

## THERE'S A NEW SHERIFF IN TOWN



**Vladimir Putin's captured Brits**  
**Profile: Leo Varadkar**

**Young Blood: Nick Delehanty**  
**Denis O'Brien's radio interference**  
**Kitty Holland v John Waters**

**ALSO: Dermot Desmond's bumpy ride; Clever Trevor White; Bertie Ahern to lose out; Oonagh O'Hagan's €1½m prescription; Dan O'Brien's OTB warnings; Ian Hyland's bad call?**



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## AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

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## PUTIN'S CAPTURED BRITISH 'TOURISTS'

HOW STRANGE that, despite their copious coverage of the war in Ukraine, RTE and the major Irish media – print and broadcast – haven't bothered to mention the most revealing Ukrainian war story of the year so far: that Russian special forces recently captured two senior British Army officers, colonels Edward Blake and Richard Carroll, in an attack behind Ukrainian lines in the conflict zone in the coastal city of Ochakov.

At a press briefing last week by the Russian foreign affairs ministry, it was claimed that the two colonels were actively engaged in directing combat operations and had in their possession documents relating to the planning and implementation of such operations.

The capture of the two officers caused consternation in Britain's Ministry of Defence (MoD), which at first denied the soldiers were even in Ukraine, until the dastardly Russians produced photographic evidence of them in custody.

Then the MoD switched narrative and, to the amusement of international observers, claimed the pair were simply "tourists visiting battle sites".

The Russians say no beach towels or cameras were found with the detainees but instead maps with strategic objects on the territory of Russia, Russian air defence plans, secret instructions on co-operation with Ukrainian drone operators, and discs with encrypted data and records of conversations

with the British General Staff were found.

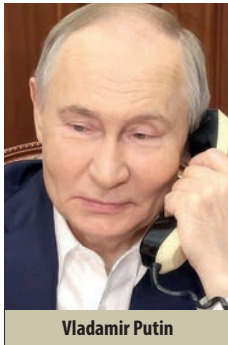
Then the MoD argued that, as the officers had diplomatic passports, they should be entitled to diplomatic immunity. When that failed to impress, it demanded that the captured officers be treated as prisoners of war.

Britain, however, while politically supportive of Ukraine in the war, is not an acknowledged participant in the conflict. According to the Russians, under the terms of the Geneva Convention unacknowledged combatants operating in a conflict zone are illegal and do not have the protection of the convention.

Russian legal officials have publicly declared that the planned sabotage operation uncovered from the officers' materials could warrant capital punishment under Russian military law.

A senior Russian security official has been quoted as saying: "Planned sabotage does not warrant leniency. This is not a game of diplomacy. This is war. The noose is what they've earned."

*Continued on page 4*



Vladimir Putin

**THE DREADED** taxman has just registered a judgment for €70,000 against a company called Playground Music Ltd (PML), which was behind *Anderson*, an exciting new music business established a few years ago by Trinnern duo Neil Dunne and Zach Miller-Frankel. Despite apparently being destined to make it to the top, things haven't quite worked out that way.

The boys' technology could apparently match unsigned musicians with industry execs by enabling searches based on an artist's sound. There was hype aplenty for PML, with one *Indo* article headlined: "Irish music tech firm launches \$5m Series A round".

The startup claimed to have attracted 5,000 artists to join its platform, while Universal Music Ireland had started using the platform too. Miller-Frankel is the only remaining listed director, with Dunne having resigned in July 2021.

It had certainly looked like *Anderson* was the next big thing and the taxpayer was on board too courtesy of Enterprise Ireland, which invested €14m. Another big backer was the Coffey family's Bigwood Holdings.

Unfortunately, Yank Miller-Frankel and Dunne never really found their groove and the last accounts their company filed date all the way back to 2019. Zach is now at Fordham University in New York, while Neil is an exec at a tech firm called Orfium.

## CENSORING THE RUSSIANS

WITH MOMENTUM building for Russia-Ukraine peace negotiations, it will be interesting to see how developments are reported here. A recent essay published on the website of the state's media regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, turns out to be damning of censorship actions taken by the EU that may have far-reaching consequences.

In partnership with Trinity College, the media commission published an essay from the top student in the postgraduate EU Media Regulation module. The essay, by Grace Ryan and titled *Fighting Fire with Fire*, was described as a "critical examination of the EU's ban of Russian state media".

Given that the essay was published by a state agency, it might surprise some that the content and tone of the piece were strongly against the action taken by the EU, with its March 2022 ban on content produced by Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik described as "riddled with legal uncertainty... undermining the democratic legitimacy of the EU".

The ban had been implemented on the grounds that it was necessary to manage "the significant and direct threat to the Union's public order and security" but it failed to provide "grounded reasoning for the legal basis of the ban and misapplied key European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence".

RT appealed on the basis that it was contrary to EU law but the General Court found the ban to be "proportionate". This ruling, Ryan claims, was based on "uncertain legal analysis" and so created "a murky doctrine which may be relied upon in the future". Essentially, the court's finding was deemed to be political rather than legal and the judgment "signals that legal protections may vary depending on the context or convenience of a future media ban".

As with much of the debate about the Russia-Ukraine war, the important issues highlighted by Ryan's essay are not ones that have featured in the Irish media (as highlighted elsewhere on this page).

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The third stamp featured Daniel relaxing at home watching his dodgy box.

Continued from page 3

But the Russians have allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross access to the two unfortunates and the British Army hopes this is a portent that a deal can be done. Britain did offer a prisoner exchange, it appears, but the Russians refused this – not a good sign for the two men involved.

If things don't look too good for the pair soldiers, then even worse has been the claim that a third officer, this time a senior member of MI6 (Britain's external intelligence agency), was also captured, although the Russians have issued no personal details concerning him.

This suggests a deeper level of direct British involvement in the conflict than previously admitted.

It is customary in time of war for captured spies to be summarily executed, so – whatever the fate of the two army officers – the future looks decidedly bleak for the captured spy.

Nothing underlines the real nature of the Ukrainian conflict more than this story, as *The Phoenix* special report also did over two years ago, headlined: "Is Nato helping Ukraine to fight Russia or is it using Ukraine to fight Russia?" (see edition 10/2/23).



Boris Johnson

When the Irish media parrots the British media and reports that 'the world' is shocked at Russian militarist behaviour, they mean 'the West' is shocked. The rest of the world – the Global South and many countries such as China, Iran and others – are shocked at the manner in which Nato destabilised Ukraine even to the point of disrupting two peace deals between Ukraine and Russia leading up to the Russian invasion.

It was British and US leaders Boris Johnson and Joe Biden who undermined the peace talks between Ukraine and Russia shortly after the 2022 invasion, arguing that Vladimir Putin had to be confronted and unseated. The message since then in the EU and western media is that EU states and the US are merely offering to lend support to occupied Ukraine. The active involvement of senior British officers in leading special operations in Ukraine does not fit into this overall paradigm.

It's just as well then that, while the British media has likely had a D notice slapped on this story about British undercover ops, the Irish media – free of such constraints – has chosen the 'responsible' path of censoring itself as part of the western war effort and the Government's agenda of abolishing neutrality.



**THE RECENTLY** reported revamp of the Irish Military Intelligence Service (IMIS) is part of an overall military effort to close the gap with the big boys in Europe, who in turn are trying to close the gap with the really, really big boy, the United States.

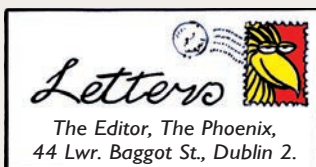
There will surely be some awkward questions regarding financial priorities and resources when the real multi-billion cost of these ludicrous priorities becomes more apparent. But meanwhile the Top Brass are like small children in Santa's grotto. None more so than the IMIS, whose resources and powers are set to be greatly enhanced.

The institutional rivalry between the IMIS and the Garda Special Detective Unit (Special Branch) is not dissimilar to that between Britain's MI5 and MI6, although since the 1920s the Special Branch has always had much greater power and resources than its army counterparts.

But Goldhawk's treasonous sources say there will be changes in this balance of power, although IMIS intel gathering will still be informative rather than 'actionable' (and therefore less expensive). Regardless, the competitive tension between the two state organs will necessarily grow.

What really concerns some interested parties in the spookie Irish peer group is that the naivety of Irish spies and their political masters is still regarded as bottomless by the more cynical chaps in other states' agencies. Members of some of these entities were rendered helpless with laughter when the man introduced at the Smithwick Tribunal as the PSNI link man with MI5, Drew Harris, was later appointed Garda commissioner.

Another view is that industrial espionage from closer to home is more threatening to Irish interests than any cold war-minded Russians.



Dear Goldhawk,

As usual, you are talking twaddle (DPP v DPP, issue 25 July 2025). Your readers should know that your claimed "quote" appears precisely nowhere in my book, *Sophie: The Final Verdict*. You could have consulted it... on (sic) contacted me to check nonsense, but of course you just didn't bother.

As elsewhere in *Phoenix*, your lazy, sloppy approach shows. You print garbage, and the suggestion you entertain that I ever harassed an-ex (sic) DPP lawyer is laughable. I have never met him, spoken to him, nor contacted him (I don't deal with his views at all in the book). To further associate me with a criminal offence is a little beyond your usual depth of abysmal outpourings.

You know nothing about this case and its detail, and are making an exhibition of your ignorance. Grow up and cop on.

Senan Moloney

On page 340 of Senan Moloney's book, *Sophie: The Final Verdict*, the following statement is made: "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."

This is, verbatim, the "quote" published in *The Phoenix*.

Goldhawk also quoted from an interview Molony gave to Newstalk's Pat Kenny, in which the former referred to the "single lawyer" (the DPP's Robert Sheehan) he had mentioned in his book. Molony told Kenny: "The DPP is not one single overarching sagacious person, it is an office where they dole out the files to people and this file went to a particular person who later sued the DPP's office over non-promotion if you like and I think that person... wouldn't, you know, zealous would be probably the most charitable way to interpret it..."

Goldhawk summarised that exchange as follows: "Molony went on to tell Newstalk Radio about office/career conflicts inside the DPP, impugning the 'single lawyer's' motivation in the case. Sheehan was not named by Molony or Martin but was clearly identifiable from their comments."

We clearly made the rather academic distinction between the first quote (in the book) and the second quote (in the Kenny interview). Either way, they are Molony's words.

We did not say Molony had "harassed an ex-DPP lawyer". We said that Mr Sheehan had made efforts to persuade the court to issue "a summons against Senan Molony for harassing me". Judge Watkin stated on July 14, 2025, that she was precluded from issuing the summonses because of what had been stated in the DPP email of July 3, 2025, without which she would have considered issuing a summons against Senan Molony for the criminal offence of harassment.

These are the verifiable facts and the abusive bluster in Senan Moloney's letter does not contradict them. Ed.

#### BROWNE BOOSTS HOUSING GOALS





## AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

## CLEVER TREVOR'S GENIUS

NO DOUBT Little Museum of Dublin (LMD) founder and curator Trevor White is delighted with the amount of media coverage being devoted to his much-loved and well-funded project on St Stephen's Green, which has just undergone a costly revamp. His most recent outing was in the *Indo*, where columnist Sarah Carey gushed over Clever Trevor, whom she described as "a genius" no less.

