, south

Co Dublin, and Mrs Robinson’s cocktail bar in Greystones, Co Wicklow.

There has, however, been some signs of retrenchment and earlier this year Clancy put the House boutique hotel/bar business on Belfast’s Botanic Avenue on the market, seeking around £½m for the leasehold of the high-profile property that underwent a major revamp back in 2018.

Nolaclan is a joint venture with Kildare moneybags **Gerry Conlan**, who has 35% of the business and no doubt is a good man to have by your side when expanding at the rate Clancy has been doing.

The out-of-date accounts for the group show it lost €208,000 in the year to December 2022 compared with a chunky pandemic-impacted €2.7m in 2021, leaving it sitting on an accumulated deficit of €13.2m, while creditors were owed over €20m, of which the taxman accounted for €4.3m.

The *Business Post* reported recently that Cheyne Capital, the new owners of the Press Up group (since renamed Elective), have expressed an interest in buying the sprawling Nolaclan outfit, although apparently Clancy might retain an involvement.

Not that the busy hospitality entrepreneur hasn’t got plenty of other interests to keep him busy outside of Nolaclan. There are a number of venues where Clancy personally is the sole owner or a significant partner, as is the case with a



Alan Clancy

recent venture, The Glasshouse bar/restaurant in Dublin’s Point Square, where he has a 50% stake and 45% is held by former Maples and Calder suit **Barry McGrath**. The other 5% is owned by Kish Capital’s **Dan Ennis**.

Clancy is also in business with Lowry, with the pair having acquired the old Tullamore Dew bonded warehouse property to open a bar and restaurant called The Old Warehouse in Lowry’s

home county of Offaly.

Another ambitious Clancy project has seen him take the two top storeys at One Central Plaza, the former Central Bank of Ireland headquarters on Dublin’s Dame Street that has been redeveloped by the Hines and Peterson Group. Apparently, this overdue operation is to be the “most exciting hospitality venue in Ireland”, when it eventually opens its doors.

Less exciting, unless you work for the Revenue Commissioners perhaps, is Clancy’s Honsun Ltd, an entity that he incorporated back in 2013, which was behind The Monks Society bar in Ennis, Co Clare and The Bell & Pot cafe on Mercer Street, D2, both of which have shut their doors.

The last accounts for Honsun Ltd show accumulated losses of €412,000 at the end of June 2024, having dropped €210,000 in the 12 months. Given the red ink and the fact that Honsun has ceased to trade, it is far from clear what the taxman might be able to squeeze out of this Clancy vehicle but the High Court has been petitioned to wind the company up, with the hearing set to take place at the end of this month.

TV producers' unscripted credit

LAST WEEK the EU's competition directorate approved the plan announced in Budget 2025 by then finance minister **Jack Chambers** to introduce a new tax break for "unscripted" TV productions. In case you're wondering where your money is going, this includes reality TV shows and light-entertainment programming, and even covers formats such as chat shows and game shows.

Not surprisingly, **Susan Kirby**, the director of the film and telly producers' lobby group, Screen Producers Ireland (SPI), described the news as "a major win for the hard work" of the SPI's so-called unscripted working group, led by **Stuart Switzer**.

The new tax credit is being introduced for a four-year period, back-dated to January 1 this year and (initially) running until the end of 2028. The tax relief will be worth up to 20% of produc-

tion expenditure incurred within Ireland.

To be eligible, a production must have a minimum total cost of €1/4m and, unlike the Section 481 tax break for scripted productions, there is a built-in ceiling on total expenditure of €211m over the four-year period.

It is worth noting that a cultural test "designed by the Irish authorities" will play a part in ensuring that the qualifying productions have a strong cultural character and "contribute meaningfully to the promotion and expression of Irish or European culture".

It is still unclear whether **Kevin Bakhurst** and the gang in Montrose will be able to avail of the tax relief directly for the likes of *The Late Late Show* or if RTE will have to offer such programming to independent producers on a commissioning slate.

Doubtless, the successful COCO production outfit will be quick off the mark with applications for the tax break given its prolific output of top-notch shows



Stuart Switzer



'They grow up so fast these days.'

such as *Room To Improve*, *Home Rescue*, *Dermot Bannon's Super Spaces*, *Dermot Bannon's Incredible Homes*, etc, etc.

Until 2023 the CEO role was held by Switzer, the company founder and who is listed as holding 25% of the shares, the same as current CEO **Linda Cullen**. Wexford-based Switzer is today described as a "consulting executive" with COCO.

