



## 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.

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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.