Certainly, Goldhawk finds it hard to argue against White's genius credentials, at least when it comes to creating a €130,000 per annum gig for himself in a Dublin City Council-owned Georgian building. He has also proved something of a genius at getting his hands on substantial grants from the taxpayer, most notably courtesy of Fáilte Ireland and the tourism and arts department.



Trevor White

Having a board member such as Ed Brophy – currently a senior suit at Amazon's Irish operation but better known as a Fine Gael adviser and former chief of staff to one Paschal Donohoe – has presumably come in handy when trying to securing state aid.

Other board members include chairwoman Rhona Mahony (former master of the National Maternity Hospital); ex-lord mayor and would-be senator Hazel Chu; and Susan McKeon, who sits on the boards of various oil and gas prospecting entities. Also *in situ* is number-cruncher Brian Geraghty, who is a partner with Crowe Ireland, one of the Government's favoured consultancy firms when it comes to commissioning reports into the likes of RTÉ and the Abbey Theatre.

Although the Charities Regulator recommends that the terms for board members of charities have limits, with a suggested maximum of nine years, Brophy and Geraghty have been directors of the museum for over 14 years, while Mahony has been *in situ* since the start of 2014.

The latest accounts filed cover the year to the end of 2023 and reveal that things have been going swimmingly at LMD, where "key

supporters" include heavyweights such as Diageo, KPMG, BNY Mellon as well as the very friendly *Irish Times*.

While plenty of charities have been struggling, the good news for Trevor is that LMD managed to deliver a surplus in 2023 of over €½m on foot of admissions of €950,000 and shop sales of over €100,000, ending the year with cash at bank of €1.36m.

With the major upgrade completed and the museum now reopened, it looks like things can only get better for genius Trevor.

**DERMOT DESMOND** was shooting his mustachioed mouth off this week on the subject of the *MetroLink* and why it will be a total waste of money and "out of date in 10 or 15 years time". This is because by then Dublin will, apparently, be full of autonomously driven vehicles.

Dermo clearly has quite the appetite for artificial intelligence (AI), which may explain why he has remained strapped in at the turbulent airline booking software company, *Datalex*, which has been boasting about its "AI-driven innovation".

Rather less is said about the firm's disastrous trajectory over recent decades, during which DD has poured in millions as the share price has plummeted. In return, he has been on the end of lots of unwelcome media scrutiny given his dominant shareholding.

Fans of Goldhawk are well aware just how much of a disaster Desmond's flight on *Datalex* has been, while the board members must also be sick and tired of the increasingly bumpy journey. A decision has been made to take the company private at an EGM on September 4, although apparently the reason for delisting is not to escape the heat but rather so that *Datalex* can "focus on strategic execution and accelerate innovation and unlock greater long-term value for our customers and shareholders".

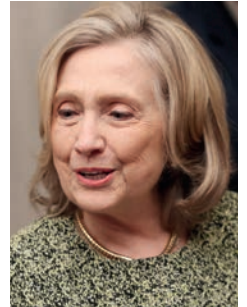
Alas, the hapless small shareholders will now find it far more difficult to trade their shares, a drawback that will affect Switzerland-based tax exile Dermo, who now holds a whopping 50% of the business.

## IAN HYLAND'S BAD CALL?

GOLDHAWK'S FAVOURITE publisher-turned-event-organiser, *Business & Finance* boss Ian Hyland, has been spreading his wings of late, most recently

with the acquisition of the Windmill Lane Pictures business. Much of his energy, however, is expended on dishing out awards to worthies who are lauded at annual shindigs attended by fat cats.

Fans of *The Phoenix* will recall that the roll call of *B&F*'s alumni includes the likes of former US speaker of the house Nancy Pelosi, who was given something called the Sutherland Leadership Award "for outstanding international leaders" who have embodied the "values" of former Goldman Sachs chairman, Suds (whose family backs the annual award).



Hillary Clinton

Other luminaries deemed to have made the grade in the recent past include Ursula von der Leyen, Christine Lagarde, Nick Clegg and Dame Louise Richardson. You get the picture.

Last month, the *B&F* website announced that this year's recipient of the Suds gong is none other than Hillary Clinton, who is apparently "one of the most transformational leaders of her generation". (Imagine what they would say had she won in 2016?) And in case you are wondering what Hillary got up to when Obama installed her as secretary of state in 2009, it turns out that she "strengthened America's global partnerships and actively promoted democracy and peace".

Given that the focus of Hyland's other big project, Ireland Inc, is on the US market – its aim is to "amplify the significant Irish investment across the US" – it is not surprising that high-profile Yanks should pop up on the awards list. Nor is it surprising that the main sponsors of the awards and Ireland Inc are US corporate big-hitters such as KPMG, Pfizer, BlackRock, Carlyle and Bank of America.

This begs the question: has Hyland got his timing right? When Pelosi was given the nod, for example, Joe Biden was in the White House but today the president is one Donald J Trump, who loathes Clinton and anyone giving her a special award will be off his Christmas card list pronto.

Dishing out accolades to Democrats is not the easy win it was in the recent past and corporate America has already demonstrated its eagerness to kowtow to Trump in order to keep on the right side of the prez's capricious nature.

Certainly, sponsoring Ireland Inc could look rather less attractive than it did before cufflink-wielding schmoozer Hyland announced the great news about Hillary. Moreover, when Pelosi was over here, the US embassy posted online about her activities. When La Clinton jets into Dublin later this year, Goldhawk suspects the staff in Ballsbridge will find other ways to keep themselves occupied.



GOLDHAWK



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Keep Him Informed



FEAR OF RACISM OR  
 MI5 COVER-UP?

THE BRITISH media is claiming that the South Yorkshire Police (SYP) and other forces in England and Wales failed to halt the crimes of grooming gangs because of concerns they would be labelled racist.

The alternative explanation is that powerful state forces, including MI5, tolerated the abuse to create blackmail opportunities to recruit reformers within the Muslim community (see *The Phoenix* 27/6/25). The precedent for this is the Kincora Boys' Home scandal in Belfast, where MI5, with the assistance of the RUC special branch, recruited loyalist paedophiles.

As more details emerge, the similarities between Kincora and the grooming gangs have deepened. It was reported last week that five victims from Rotherham were abused by SYP officers connected to the gangs. Girls as young as 11 were raped by SYP officers and a 12-year-old was assaulted in a marked police car. Three children were beaten up in a police cell. Another victim witnessed an SYP officer supplying class A drugs to a grooming gang.

The SYP crimes are to be investigated by no less a force than the SYP itself.

Sound familiar? In 2022 Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman Marie Anderson confirmed that repeated complaints about Kincora had been made to the RUC yet the force failed to intervene. After the scandal erupted, the RUC investigated itself and found nothing to implicate its special branch or MI5.

Time may reveal the seniority of some of the officials involved in the grooming gang scandals. In the north, complicity in Kincora reached far above the level of the police.

John Imrie, a senior MI5 officer stationed at the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) was arrested in 1979 after flashing at a stranger in



Marie Anderson

the gents' toilets at Victoria Station. At his trial, he claimed he had been caught short and, as the train he intended to take at 11.10 to Sydneyham had no toilet, he was compelled to display himself to a gentleman in the vicinity of the urinals. Imrie, however, had exposed himself 10 minutes after the train had departed. He received a conviction.

On August 17 1979 *Private Eye* magazine revealed: "Up until the trial strong pressure was brought to bear by a variety of authorities to drop the charges in the national interest."

Imrie was later promoted within MI5 to oversee the recruitment of new officers.

Peter England, also a high-ranking intelligence official at the NIO in the 1970s, was convicted and fined £100 for a crime committed in a public toilet in that decade.

Chris Moore, author of a new book on Kincora, discovered a document describing the security precautions in place for England during the search of an office at Kincora after it had been shut down. A sex abuse survivor also described to Moore how he had been abused by England.

Sir Maurice Oldfield, MI6 chief (1973-78) and NI security co-ordinator (1980-81) was the architect of the Kincora 'honey trap' operation. He lost his security clearance in 1981 after the Metropolitan Police discovered his lust for young males and a collection of male pornography in his London flat.

In 1984, Oldfield's former deputy, Sir Peter Hayman, was convicted of gross indecency.

MYERS AND McGUIRK  
 ON TUAM

AS WORK commenced at the former mother-and-baby home in Tuam, some of Ireland's right-wing commentators have distinguished themselves. Kevin Myers and John McGuirk went to great lengths to offer alternative reasons as to why the Office of the Director for Authorised Intervention in Tuam had begun to exhume the almost 800 babies and infants buried at the site.

Myers has been writing a weekly column for *Brussels Signal* (BS) since June 2024. Hungarian investigative media group Atlatszo has linked funding for BS to both Viktor

Orbán and a long-time strategist for his Fidesz party, Patrick Egan. In July Myers penned a piece for BS about the excavation in Tuam.

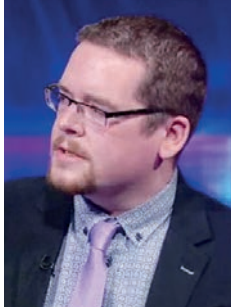
He starts by describing how forensic scientists will compare DNA samples from the 796 bodies to the DNA of living people. He seems to even question the legitimacy of these comparisons as he writes the word 'identify' in inverted commas. Myers claims the process is a "public piece of expiatory, agitprop-theatre around the recovery of the pathetic remains in Tuam".

He also claims that the state is on the way to providing full-term abortions and regularly returns to the modern-day availability of abortion services in Ireland in an effort to undermine any critique of what took place in Tuam. He claims that the state and media are trying to silence "Christian traditionalists who still cherish those life-affirming elements of the culture", which are being "abandoned for the liberating ideologies of egalitarianism, full-blooded feminism and the even more full-blooded execution-by-abortion of fully-gestated human beings".

Meanwhile *Gript* editor John McGuirk – in a 1,500-word comment piece headlined "The Disgraceful Calumny of Tuam" as well as during a *Prancing Princes* podcast – questions what he claims is modern Ireland's love of digging up the past.

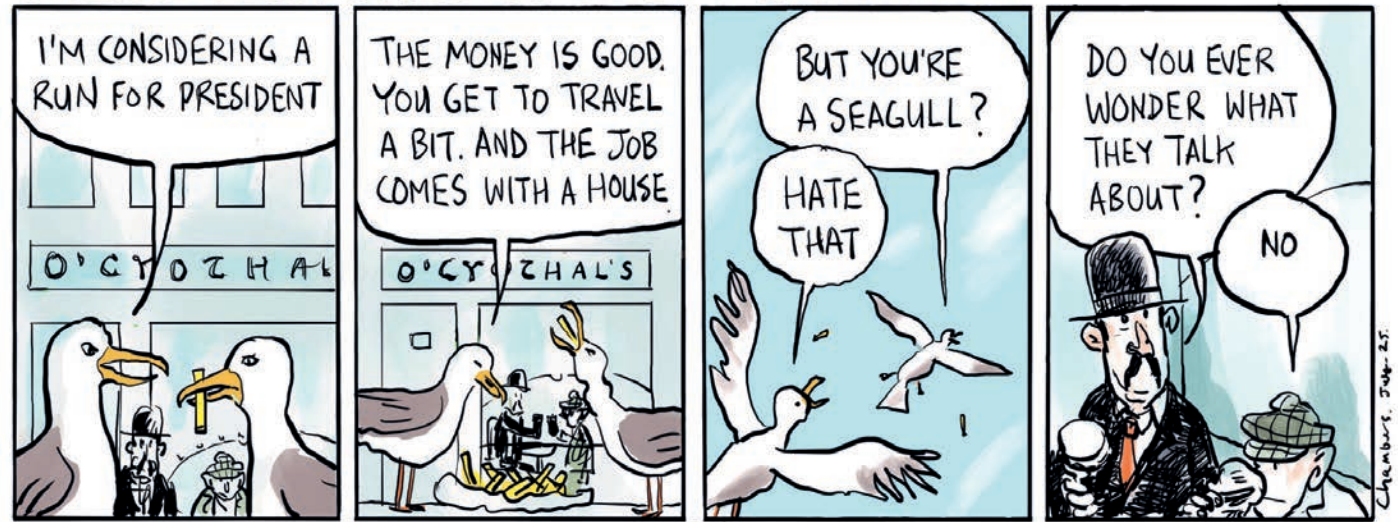
He asserts that most coverage and now the excavation in Tuam is "fictional history designed to legitimise modern prejudices". Like Myers, he says it is ironic that just as Tuam and the role of the Bon Secours Sisters is being investigated "Irish society has simply found new and more efficient ways to dispose of inconvenient and unwanted children, as the enormous surge in the abortion rate in Ireland would tend to confirm".