The last accounts for the company Coco Content Ltd are now well out of date and cover the year to the end of 2022, when it was sitting on accumulated profits not too far off €1/2m.

Those 2022 figures show that Coco Content owed €94,000 to related company Coco Television

Productions Ltd (CTP) at the end of 2021 but this was apparently paid off as the balance was nil at the end of 2022.

CTP had been set up way back in 1985 by Switzer and **Paul Higgins** (still a director and 10% shareholder of Coco Content) but was wound up in 2019 with a declared surplus of €2m.

Surprisingly, six years later this liquidation remains ongoing and the last filing from **Micheál Leydon** of Outlook Accountants, dated last October, suggests the process might be wrapped up in six months, once assets described as "work in progress" have been realised.

Brief Cases continued on page 30

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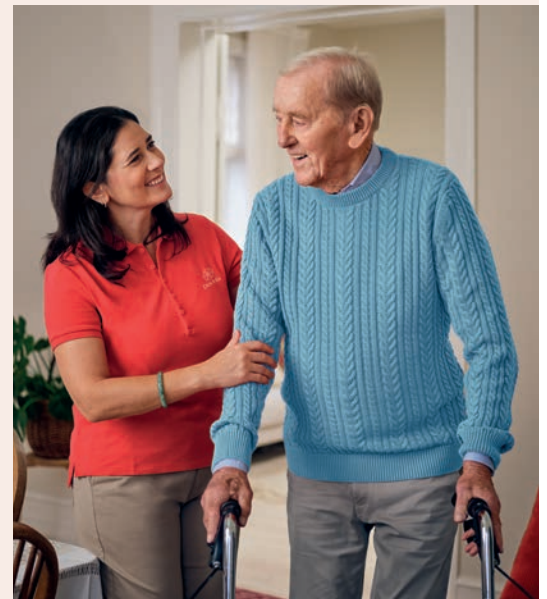
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Branigan's uncomfortable seats

WITH THE deadline of June 16 for phase-one submissions to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, high-flying radio boss **Kevin Branigan** will be keeping his fingers crossed that there are no last-minute hiccups in relation to the bid by his Bay Broadcasting Ltd (BBL) operation to buy Galway Bay FM from the *Connacht Tribune*. The chief executive also has other things on his mind, however, notably the winding-up of his Seats Are Limited business.

Leopardstown-based Branigan and his business partner, **Mike Ormonde**, continue to spread their radio wings with BBL. If the Galway Bay FM deal is greenlighted (it has already been cleared by Coimisiún na Meán), this “significant expan-



Kevin Branigan

sion of the group's footprint across Ireland” will result in the Irish-owned BBL becoming the second-biggest radio group in the country, moving ahead of **Rupert Murdoch's** Wireless group (now called Onic), which operates FM104, Q102, etc.

Although the legacy deficits within the individual stations in the BBL group remain substantial, the individual subsidiaries have been releasing some chart-topping profits recently.

For example, Choice Broadcasting Ltd (Ireland's Classic Hits) recorded a chunky €1.4m surplus in 2023, while in Classic Rock Broadcasting Ltd (Radio Nova) the profit reported that year was €380,000. Star Broadcasting Ltd, which is behind Sunshine 106.8, where BBL has a substantial stake, delivered a profit of €130,000.

The busy Branigan has a number of irons in the fire. For example, he is the CEO of Biz Expo, which is described as “Ireland's largest B2B trade show, conference and network-



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“I'll have my AI assistant call your AI assistant.”

ing event”. It has been held in Dublin since back in 2011 and is to kick off again this year in October in the RDS.

The company that trades as Biz Expo is Seats Are Limited (SAL), which is also behind the likes of the Jobs Expo careers fair and Courses.ie.

Branigan is the only listed director and 100% shareholder of SAL but, despite the high profile and popularity of the business run by the company, it has recently proved a loss-maker, with the December 2023 figures showing an accumulated deficit of €416,000.

A note in the accounts, which were approved in November last year, states: “The directors have prepared budgets and cash flows for a period of at least 12 months

from the date of approval of the financial statements, which demonstrate that there is no material uncertainty regarding the company's ability to meet its liabilities as they fall due.”

Furthermore, “the company has received assurances from the shareholders that they will continue to support the company for a period of at least 12 months from the date when these financial statements are authorised for issue”.

There appears to have been a rather unexpected change in circumstances at SAL and a creditors' meeting is scheduled for the end of this week at the Harcourt Hotel, D2, at which **Tom Murray** and **Anthony Gleeson** of Friel Stafford are to be appointed as joint liquidators.

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