

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



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

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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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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.

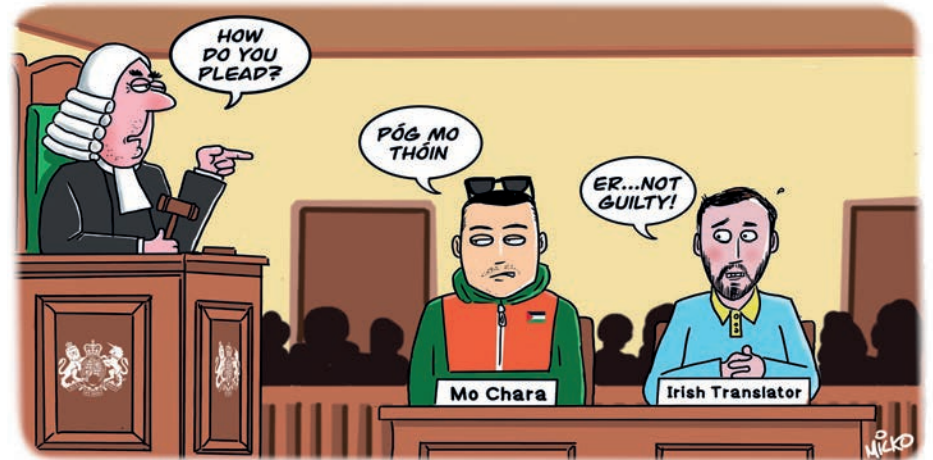
The file’s full publication would mean that the fine speeches and applause for the family delivered in the Dáil were sincere and that fears of a lengthy wait for an inquiry’s conclusion was not a substitute for real action and much-needed relief for Shane O’Farrell’s family.

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.

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.

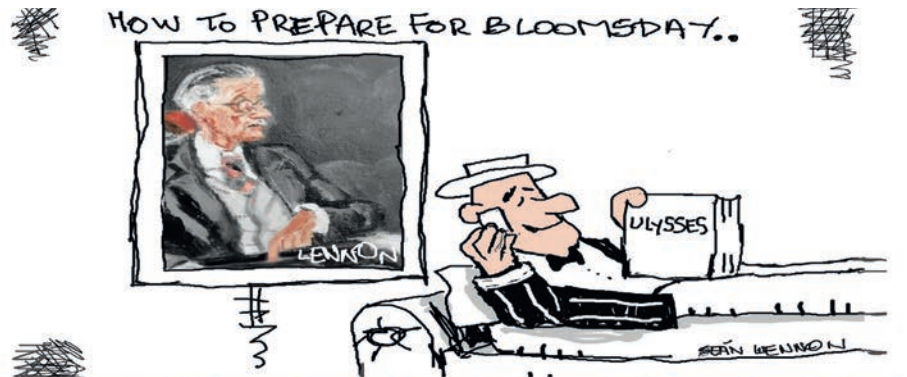
The Independent Workers' Union then found itself named as a defendant in High Court proceedings issued by Maniar's Metron Stores Ltd under industrial relations legislation, with some individuals also named, including shop steward Jeanette Joyce.

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-



Liam Cunningham



"Oh, just hanging out, enjoying 'Oxen of the Sun' for its dense use of various parodic styles and the sheer length of the episode."

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.

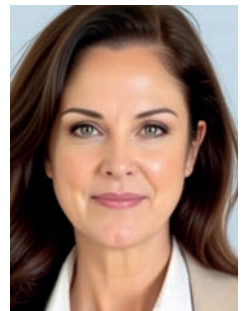
It was subsequently reported by the *Oirish Mail on Sunday* in 2022 that the charity had failed to comply with relevant tax and charity laws in Moldova for many years.

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.

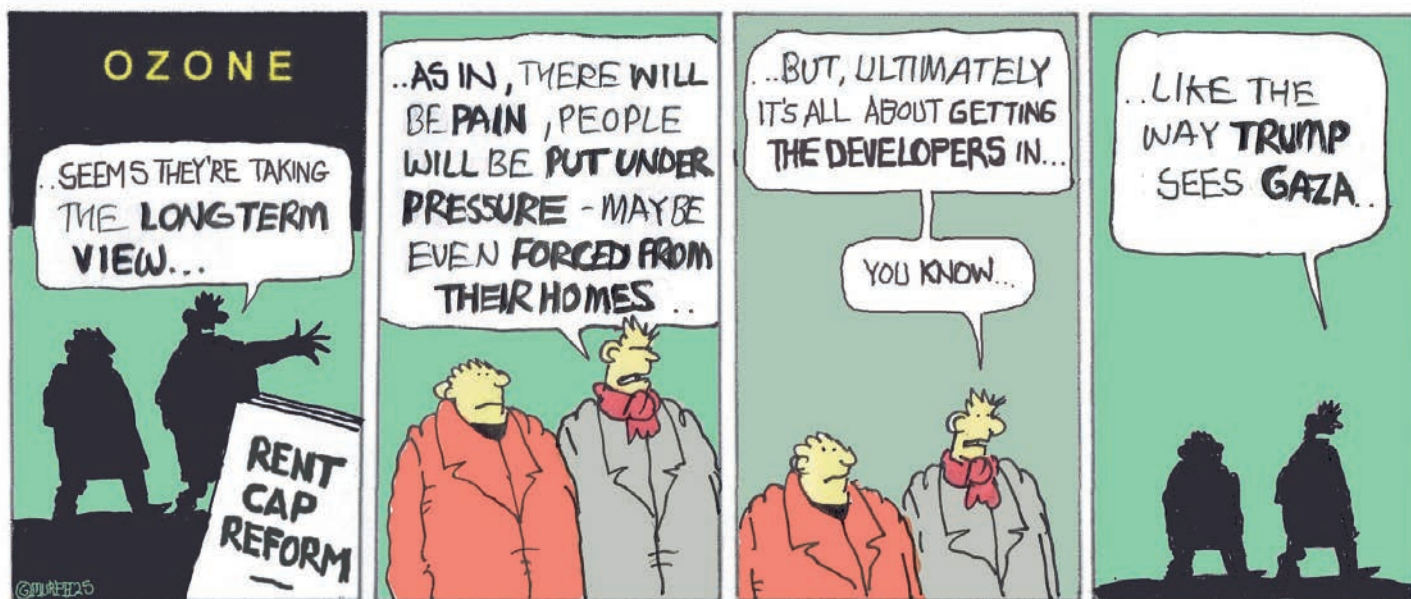
The exercise entailed a fictional scenario where vital services and critical infrastructure needed to be protected, as well as providing key military infrastructure such as air defence and battle management systems.

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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