On the podcast McGuirk says Ireland is increasingly totalitarian and its populace is being indoctrinated and subjected to a sustained campaign of relentless, deliberate, deceptive and malevolent propaganda.



John McGuirk

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## AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



## IRELAND'S NEUTRAL NATO PARTNERSHIP

IN THE same month that the Government underlined its plans to ditch the triple lock governing the deployment of Irish troops overseas, the deepening partnership of Ireland's Defence Forces with Nato was on display in the Curragh.

It will not surprise *Phoenix* readers that there is no reference on the Óglaigh na hÉireann/Irish Defence Forces Facebook or X pages to the fact that Ordnance School Ireland hosted Nato's Home Made Explosive International Workshop. But a post on the @UKDefenceDublin X account – the official account of the UK defence attaché assigned to the British embassy in Ireland – was keen to commend the Kildare jamboree. British defence attaché Colonel Sean Grant lauded the “multiagency participation, global expertise, enhancing interoperability. Great work by the Ordnance School”.

Grant has developed quite the cosy relationship with the top brass of Ireland's Defence Forces over recent years. In 2023 he attended the biennial Delegate Conference of Raco (the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers) and was welcomed to the event on the association's X account: “Great to host our friend Col Sean Grant”.

Indeed Brigadier General Stephen Ryan, the general officer commanding of the Irish Defence Forces 2 Brigade, joined Grant last month to commemorate the Battle of the Somme at an event organised by the Royal British Legion of Ireland at the Irish National War Memorial Gardens in Islandbridge.

Ireland's relationship with Nato is conducted through the Partnership for Peace (PfP), of which Ireland has been a member since 1999. Nato's PfP is a framework designed to enhance political and military co-operation between countries and the military alliance. Under this agreement Irish troops have been deployed alongside Nato forces in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In recent years Ireland has

also participated in ‘live-fire’ cyber defence exercises organised by Nato's Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn, Estonia, and has started to co-operate with Nato in relation to maritime security.

In November 2023 Ireland agreed an Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP) for 2024 to 2028, which governs the continued co-operation with Nato. In March 2024 Brendan Howlin TD asked then tánaiste and defence minister Micheál Martin about future projects to be pursued under the ITPP. The response was at best vague. Martin talked about attaining “maximum interoperability, enabling of capabilities and the enhancement of the professionalism of the Defence Forces”. He asserted: “There are no specific projects contained in the ITPP... this is about co-operation.”

In July 43 bomb disposal technicians met at the Ordnance School in the Defence Forces Kildare training centre, including soldiers from the US, Germany, France, Britain and Canada. These bomb experts did not just look at how to identify and safely dispose of homemade explosive devices but also how this can be done in co-operation with national police forces.

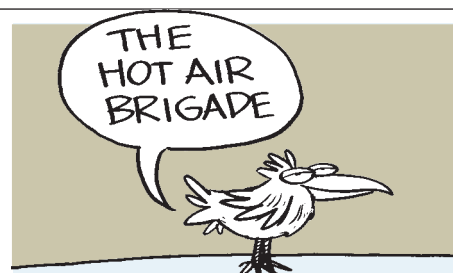
The fact that the Irish Defence Forces has world-class expertise in terms of countering improvised explosive devices (IEDs) has been exploited by Nato. Since 2010 the Ordnance School in the Curragh has offered these counter-IED training courses to both Nato allies and partners.

With Nato deepening its connections to Ireland, Goldhawk is also intrigued by the career trajectory of Irish academic Jack O'Doherty. He is currently researching US nuclear strategy and policy at the University of Leicester and was recently selected from over 350 applicants to work on Nato's NextGen Futures platform. This is a forecasting programme that will provide Nato with probability estimates regarding key events and trends and examine “second-order effects, question assumptions, and surface overlooked dynamics shaping the future of war and warfare”.

This is not O'Doherty's only Nato connection. He is a junior associate fellow with the Nato Defense College in Rome and in 2017, when studying for his masters in international relations at University College Cork, O'Doherty represented UCC at the Nato allied command transformation crisis simulation exercise at the University of Bologna.



Stephen Ryan



I would certainly want to be fairly remunerated. At a time when Premiership footballers are earning £25m a year... I wouldn't necessarily think I should be earning that kind of money, but if I'm going to sign up for another four or five years to deliver industry-leading performance – and not just me, the rest of the senior management team – then the reward package would reflect industry-leading performance. **Michael O'Leary, Sunday Independent**



Michael O'Leary

Storyed minutiae of my past will be an asset to researchers of the future. **Terry Prone on donating her papers to the National Library, Irish Examiner**

Our former president is a role model, not just for women, but people. She is also a poster child against ageism, with its sly denigration of senior citizens: aged 81, her firepower burns more brightly than ever. **Martina Devlin on Robbo, Irish Independent**

Brad Pitt. **Martin Heyden SC, who is acting in the high-profile legal action over an alleged sale to John Magnier of the Barne Estate, suggests the Hollywood heartthrob as an actor who could play the role of Judge Max Barrett in any movie of the High Court stand-off, Sunday Independent**

Later that evening, I find myself crossing the Hyde Bridge. It's raining. Even so, I stop for a couple of minutes, lean on the bridge and listen to the rushing waters of the Garavogue river sweeping underneath, as if unseen creatures are urgently calling to each other as they pass by. If towns have distinctive sounds, this is what Sligo sounds like, and always has. **Rosita Boland, Irish Times**

A concept store called Baggotonia. Located on Leeson Street Upper in Dublin, the bijou boutique/deli/exhibition space quietly opened in spring with its “eclectic mix of stylish items”, from pantry goods and plimsoles to perfume and ceramics, and is, Lambe-Murphy declares, his first “proper job”. **Marie Kelly on Gavin Lambe-Murphy's shop, Sunday Times**

In an age when luxury travel risks becoming indistinguishable from one city to the next, a quiet rebellion is underway, one that favours soul over sameness, storytelling over standardisation. **Brenda Collins, Irish Tatler**

In the stadium of relationships they were in the lifers' area. With Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russell or Bono and Ali, or Brian and Amy. They give off the “excited to be together” vibe of which most of us can only dream. **Mary McCarthy lamenting Cat and Pat's break up, Irish Independent**



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

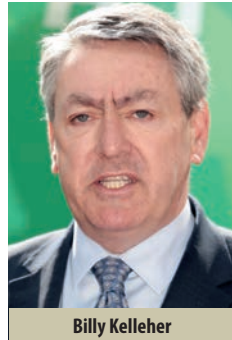


## TRUMP ENERGY DEAL

URSULA VON der Leyen's recent trade deal capitulation to Donald Trump was humiliating on several grounds but the most farcical element was her promise that the EU would buy \$¾ trillion worth of US energy over three years.

This equates to \$250bn a year of fossil fuels. The MAGA regime has waged all-out war on climate science and on US climate action (partly a payback by Trump to his Big Oil donors) and now the US president is using the tariff threat to try to bludgeon Europe into undoing its climate action.

But this energy deal is never going to happen. The US exported \$318bn of fossil fuels last year, of which about \$75bn went to the EU. To keep Ursula's promise, the EU would need to more than triple its intake of US fossil fuel – and the US would need to stop selling it to almost anyone else.



Billy Kelleher

Also, the EU can't tell member states (or companies) who to buy gas from. And, crucially, gas demand in the EU has been falling due to climate action.

But even if only a fraction of Ursula's promise comes to pass, the deal can still do huge damage to EU climate action, especially because of the signal it sends to investors.

This farce is a timely reminder of the chaos and uncertainty Ireland will be subjected to if the Government gets its way. We're told *ad nauseam* that an LNG import terminal is vital for energy security, when in reality it would mean putting ourselves at the mercy of volatile global forces such as Trump.

Fianna Fáil MEP Bill Kelleher was at it again last week on RTÉ radio, arguing in favour of a state-led "strategic gas reserve". This proposed floating facility is effectively an LNG import terminal by another name. It would be naive to expect the facility would not end up permanently supplying the Irish market.

Kelleher's repeated use of the word "temporary" and references to "catastrophic events" involving our gas import pipelines from Scotland give the impression this gas reserve would be strictly for emergency use only. And our "climate commitments" mean it won't become permanent, he asserted.

This doesn't really tally with Kelleher's (and the Government's) unstinting support for a separate project, Shannon LNG, a private

commercial operation that very definitely would be a permanent import terminal for gas.

He even cheered on the granting of planning permission last March for a giant 600MW gas-burning power station next to the proposed terminal, calling it a "victory for common sense over ideological dogma".

During his radio outing last week, Kelleher had the gall to cite, as an example of our energy insecurity, the fact that poor old Jeff Bezos had to cancel a planned Amazon manufacturing plant in Dublin because it could not secure an electricity supply.

The biggest driver of energy insecurity in Ireland is data centres, and Amazon is one of the biggest players in that sector.

If Kelleher really wants to improve Ireland's energy security, he should try to convince the Government to stop allowing new data centres.

**MEDIA COVERAGE of AI is strong on hype but invariably ignores its disastrous climate impacts. Listeners to Brendan O'Connor's radio show last Sunday were treated to a half-hour of breathless techno-optimism from RTE's favourite scientist, Luke O'Neill. Apparently AI will save us from everything – even from climate change.**

**Unfortunately, along the way O'Neill told listeners they should use ChatGPT more – even for booking a restaurant. An AI search uses 10 times more energy than a traditional web search and AI hype is causing a global boom in data centres, with disastrous climate consequences.**

MIAMI MURDERS:  
LOYALISTS  
CELEBRATE

JULY 31 was the 50th anniversary of the Miami Showband massacre in which members of the notorious Glenanne gang – made up of UVF, RUC and UDR members – killed three of the band.

The gunmen were UVF/UDR members. Two of them, Harris Boyle and Wesley Somerville, died when the bomb they were planting in the band's minibus exploded prematurely.

A commemoration of showband players deaths was held at the spot on the recent anniversary. It was attended by surviving members and also, significantly, PSNI chief constable Jon Boucher. There was widespread coverage by the media.

What also received coverage was a commemoration on Saturday August 2 of Boyle, one of the killers. Fifteen bands with 400 marchers and many supporters left Levaghery Orange hall and marched around the loyalist Killycomaine estate in Portadown. One of the bands was the Sons of Ulster Flute Band from Moygashel. Boyle's fellow killer, Somerville, was from Moygashel, where there

was a large parade for him in April. After Saturday's unveiling of a mural in honour of Boyle, the parade and supporters dispersed.

Unionist politicians regularly rail against IRA commemorations in the north but, while nationalist and Alliance politicians condemned the Portadown parade, unionist politicians had to be approached for comment. Only one, former UUP leader Doug Beattie, condemned it outright, saying it was "utterly appalling".

Sinn Féin's response from first minister Michelle O'Neill was that calls for the Portadown parade to be banned were wrong: everybody should have "the space to remember their dead" and do so in a "dignified and respectful manner." She didn't say whether she thought what was essentially a UVF march and new mural fitted her criteria.

The Orange Order said it was nothing to do with it, although organisers used an Orange hall as the assembly point. Bands get around accusations that they are UVF supporters by calling themselves the 36th Ulster Division Regimental Bands Association, referring to the 1912 UVF. They regularly drill in Orange halls.

Saturday's parade, coming so soon after the formal 50th commemoration of the Miami murders, threw a spotlight on the whole scene of loyalist or Orange marches, flags, murals and demonstrations, which receives little attention after the '12th' but continues unabated until September. Each weekend there will be 40-plus marches by the Orange

Order, Royal Black Preceptory or Apprentice Boys of Derry led by bands, many of which commemorate UVF and UDA figures, often with their name on the bass drum.

The vast majority take place in unionist districts and pass off peacefully. The last serious disturbances were 10 years ago in north Belfast, after which marchers gave up trying to force their way through contentious Catholic districts. Nevertheless, when parades

are planned, posters and flags are erected in mixed districts, some provocatively close to Catholic churches and schools. Posters with photographs of Somerville have been regularly tied to telegraph poles in and around Moygashel. They cause annoyance and distress to families of his victims – he killed several people in east Tyrone.

Nationalists are greatly aggrieved because the PSNI claim it's not its function to remove them but police remove racist graffiti. The PSNI also know removing UVF posters will lead to a tit-for-tat contest as the posters are replaced with twice as many. It becomes a game of whack-a-mole.

Boucher says he's trying to get legislation from Britain extended to the north to give the PSNI extra powers to remove posters and prosecute those who affix them.

In the meantime, the attention Saturday's parade attracted has thrown into perspective the small number of sparsely attended IRA commemorations in the north compared with regular loyalist ones accompanied by bands with hundreds attending.



Doug Beattie



## WILL MARY LOU BACK CONNOLLY?

SINN Féin strategists may claim they are engaging in mature reflection about their choice of presidential nominee but the reality is that the widespread consultation of members led to confusing results and then political paralysis.

In turn, this firstly allowed Catherine Connolly to take the lead role in discussions about a united left candidate. Secondly, it allowed the still disgraced Labour Party to push SF into third place in this forum when Ivana Bacik and Labour's leadership grasped the nettle and came out in support of Connolly – despite a much more antagonistic history of conflict between Labour and the Galway West TD.

SF will get little credit from the media or anyone else for deferring to its members but the decision at its recent ard comhairle to postpone a decision until its September meeting only prolongs this image of SF hesitation and procrastination. Is this the reason why Mary Lou McDonald told the media this week that SF would have to make a decision within the next “couple of weeks”?

This might not matter if it were not for the more important strategy – outside of the presidency – that all on the left claim to be agreed on; namely, a broad, united opposition to Government that can take on the FFG coalition electorally. If this is not possible in a presidential campaign, how will it work during a general election?



Mary Lou McDonald

More important at the ard comhairle meeting was the argument put by some that when the membership was asked about a united campaign for the presidency, the candidate's name on everyone's lips was that of senator Frances Black, who has since departed from the fray.

Black is regarded as ‘sound on the national question’ but while SF members are aware that Connolly has a benign attitude to a united Ireland, she is not exactly an unrepentant Fenian in the same mould as themselves. Thus, extra time is needed to test attitudes towards Connolly.

The September deadline was not intended in the first place to allow considered rumination by the membership but rather time and space for the leadership, or some of the leadership, to persuade members of the benefits of a united presidential campaign. This will not be easy as the memories of anti-republican abuse from what passes for most of the left in the Republic still rankles in SF.

Doubtless, SF seniors will point out to members that unless the party backs Connolly, the left vote will split and McGuinness will win the presidency for Fine Gael (a first-time triumph for the Blueshirts), for which SF will be held responsible. Here again, Mary Lou confronted that argument this week in what looked like a move away from a united front candidate.

Even if the Shinnars vote to back Connolly, some of them are worried that it will look as if they were forced to do so by the ‘split’ accusation above as opposed to making their own decision.

What is it about presidential elections and SF?

## BERTIE AHERN TO LOSE OUT

THAT *SUNDAY INDEPENDENT* poll showing Bertie Ahern ahead even of Micheál Martin in a Fianna Fáil presidential candidate survey (by the somewhat embarrassing score of 24% to 19%) may have come as sweet music to Bertie's ears. But there is no sudden rush in political and media circles to declare that the former taoiseach is now the stand-out candidate for the party's nomination.

The penny may have finally dropped for Bertie and his plentiful admirers in FF that what has done for him is the fear among many members – and certainly those weighing up their own future electoral prospects – that

the Mahon Tribunal's findings against Ahern would be depicted in full technicolour glory across every media platform if he became the party candidate. The argument that it was a long time ago and that Bertie does not provoke the same opprobrium as Denis O'Brien has not persuaded those who matter and Bertie will not be running for FF in the presidential election.

That Martin resents Bertie in any case has hardly helped. But what has mattered more is the negative view among those anti-Martin elements who railed against his leadership after the 2020 general election and gathered around Jim O'Callaghan but who also believe that nominating Bertie for the park would be a blunder.

The growing view now is that the leadership will likely not choose a party or even a non-party candidate but will instead adopt a nominal, supine stance of support for the ‘Government’ candidacy of Fine Gael's Mairead McGuinness.

There may be a negative Blueshirt reaction to this phenomenon of FF bearing gifts – a reaction borne not out of ingratitude but the knowledge that, without an unchallenging FF candidate, there appears to be no source of the transfers needed to elect Mairead (see *The Phoenix* 25/7/25). In the context of the unspoken battle between the two civil war parties in decline, such a result would not dismay a great many FF members.

In this scenario the demeanour of FF members – especially those in close, intimate interaction with their FG colleagues in Government – will be interesting, amusing even, to behold during a tough election campaign. Already, some of these have been privately muttering that MEP Seán Kelly would have been a better candidate given the profile of the ex-GAA boss and his much chummier disposition than Mairead.

The unofficial advice being dispensed by shrewder FF members to their less cynical party colleagues is that, in the event of a first ever presidential victory for ‘our Government’ candidate, McGuinness, they should claim credit for the part FF played in FG and Mairead's triumph. Alternatively, should McGuinness lose out, it can be rationalised by way of noting that ‘we were not that involved’ in any case.

What this couldn't-care-less attitude might do for coalition unity, already frayed after less than a year in office, is hard to calculate.

## DON'T FUND THE GENOCIDE

WHILE THE Dáil argues about the Occupied Territories Bill, Palestinian supporters in Galway have decided to make the global local by organising a boycott of the Leonardo group of hotels, which is owned by Israeli businessman David Fattal.

The Galway Alliance against War says that



"We had to put extra health warnings on the shipments going to Gaza."



## AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

Fattal is an active supporter of the infamous Netzah Yehuda battalion of the Israeli Defence Forces, which has been accused of a litany of abuses against Palestinians. Palestinian supporters in Galway are running a boycott of the Fattal Hotel Group, which has two hotels in the city, the five-star G and the Leonardo Hotel, a former Jury's hotel.

Pickets are regularly held outside both hotels, with all Palestine solidarity demos through the city concluding at the Leonardo at Spanish Point.

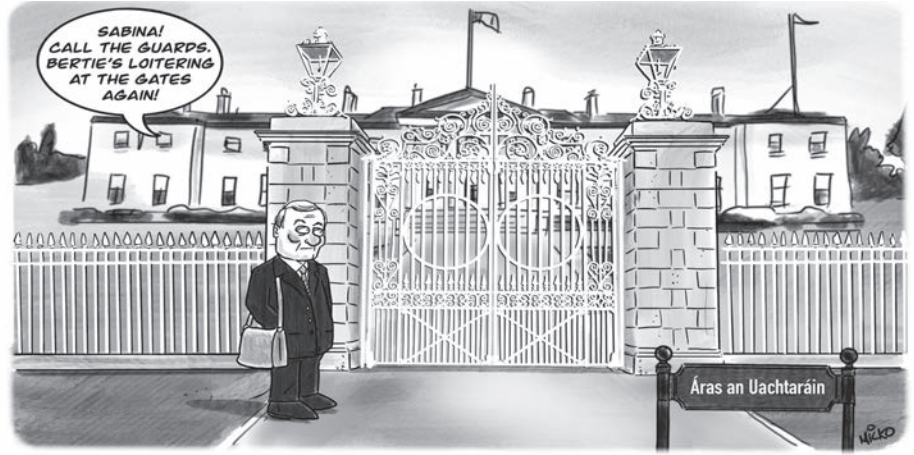
In Belfast there is also a weekly vigil every Saturday at the Leonardo. The hotel chain is also prominent throughout Dublin and Cork.

Even the deeply Zionist US government had contemplated imposing sanctions against the Netzah Yehuda unit but was persuaded not to following a 2024 Israeli campaign led by Benjamin Netanyahu. Even before the ongoing genocide in Gaza, the battalion was responsible for mass atrocities including torture, sexual assault and the killing of detainees as well as unarmed civilians.

The battalion is recruited from an ultra-orthodox sect, called Haredi, and was established in 1999. Since then it has been active in supporting the establishment of



Benjamin Netanyahu



illegal settler outposts in the Palestinian West Bank.

In 2015 a combat soldier from the battalion was jailed for nine months under aggravated circumstances, after he was convicted of having electrocuted Palestinian suspects on two separate occasions. This included arresting a Palestinian suspect near the West Bank city of Jenin, before blindfolding, handcuffing and beating him and attaching electrodes to his neck and electrocuting him. Four other soldiers involved in similar incidents were also indicted.

Fattal has hosted a series of "relaxing vacations" for members of the battalion and their families, with the CEO of the Leonardo Plaza hotel in Jerusalem, Ortal Noah Moalam, boasting in the *Jerusalem Post* that "the Fattal

chain is excited and proud to partner with the Netzah Yehuda association".

Local Palestinian supporters say that some of the profits of the Fattal chain go to fund the Israeli war effort and that Irish citizens should express their revulsion at what is happening in Gaza and the West Bank by refusing to fund the genocide. They are particularly targeting the Leonardo hotel in Belfast by asking people participating in this year's Oireachtas na Gaeilge in October to boycott the hotel.

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## 'COMRADES' MICHAEL D AND CATHERINE C

GIVEN THE alarming prospect of leader Ivana Bacik's support for Catherine Connolly's presidential campaign being rejected by her own party, Labour's members grudgingly, and definitely not unanimously, decided to accede to her wishes and row in behind the former party member, who once told them they had lost their soul. But it will be interesting to see just how active and energetic members in for example Tipperary North, the constituency of Alan Kelly – an implacable opponent of Connolly's candidacy – and other old-guard TDs and members will be in the presidential campaign.

A raft of criticisms of Connolly, laid out in almost press statement discipline, had been circulating in the media and elsewhere before the party made its decision. It listed her 'negative' political style, her split from Labour, her pals on the far left, her visit to Syria and other sins. Her remark about Labour losing its soul was especially provocative to the old guard.

Some of her critics made sure to publicise Connolly's falling out with Labour in 2006, describing it as the party's decision, along with that of then party leader Pat Rabbitte, to ensure that Michael D Higgins was the sole candidate – sans Catherine – in Galway West at the 2007 general election. This account leaves out much of the electoral and political arguments involved in that disagreement.

For a start, Connolly knew well she would not win a seat in 2007 but, with the party locally and even nationally obsessed with

ensuring Higgins's seat would pass to Labour after he retired, she wanted to stand alongside him and be in pole position to succeed him subsequently.

Connolly and her sister, Colette – collectively known mockingly by the 'comrades' as the Grim Sisters – had greatly



Ivana Bacik



Catherine Connolly

increased Labour's local vote and doubled its representation on Galway City Council from two seats to four at the 2004 local elections.

They were very much to the left of the party and had even begun to criticise Michael Twee's very flexible tactical astuteness locally and nationally, a theme they vocalised more often and more loudly after exiting the party.

Although Connolly argued that her candidacy at the 2007 election would only help Higgins via her extra votes in transfers, the party said no.

That is how it has been reported recently

but the fact is that Higgins himself was even more hostile to her candidacy than Rabbitte or any party handler at HQ.

The ongoing tensions in Galway West during this period and in the following general election in 2011 – Connolly took 2,006 and 4,766 first-preference votes as an Independent in 2007 and 2011 respectively – only intensified the friction between her and Higgins. Ironically, running as a left Independent was much more of a threat to Higgins than if Connolly had been allowed to stand as his running mate.

Today, the relations between the two are sub-zero and, while Labour is formally backing her presidential campaign, it is perhaps fortunate that President Michael D is precluded from expressing a preference one way or another in the contest.

Media commentary about Connolly being a continuity candidate in the Higgins mould may be on the button politically but personally this is far from the typical reality of splits on the left. Many Labour activists are also fearful that unity with the Social Democrats, far left and Sinn Féin (if the latter decides to come on board) will be of benefit only to these parties – all of which are to the left of Labour.

However, Bacik at least knows that refusal to agree to a left unity candidate will depict her party as obstructive and party political sectarian, more concerned with potential careers in government with, say, Fine Gael, than building a left alternative to the current coalition.



## KITTY HOLLAND V JOHN WATERS

THE END game in the seven-year defamation action by *Irish Times* journalist Kitty Holland against ex-IT journalist and anti-abortion activist John Waters is closer, if not completely finalised. Last month Holland secured a judgment against Waters for a sum of €35,000 – the amount awarded to her in the Circuit Court last year following a five-day hearing. Holland was also awarded her costs amounting to €100,000 circa.

Holland broke the story about the death of 34-year-old Savita Halappanavar in University Galway Hospital in 2012. She alleged that Waters had later accused her – without naming her – of lying in her *IT* report and had seriously defamed her. She reported that Ms Halappanavar had been refused a termination because a foetal heartbeat was still present and that she had been told: “This is a Catholic country.”

Waters told the court that Holland was a decent, sincere person but that she had been used by “unscrupulous interests” inside and outside the *IT*.

Judge John O’Connor, however, ruled that the defamation was a serious attack on Holland’s professional integrity as a journalist and caused her great hurt before awarding her €35,000 in damages and later awarding her full costs.

Those costs will have amounted to a multiple of €35,000 given that Holland’s legal team consisted of Lavelle solicitors and a senior and junior counsel. Waters’ team



Kitty Holland

consisted of Brendan Moloney solicitors, along with one senior counsel and two juniors, and is thought to have cost €150,000 circa.

Waters will surely have known of the financial pitfalls involved in defending this case given that he has sued over half a dozen media for defamation – as he stated during Holland’s action against him last year – and was successful in most if not all of them, racking up tens of thousands of euros in the process.

He even sued poor Goldhawk for a report on his legal actions (see *The Phoenix* 30/6/17).

**DONALD TRUMP’S threatening mind games in moving nuclear submarines close to Russia is worrying enough but when two of Britain’s most jingoistic newspapers, the Sunday Times and Mail on Sunday, point blank disagree about the dangers inherent in this stand-off, it’s even more concerning.**

**The Irish editions of both titles delivered their verdicts to readers last weekend, with the Mail’s headline warning: “Nuclear submarines closing in on Russia”. This, it said, was “dramatically escalating tensions between the two countries”.**

**Further Red October-like reportage followed, with the Mail saying: “A source close to the President told the MoS: Trump is running out of patience with Russia.”**

**With more menace in each successive paragraph, the Mail’s estimation of the Russian threat concluded with the warning: “Military experts said Mr Trump will most likely have deployed two Ohio-class vessels. Each is armed with up to 20 Trident II D5 missiles that can deliver multiple thermonuclear warheads with a range of up to 7,000 miles.” OMG!**

**Over at the equally belligerent ST, defence academic and former Royal United Services Institute director Michael Clarke’s story was headlined: “Duel in deep water: why US doesn’t need to move a single sub”.**

**Clarke wrote: “Whatever Trump’s reasons for the sabre rattling deployment, strategic advantage is not one of them.”**

**He advised Britons that moving two Ohio-class subs closer to Russia would create noise and place them in shallow water, rendering them vulnerable. He ended by saying: “The simple fact remains that these vessels can only perform their deterrent role properly by keeping very quiet, a long way out to sea and deep beneath it.”**

**Which of these two authoritative reports should we take seriously?**

## IIEA ECONOMIC GURU WARNS IRELAND (II)

WITHIN DAYS of the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) chief economist Dan O’Brien having his invitation rescinded to speak to the Oireachtas foreign affairs committee, he has spoken out again on his pet topic – the mortal threat the Occupied Territories Bill (OTB) poses to the Irish economy.

Last month O’Brien was preparing to tell the Oireachtas committee about the OTB’s deadly threat to Ireland when the committee discovered that the IIEA did not have a conclusive position on the OTB and its chief economist was not empowered to present such a position on the IIEA’s behalf.

Thus, O’Brien, who was due before the committee after Alan Shatter’s defence of Israel, did not get to address the TDs and senators (see *The Phoenix* 25/7/25).

But O’Brien, presenting as

“Chief Economist at the Institute for International and European Affairs”, could not be prevented from tweeting most favourably about a *Wall Street Journal* column that vigorously supported the OTB’s threat to the Irish economy. Eugene Kontorovich – under the headline “BDS will be bad for Irish business” – warned that “US anti-boycott laws will put American firms in a tough spot”.

Gleefully seizing on the argument that has effectively become a campaign by US/Israeli interests against the OTB, O’Brien posted on X that the article had not received “the attention it deserves given that the *WSJ* is the paper of record of financial and corporate America”.

A more relevant detail might be the political affiliation and views of the column’s author. Even by Israeli and US standards, he would be regarded as very much on the right of the political spectrum. The *WSJ* describes the academic and writer as a professor at the Antonin Scalia School of Law and senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation. But he is much more than that.

Kontorovich is a founder and activist in the Jerusalem Centre for Security and Foreign Affairs, whose website currently includes two especially strident articles. One advocated that “the US should permanently stop all funding to UNRWA” (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine) – this as children are dying from famine. Another article was headlined: “Finishing the job in Gaza: what it means and what it takes”.

Kontorovich has other interesting affiliations with right-wing Israeli groups but perhaps most tellingly is his residency in recent years in two West Bank settlements. One was in Alon Shvut, an Israeli colony south of Bethlehem, and the other was Neve Daniel, another settlement near Bethlehem.

Is this the sort of Israeli activist that the IIEA chief economist believes Ireland should take advice from?



Dan O'Brien



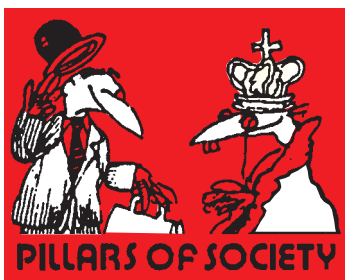


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# Leo Varadkar

FORMER TAOISEACH Leo Varadkar's metamorphosis from Tory boy to wet centrist, from Blueshirt to Irish republican, and from anti-abortionist to virtually a woman's right to choose position, along with many other U-turns, is quite the political journey. The most significant part of this is his line on the national question, specifically his advocacy for a border poll, if only because it is mirrored by the reverse odyssey of current Taoiseach and leader of Fianna Fáil ('The Republican Party') Micheál Martin. This led to a public confrontation recently, something that is likely to be repeated even though the ever-so-responsible media seems determined to avoid the most spectacular role reversal of two taoisigh and the two historic big parties in the Republic.

Young Vlad the Impaler was the archetypal, right-wing student prince at Trainers, where he and Lucinda Creighton were leading lights in Young Fine Gael and ate socialists, Shinnars and those awful oiks in Ógra Fianna Fáil before dinner. It was, however, after he had fought his way into the Dáil in 2007 and became a lurking menace to Enda Kenny's leadership – along with others such as Brian Hayes and Paschal Donohoe – that he really asserted himself. But although he certainly was part of the cabal that was crushed by Field Marshall Phil Hogan in that famous party heave in 2010, during the general election the following year Vlad really made his mark.

The one lesson that Kenny and Hogan took from the upstart rebels was the view that, bad and all as the FF government looked during the crash and the troika's rule, simply waiting for their turn to enter government was only inviting the Labour Party to take advantage. Thus Vlad was forgiven for his disloyalty and was let loose to savage Labour and frighten its middle-class base by focusing on Labour's tax policies, a strategy that pushed the latter back from a threatening position early on in the election campaign.

At this point, Varadkar still cut an image as a menacing reactionary with views on 'lazy' workers and the unemployed that were best manifest by his campaign in 2017 – as social

protection minister – against welfare fraud with the slogan "welfare cheats". This was a crude tactic that most recognised was part of his party leadership campaign.

In the same period and for the same reason, he said that he stood for those who got up early in the morning (unlike, one supposes, those who lie in bed much of the day). He won the leadership that year (2017) and entered a period that eventually softened his political cough.

Varadkar's political values remained largely intact until he took the FG leadership but, one by one, in subsequent years he flipped positions on a number of basic political issues. As a young

Blueshirt in college he had resorted to that old trope

about Palestinian supporters being antisemitic and as a TD he attended the Oireachtas Friends of Israel group, which was chaired by Alan Shatter. Years later, however, and just one week after the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, he condemned Israel's blockade of Gaza as collective punishment.

One of Varadkar's first initiatives as

taoiseach was to flag a referendum on abortion, something he had previously condemned as wrong even in the case of rape victims. He never quite came around to supporting an unqualified woman's right to choose but came close during the referendum, which passed easily with 66% in 2018.

Even on the issue of same-sex marriage he had initially demurred, stating that, while he did not believe homosexuality was wrong, he did not support same-sex marriage. Following his public declaration that he was gay, he went on to fully support the referendum on the issue.

In 2010 Vlad supported a scheme whereby immigrants would be paid to return to their own country but years later he condemned as "disgusting" British home secretary Priti Patel's proposal to send immigrants to Rwanda.

## UNITED IRELAND

Recently, following the general election and his earlier retirement, the new Varadkar in a *Sunday Times* article expressed disappointment that bedrock issues such as the living wage and more sick days – stuff that would have been anathema to Vlad the Younger – are not being explicitly included in the coalition's Programme for Government in January. But he welcomed commitments in the programme to women's equality, LGBTQI+ and racism. All of this is a million miles away from slagging off the unemployed and low-paid workers, as in the old days.

However, the biggest single part of that article was concerned with the north and, while noting the extra €1bn for Martin's pet project, the shared island unit, he was critical of the failure to include any commitment to Irish unity. "It's likely that the impetus to work towards and plan for unification will have to come from outside Leinster House," he warned.

This is where Varadkar's real focus is now concentrated and he appears determined to take on Martin's ultra-revisionist new party policy on the north – a development that has been not so much ignored as virtually covered up by Dublin's political correspondents.

Considering that the core of FF's foundation, identity and success as the biggest party in the state for nearly a century has been its commitment to constitutional republicanism and a united Ireland, Martin's conversion to *Sunday Independent*-type partitionism is remarkable. It began in 2011 shortly after he became leader of a party that was on the floor – never a good time to throw out basic principles in a blind panic. But just as FG's Phil Hogan had successfully





## AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

appealed to middle-class FF voters to 'loan' their votes to FG, Martin began to appeal for reconciliation with the same vote and concluded that the faintest whiff of nationalism would be counter-productive.

But if it began in Martin's head as a strategic electoral ploy, it soon gripped his political faculties and, with attentive midwife Eoghan Harris in attendance, a terrible and most unbeautiful creature, the ardent southern partitionist, was born. This also involved FF's abandonment of the SDLP, for long a party that moderate southern nationalists looked to. For years FF competed with FG for the role of the SDLP's southern partner under the leadership of John Hume, the representative of northern, constitutional nationalism.

From 2007 the FF leadership – first Bertie Ahern, then Brian Cowen – talked a lot about unity and even a merger with the SDLP. In 2011, Martin said the party was preparing a white paper on a united Ireland. Nothing happened for five years. In 2016 he said FF would take a year to work out the "practicalities of a united Ireland". In 2017 Martin promised a 12-point plan for a united Ireland within months. Then the party said the plan would be published later that year. Nothing happened. In February 2018 an FF statement declared that "discussions now about a united Ireland are premature".

Similarly, Martin's 2016 declaration that FF would stand in local elections in the north in 2017 – via a merger with the SDLP or unilaterally – was binned. In 2022, then SDLP leader Colum Eastwood, demoralised by Martin's capricious behaviour, declared the partnership with FF to be at an end.

Vlad recognised that Martin was trying to retrieve FF's middle-class vote and he resolved to outflank FF in reverse by appealing to its nationalist base. In 2019 he set up FG's Northern Ireland Engagement Group to forge links with northern politicians (in reality, the SDLP). On resuming the role of taoiseach in 2022, Varadkar delegated two Dublin FG politicians – then junior minister Neale Richmond and Dún Laoghaire councillor Lorraine Hall – to move into the debate about a border poll. Their brief from Vlad was that, unlike the FF leadership, they were to support such a poll and engage with Ireland's Future, the main lobby group behind the campaign for a poll. Thus, the strange spectacle of FF and FG virtually swapping roles on the national question.

### REJUVENATED

In 2023 Vlad revived the old title of Fine Gael, the United Ireland Party, in the introduction to the party's northern policy. When it came to the section on the future of our shared island, it said: "Bunreacht na hÉireann affirms our national aspiration for territorial unity. Fine Gael, the United Ireland Party, shares that aspiration."

Martin has explicitly and repeatedly stated that his "shared island" policy does not include a border poll or other moves towards a united Ireland. He recently ruled it out this side of 50 years.

Much of the impetus behind Vlad's initiative seems to have dissipated following his flight from office last year but he himself appears to have been rejuvenated by the move. He has spoken of the need to not simply push for a border poll but that adequate preparations be made to ensure its passage and he uses whatever platform he can find to push his message.

Despite not standing in the general election, he sought pledges from political parties to treat Irish unity as an objective, not an aspiration, and that they would back the establishment of a new Ireland forum to plan for it. Questions from Goldhawk to FF about whether the party would say yes to Varadkar's proposal were not answered at the time.

### POLITICAL POLEMIC

Perhaps Varadkar's most effective move to date was to puncture Martin's mantra that no moves towards a united Ireland can be made before there is reconciliation in the north, a stipulation that he claimed (wrongly)



Micheál Martin

was at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). This condition is actually a warmed-up version of the unionist veto but Vlad's forensic talent with political polemic came out when he filleted Martin's argument as follows: "[The GFA] does not require that reconciliation between the two main communities should occur before a border poll takes place and I am sure there would not have been a Good Friday Agreement had this pre-condition been set. I think making it a pre-condition would be a mistake. It could encourage some to eschew reconciliation so that they do

not have to contemplate unification. However, I firmly believe that reconciliation, unity among people, is deeply desirable and is the ultimate prize."

The unanswered question about Varadkar is what was it that transmogrified this arch Blueshirt into a constitutional republican? His resignation statement referred to personal and political factors and, while the former impulse has been cited by many, it seems that his recent activity means it was the type of politics he was engaged in, not politics *per se*, that provoked his resignation.

Another factor is the ex-taoiseach's personal and political background. Little noticed at the time were the references in two biographies of Varadkar to two of his uncles jailed by the British during the Indian movement for independence. Varadkar's family are immensely proud of their relatives' record, which was rewarded with government decorations after independence, and also with the role of Vlad's aunt, Prabha, in the movement.

The mutual solidarity and respect between the Irish and Indian movements for independence is an enduring relationship developed throughout the 20th century. Coming from the outside Varadkar would perhaps, ironically, have little of the anti-republican sentiments prevalent in some quarters of FG.

Did his personal and political emotions merge in the lead up to his resignation from high office 16 months ago?



### HAVEN'T GONE AWAY?

DUNDALK DISTRICT Court head the case of a man who stuck his middle fingers up at gardai on mobile patrol, leading to his arrest. Daniel Madejski (31) of Park Street, Dundalk, was observed by the officers in an intoxicated state at Francis Street, Dundalk, on June 29 after they received complaints about a man acting erratically. The defendant was shouting obscenities and claiming that he was a member of the IRA. When Madejski spotted the approaching gardai, he stuck up both middle fingers at them and continued yelling obscenities. He was arrested and charged with public intoxication and engaging in threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour. The solicitor for the defence told the court that Madejski – who has eight previous convictions, including three for public order infringements – would like to apologise for his behaviour and that he had too much to drink while celebrating his birthday. He was ordered to complete 60 hours of community service. *Dundalk Democrat*

### HIDE AND SEEK

AN INTOXICATED man who tried to hide from gardai behind a bus, having reacted aggressively after being prevented from boarding by the driver, appeared before Sligo District Court. Sergeant Derek Butler told the court that on October 16, 2024, officers received reports of an intoxicated man being abusive to staff and passengers at Sligo Bus Station. When they arrived, they saw Jamie Grenaghan (33) of Boley Hill, Manorhamilton, Leitrim, attempting to hide from them by walking behind a bus. When gardai asked Grenaghan for his details, he said he wouldn't provide them, before telling the officers to "fuck off". They asked Grenaghan to accompany them to Sligo Garda Station, to which he replied: "Fuck you, I won't." Defence solicitor Laura Spellman said Grenaghan would like to apologise to the gardai and that he hasn't touched alcohol since the incident. Judge Sandra Murphy adjourned the case to await a GP letter proving the defendant's sobriety. *Sligo Weekender*

### 'ORANGE BASTARDS'

RYAN JOHNSTON (35) of Fern Park, Derry, received a three-month suspended sentence at Derry Magistrates' Court after being charged with disorderly behaviour in Altnagelvin Hospital. Police were visiting the defendant's address to deal with a breach of curfew when they became concerned that he was intoxicated to a dangerous extent. Having decided to take him to the hospital, Johnston passed out in the police car and, when he awoke at the hospital, became highly abusive towards officers and staff. He repeatedly called officers "Orange bastards" and swore repeatedly at staff. When questioned, Johnston claimed to have no memory of committing the offences, admitting his recollection of the night was hazy. Judge Ted Magill handed Johnston a three-month suspended sentence. *Derry Post*

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



# Nick Delehanty

RIGHT-WING activist and small businessman Nick Delehanty is running for president, declaring in a statement to right-wing news website *Gript* that “we have major problems around housing, public expenditure, accountability and of course our immigration system”. The 35-year-old has never won an election, has little political experience to speak of and has next to no chance of getting on the ballot. Despite all this, he still managed to raise over €15,000 via crowdfunding in just a week. This display of enthusiasm is surely not to be ignored.

Delehanty has built up an online profile by calling out the Government for overspending, particularly in regards to Ipas centres. He recently claimed to have revealed that the parents of Keir Starmer’s wunderkind, Morgan McSweeney, were paid over €8m by the Irish state for their work in this area.

Delehanty’s own family is not without government contracts. His father, Nicholas Delehanty, was paid €93,400 by the State from 2004 to 2007 to store the ill-fated e-voting machines of the 2002 election. While addressing the topic in the Dáil in 2011, then local government minister Phil Hogan confirmed that the returning officers of the given counties were responsible for the storage of the machines.

Nick is also not without political party connections, counting former minister and presidential hopeful Mary Hanafin among his cousins. More exotic, perhaps, is another cousin, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, former IRA chief of staff and Sinn Féin president.

Delehanty lists not owning a house in his mid-30s as one of his qualifications to run for president. He currently runs “Dublin’s only outdoor doggy daycare”, Barkleys, which reported a €70,000 loss in 2024. Prior to this he was a corporate lawyer at Arthur Cox.

As he exited the legal world during Covid, Nick began promoting newly minted cryptocurrencies on Twitter, encouraging his followers to buy various coins and tokens in order to flip a profit. He interviewed people in the crypto space on his YouTube channel, *The Daily Millennial*. All of his videos on cryptocurrency have been deleted but he still sings the blockchain’s praises now and then on his social media.

Delehanty’s first foray into electoral politics was his unsuccessful run last year for council in Dublin South East Inner City. He received only 374 first-preference votes but garnered attention for his provocative posters, brandishing slogans such as “No More Tent City” and “Make Crime Illegal”.

During the campaign he turned to fringe publications to get his message out, including the esoteric, Gaelic revivalist journal *Meon*. The site is explicitly anti-capitalist, which doesn’t exactly gel with small business owner Delehanty. The journal’s general anti-establishment tilt and aversion to immigration is likely what led it to interview him.

The furthest Delehanty has gone in opposing immigration was on former Irish women’s rugby head coach Greg McWilliam’s podcast, where he voiced support for a Danish-style immigration system, a uniquely strict doctrine. But he has no problem associating with commentators

whose rhetoric is far more extreme than his. He appeared on former Renua president Eddie Hobb’s podcast *CounterPoint*, alongside X personality UberBoyo (aka Steafan Fox), a frequent poster on eugenics, who espouses the Great Replacement theory.

Delehanty himself says nothing racist or xenophobic but never pushes back against the more radical voices he often rubs shoulders with. In April he was at a large anti-immigrant protest in Dublin, which was attended by presidency rival Conor McGregor and neo-Nazi Justin Barrett (see *The Phoenix* 1/5/25).



Nick Delehanty

Delehanty has also found friends in the accelerationist movement. The Effective Accelerationist movement has come to prominence recently, with high-profile followers such as venture capitalist Marc Andreessen bringing the ideology to the Trump administration. The once fringe and cult-like ideology – it argues for unrestrained technological progress and large-scale deregulation – has made its way to Ireland and Delehanty attended the launch of the Éire Accelerationist movement in Dublin last year.

He was recently spotted jogging with AI entrepreneur and member of the European Accelerationist movement Gary Tiscovschi as a part of his presidential campaign, alongside Dean Keating of Breaking Point (see *The Phoenix* 10/7/25) and former Irish Freedom Party candidate Con Óg Ó Laoghaire.

In November’s general election, Delehanty put up a more impressive performance, scoring 1,542 first preferences in Dublin Bay South, overtaking former TD Kate

O’Connell on transfers from Aontú. He received a relatively high-profile endorsement in this race from Independent MEP Michael McNamara. The admiration goes both ways as Delehanty told Goldhawk he would love to see McNamara as taoiseach.

McNamara endeared himself to the anti-establishment crowd during his time as chair of the Oireachtas Covid committee (see *The Phoenix* 4/6/20) but he is yet to endorse Delehanty for the presidency.

Another ally of Nick’s is Cork councillor Albert Deasy, who recently appeared alongside him at a Breaking Point event in Athlone. Deasy is currently the highest donor to Delehanty’s campaign, donating €300 on his GoFundMe page.

To get on the presidential ballot in September, Nick will need the support of four councils or 20 Oireachtas members. He acknowledges that the Oireachtas path is his most likely (or least unlikely) route to getting on the ballot and claims he has “strong interest” from 10 (unnamed) Oireachtas members. Assuming these votes actually materialise, how does Delehanty make up the other 10 votes?

There is zero chance of Fianna Fáil adopting him as its candidate and Fine Gael has chosen Mairead McGuinness, while Labour, the Soc Dems and the far left have gone for Catherine Connolly. And SF wouldn’t see him as its saviour. This leaves about 18 Oireachtas non-Government members – excluding the Government-tied regional Independents – who could potentially support Delehanty.

Aontú is trying to whip together a nominating bloc from these deputies and a few others in order to select an alternative, conservative-leaning candidate to shake up the race. As such, for this bloc’s endorsement Nick must compete with previous presidential candidate Peter Casey and ex-Libertas leader Declan Ganley. The war for social media attention is also a difficult one, with Ireland’s foremost diplomat McGregor boasting a few million more followers than Delehanty.

In the fantastic scenario whereby Nick secures a nomination and becomes president, he envisions a “team of people” in the Áras to help him investigate Government contracts. This is certainly a new take on the office.

Despite it being most unlikely that Nick will be on the presidential ballot, the enthusiasm displayed through his fundraising efforts is undeniable. There is an energetic and rightward-leaning segment of the population that might take to Delehanty’s anti-establishment rhetoric. But with strong political ties needed to be nominated and broad support to be elected, is the D4 dogsitter barking up the wrong tree?





## VONA GROARKE'S GOOD NEWS

GOLDHAWK RECENTLY reported on the appointment of **Éilís Ní Dhuibhne** as the new Laureate for Irish Fiction – an Arts Council-fronted gig dished out every three years to a worthy scribbler. A less high-profile post that is also doled out every three years is that of Ireland Professor of Poetry and the new incumbent has just been appointed here too.

Coincidentally, the new prof, **Vona Groarke**, popped up as a member of the selection panel that chose Ní Dhuibhne as the new laureate from a final list of four writers.

Clearly then, Groarke understood all too well the mechanics of landing a role like the £35,000 per annum Ireland Professor of Poetry. In her case, it was a body called the Ireland Chair of Poetry Trust (ICPT) that made the final decision.

When it comes to choosing the fiction laureate, the Arts Council appoints both short-listing and selection committees, which are predominantly made up of outsiders (albeit, crucially, both chaired by council members).

The ICPT itself, however, has total control over the poetry professorship appointment process.

For those unfamiliar with the trust, it was established in 1989 and is chaired by Arts Council chairwoman **Maura McGrath** and includes the chairman of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, **Liam Hannaway**, as vice-chair.

Both councils contribute to the funding of the poetry professorship, as do the three colleges

at which the professor resides for a few weeks in each of the three years respectively.

They are currently represented on the trust by **Fran**

**Brearton**

(Queen's University), who likes a bit of Yeats; UCD's **Lucy Collins**, whose research interests include "ecopoetry and ecofeminism"; and former Trinity College physics professor-turned-poet **Iggy McGovern**.

The final member is former Belfast judge **Don-**

**nell Deeney**, the outgoing pro-chancellor of Trinners, who was knighted in 2005.

In February this year, the trust's sextet of members put out an open call for nominations for the new professor of poetry, with anyone free to submit a nomination. Most significantly, however, each of the five funding institutions was also invited to nominate a candidate.

From the 33 poets nominated this time around, a shortlist of three was drawn up by the ICPT at a meeting chaired by Han-

naway, who also chaired the final selection committee meeting.

At that stage, the ICPT was advised by two external poet advisors – former Ireland Professor of Poetry (2013-2016) **Paula Meehan** and Oxford University professor and critic **Peter McDonald** – who attended the final meeting.

In the end, the nod went to Groarke, who officially replaces **Paul Muldoon** as Ireland Professor of Poetry in October, when his term ends.

He was recently elected as a Saoi of Aosdána by the membership of that artists' organisation, which includes Groarke since 2010.

No doubt, celebrating Groarke's accolade with gusto was publisher **Peter Fallon** of The Gallery Press. The well-funded Co Meath-based publishing house, which received €180,000 from the Arts Council this year, is behind the poet's latest collection (her ninth), entitled *Infinity Pool*.

The professorship should help shift a few extra copies to readers who might not otherwise have been all that interested in a book that "tests the limits of spaces poems make for themselves".



## DREAL DEAL DELIVERS

**DREAL DEAL**, a horse with an interesting past and who was once trained by **Ronan McNally**, returned to something like his best form at Killarney recently, winning the €45,000 Boylesports Daily Moneyback Handicap Steeplechase at long odds under **Simon Torrens**.

The Arvico gelding, who landed a monumental gamble when gaining his first success at Navan back in 2020, went on to a sequence of six straight victories in flat and hurdle races.

The Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board referrals committee later disqualified the 10-times winner from his first two

victories and also disqualified McNally for 12 years for integrity breaches.

The Bowler Hats also ordered the trainer to contribute a cool €50,000 towards the cost of the inquiry.

McNally's 12-year ban was the longest ever handed out to an Irish licence holder and, although he later lost his appeal, the final four years were suspended.

This matter is actually before the High Court at the moment. Following McNally's disqualification, *Dreal Deal* moved to the

**John McConnell** stable in the ownership of **Mark Devlin**, where he won just two races from 18 starts.

The nag's final start for McConnell was an unplaced effort in Sligo, where he came to the attention of new trainer **Philip Rothwell**. The latter bought into him privately after the race, along with joint owners **Mark Devlin**, **Nigel O'Hare** and **Philip Smith**, who then asked Rothwell to train the horse.

It certainly looks like the right move.

**PHILIP ROTHWELL** also made headlines at Ballinrobe recently, albeit for all the wrong reasons.

*His charge, Coolboy Christie, owned by the Geesala Racing Group syndicate and ridden by Tiernan Power Roche, was the subject of a running and riding enquiry following an unplaced finish in the O'Hare's Bar Maiden Hurdle.*

*The acting stewards on the day, with Anthony Ryan in the saddle as chairman, ruled that the horse had not been ridden to attain the best possible finishing position. This was despite the nag being found by the IHRB veterinary officer to be clinically abnormal post-race.*

*Coolboy Christie was duly suspended for 60 days, while Roche got 14 days.*

*Rothwell had stated that his jockey "could have been seen to make more of an effort in the closing stages" and, therefore, was given the all clear.*

## KIA'S CONSISTENT FORM

HISTORY OFTEN repeats itself and 'Glorious Goodwood' – or not so glorious this year – once

again saw the big-spending owners of Amo Racing remove some of their high-profile horses from trainer **Ralph Beckett**. According to the *Oirish Sun*, the horses removed included *Partying*, a £4.6m Frankel filly.

Four years ago at the exact same meeting, moneybags **Kia Joorabchian** removed no less than 10 horses from Beckett when the two boys were, apparently, "not seeing eye to eye".

Despite the latest move, Beckett insists there is no rift with the volatile racehorse owner and football "super-agent" but did accept that the exit midway through the season was "unusual".

Ironically, while the big spending Amo operation has been having a torrid season so far, the same cannot be said of Beckett, who oversaw a remarkable group race treble at Goodwood's recent Sussex Stakes race day.

Having saddled the fillies *Sagqara Sands* and *Tabiti* to a dead heat in a Group 3 contest (with both fillies gaining valuable black type in the process), the Sussex Stakes field then chose to ignore the Beckett-trained pacemaker *Qirat* in the Group 1 Visit Qatar Sussex Stakes.

This left the unconsidered 150/1 handicapper to come home in front.



Philip Rothwell



## OONAGH O'HAGAN'S BACKER

THERE HAVE been some developments at the business of Goldhawk's favourite 'celebrity pharmacist', **Oonagh O'Hagan**, with a big injection of moolah from her hubby following hefty losses in the group.

As usual, the never not busy Oonagh has been posting energetically on her own Instagram account, with lots of news for her 63,000-plus followers. There were the trips to the Galway Races and Waterford's All Together Now music festival last weekend as well as a tie-up with Ireland Fashion Week, for which her Meagher's Pharmacy chain is the "official wellness partner".

Needless to say, the Raglan Road, D4-based entrepreneur has not shied away from promoting the UK-manufactured gut supplement Symprove. Oonagh is very familiar with this product, given that she happens to own Symprove Ireland Ltd, the company that distributes the product here (see *The Phoenix* 28/1/22).

A recent post on her Instagram account featured O'Hagan

dancing and lip-syncing (to oh so trendy **Lola Young**) in her kitchen while preparing to imbibe her beloved supplement.

She asks her followers: "Are you part of the Symprove family? When you know... you know", with a heart emoji added for extra impact.

The good news for any Meagher's customers interested in a little gut action courtesy of Symprove ("designed by scientists" no less) is that the pharmacy's website currently has a €199 special offer, which gets you a 12-week course of the product – ie with four weeks free.

The Meagher's business and Symprove Ireland have been 100%-owned by O'Hagan through parent company Batavone Holdings Ltd, where she was the only listed shareholder.

A few months ago, however, a chunky €1/2m worth of redeemable preference shares were acquired by Oonagh's other half, senior counsel **Ronan Kennedy** (who may be best known for being part of the defence team for one **Graham Dwyer**).

Kennedy's significant injection of cash comes after Batavone reported on its financial year to the end of August 2024. These figures show that turnover at the pharmacy group was up almost 10% to €29m but a hike

in interest payments on increased bank loans, as well as a €1/2m-plus unidentified "exceptional item"

pushed losses for the 12 months to August 31, 2024, to not far off €1m.

This still left Batavone sitting on accumulated profits of a gut-friendly €4.6m, although the "aggregate remuneration" for key management dropped 46% compared with the previous year.

Given the scale of the hit to O'Hagan's bottom line, maybe some painkillers were in order.



Oonagh O'Hagan

## WEE CARE WOES

GOLDHAWK WAS surprised to see a closure order being served on the kitchen and staff canteen of RTÉ's creche in Montrose due to extensive rodent droppings. Reporting of the matter may have upset the minted owners of the business behind the creche, given that they don't like too much attention.

The Belfast-controlled Wee Care nursery business, which also has a significant operation in Monkstown, south Co Dublin, was founded by one **Ian Buchanan**, who has gone on to scoop big bucks.

In the not-too-distant past,

however, he went to great lengths to keep a lid on some sensitive details of his operation here.

Wee Care Ltd sought to have revealing financial information effectively redacted from the Companies Office. The two directors at the time were Ian and his wife, **Mary Elizabeth Buchanan PhD** (since replaced by accountant **Ian Dalgity**).

The 2018 figures ended up providing significantly more commercially sensitive info for snoopers such as Goldhawk. For example, they showed that turnover at the company's RTÉ creche was €840,000 and the net profit topped €230,000, which looks like pretty good business.

The Buchanans headed to court to have the revealing accounts withdrawn but their case was rejected in both the High Court and Court of Appeal.

The latest (abridged) accounts show accumulated profits here had reached a not-so-wee €2.9m by the end of April last year, while the Belfast parent entity boasted an accumulated surplus of £6.9m, after dividends of a chunky £1/2m were shared by Buchanan and Dalgity.

Happily, the closure order on the RTÉ creche kitchen/staff canteen was lifted after only a couple of days as the rodent droppings were swiftly dealt with.

No doubt the children's parents have been reassured that the "high quality nutritious food and snacks" their kids receive in Montrose remain beyond reproach.

## NEILL HUGHES' SECOND SHOT

LAST MONTH a most impressive Co Dublin property was advertised with a chunky €9.25m price tag. Emsworth in Kinsealy will presumably be of interest to those who also took the tour a few years ago when the same owner last tried to flog it. The good news is that a bargain could be on the cards.

Last time out, at the end of 2017, the owner of the Georgian pile was looking for €7.5m which, even allowing for the truckloads of lolly spent restoring the house and gardens, would have resulted in a decent profit. Given that the owner turns out to be financier **Neill Hughes**, this was not a surprise.

Hughes and his FL Partners operation have been at the centre of some pretty profitable deals down the years, including one that came out of the IBRC collapse, when he managed to hold on to the *Racing Post* before selling it at a significant profit.

His biggest payday was prob-

ably the purchase of luxury yacht manufacturer Sunseeker, before flipping it on to a Chinese billionaire at a huge mark-up.

More recently, Neill surprisingly popped up as an executive producer of **Michael Mann's** boring 2023 movie *Ferrari*, starring **Adam Driver** and **Penélope Cruz**, which bombed at the box office. Clearly, the deal-maker should stick to the knitting.

A rather better Hughes deal was scooping up a Georgian villa designed by James Gandon sitting on 17 acres with, wait for it, a secret tunnel to the house next door, Abbeville – former abode of Squire Hockey.

Hughes bought Emsworth in 2013 with funding from Investec Bank, before spending millions on

renovating the impressive pile, as well as restoring the grounds, which include formal gardens, an outdoor heated pool, a golf

practice area and floodlit tennis and padel courts.

Not surprisingly, Hughes got himself a good deal when he bought Emsworth, paying €1.4m, although it had been put on the market a couple of years earlier at €4.5m by previous owner **Noel Corcoran**,

for many years Tony O'Reilly's closest financial adviser (see *The Phoenix* 5/10/12).

Ironically, Hughes had put in a few years as boss of **Denis O'Brien's** Island Capital funding vehicle before moving on to IBI Corporate Finance and then setting up FL.

Having put the house and

its 17 landscaped acres up for sale almost eight years ago, there were clearly no biters and Emsworth has now returned to the market. Overlooking the previous attempt to shift the Co Dublin house, the *Irish Times* noted that Hughes has now "made the difficult decision to sell up as he feels he doesn't get to enjoy it as much as he used to due to work commitments".

Given the level of property price growth since 2018, the €9.25m being sought doesn't appear to reflect any real increase in the price in eight years. Moreover, included this time around are an additional 58 acres of adjacent freehold land, which are currently leased to Teagasc on a fixed long-term lease.

If the price tag was a bit too rich at the end of 2017, the new deal on the table could prove more enticing to any moneybags looking for "a rare blend of past and present, wrapped in privacy and natural beauty".



Neill Hughes






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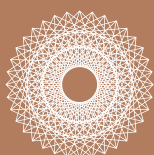
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# THE IRISH TIMES

## New housing target soars to 83,000 units

Local authorities are supposed to zone more land for housing as part of an exciting (surely unrealistic? – Ed) Government plan to raise the national annual target to 83,000 units. The latest guidelines cover the period to 2099.

Housing minister James Browne joyfully stated: "I can confidently describe this bold construction scheme as ambitious, visionary – and definitely going to happen, oh yes indeed.



"With regard to the chronic shortage of housing, I fully accept the accusation that I

myself have done absolutely nothing wrong – unlike previous ministers.

"This is why I'm particularly pleased to have taken such effective action in unveiling an incredible range of new building projects."

Those projects (in full)

- High-rise log cabins in every garden
- Huge pie in the sky over entire country
- That's it

## Goldhawk profiles this season's Premier League stars



**Drew Harris**

Finds himself a free agent following his high-profile transfer to Dublin a number of years ago but faced constant criticism that he wasn't really a team player and built a reputation for scoring impressive own goals.



**Michael O'Leary**

Often known to go in two-footed on opponents, his erratic at-

tacking style doesn't always yield positive results. Loves racking up media appearances but ironically despises caps – especially passenger ones at busy airports.



**Ursula von der Leyen**

Doubts are growing over her fitness after she was given the runaround by an aged, American right-winger. Her position might increasingly come under threat from upstarts on the benches.

## Key points of that historic US-EU trade agreement

**Pharmaceuticals:** Plenty of bitter pills for Irish Government

**Automobiles:** US negotiators definitely in the driving seat

**Chemicals:** Trump's behaviour to get more sulphurous

**Precious metals:** Elements of deal look like fool's gold

**Agriculture:** Von der Leyen happy to buy some magic beans

**Booze:** Whole thing generally considered to be hard to swallow

**Manufacturing:** Europeans denying that they were taken apart

## HOW THEY WILL SPEND THE DAIL RECESS



I've never seen any merit in staying in one place for very long, so I intend visiting the southern Sahara this month to study the nomadic Igot Nohouce people. They live solely in tents and enjoy very fulfilled lives, so I hope to learn more about what sounds like a truly wonderful lifestyle.

– **Housing minister James Browne**



I've always had a secret passion for big houses with rolling lawns, stately dining halls and spacious quarters in which to

welcome visitors. I plan to visit some large domestic establishments to learn how occupants maintain and staff them and so on. Just a hobby, you understand...

– **Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald**



I'll again be spending all my time off visiting Speakers' Corner in London, although

I don't agree with one word of the utter gibberish and unbelievable garbage I hear spouted, so fair play to them all and long may they continue to say it.

– **Independent TD Michael Lowry**

## FLATLEY'S SHARK JAW FIASCO



**JUSTIN KELLY**

"An eagerly awaited reboot"  
Jim O'Callaghan

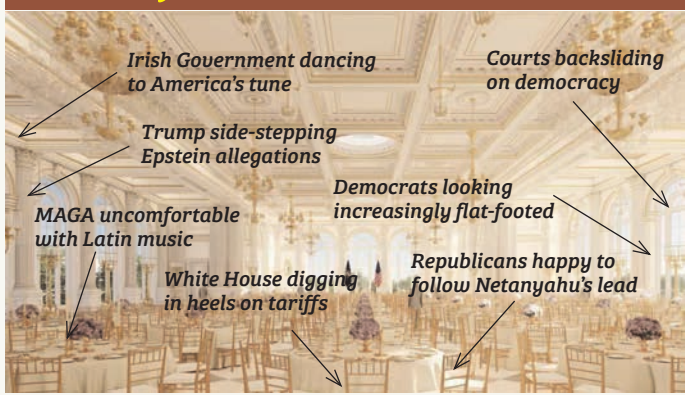
**THE NAKED GUN**

"A thankless leading role"  
Drew Harris

LOOK OUT CRIME, THERE'S A NEW SHERIFF IN TOWN! WITH SOME WELL-WORN AND UNPOPULAR SHOES TO FILL, THIS IS A MAN ON A DAUNTING MISSION ... TO BRING THE FEARSOME UNIONS INSIDE



# Trump's €200m Ballroom Plan



# That Jim McGuinness apology

Exclusive to all sports pages

On behalf of all media outlets, we would like to apologise profusely to our respective audiences for implying that the Donegal football team were invincible.

Headlines such as "Jimmy is a genius", "Crooked Kerry limp towards doom" and "Donegal to dominate for decades" may have given people a misleading impression about the Tyrconnell men's footballing ability.



However, in line with most other GAA experts, we now accept our analysis was slightly flawed and graciously accept Kerry as our new sporting overlords.

Nevertheless we reserve the right to change our minds about the current kingdom squad and revert to our justified criticism if they don't win every game between now and the rest of the century.

# 'Not a PR stunt' - Liam and Pamela

Are Liam Neeson and Pamela Anderson really madly in love?

Amid rampant true romance rumours, the glamorous Hollywood stars were recently spotted cosyng up together on the *Naked Gush* red carpet.

Several of the couple's closest friends (who cannot be named because they don't actually exist) insisted: "Pamela and Liam are a hugely essential part of each other's lives - and, more importantly, of their respective



movie career pivots."

Asked about their future plans, the loved-up couple said: "For the time being, we are just head over heels in front-page stories about our sensational movie.

"Naturally, we hope we're blessed with having more publicity by announcing our sudden separation or going off to make new films with other celebrities considering their own change in direction." (*That's enough silly season fillers - Ed.*)

# LISTERIA STORIES 'LIKELY TO GET WORSE'

By Con Sultant

Consumers in Ireland remain on red alert today amidst warnings that the recent outbreak of listeria stories may be "only a taster of what's to come".

"People are still digesting half-baked reports and regurgitating the information. I saw it happening all around town this morning," said one worried GP in Tipperary. "A lot of it is being imported

from England," she added.

Meanwhile in Cork a mother of five was said to be "nearly out of danger" after throwing up her arms while chewing over a headline in the *Oirish Daily Mail*.

If you experience sweating, panic attacks and nausea after swallowing what you read in a newspaper, contact your nearest library immediately.

RYANAIR

# RECRUITMENT FORM FOR EVENTUAL MICK O'LEARY SUCCESSOR

Due to an anticipated readjustment of our senior management framework, a vacancy will shortly, any year now, sooner or later, arise in our senior management infrastructure.

Have a go if you think dealing with half-witted politicians or cry-baby punters is something you can tolerate.

The successful candidate will be expected to - are you that stupid that I really have to spell it out to you!? You need to wise up!

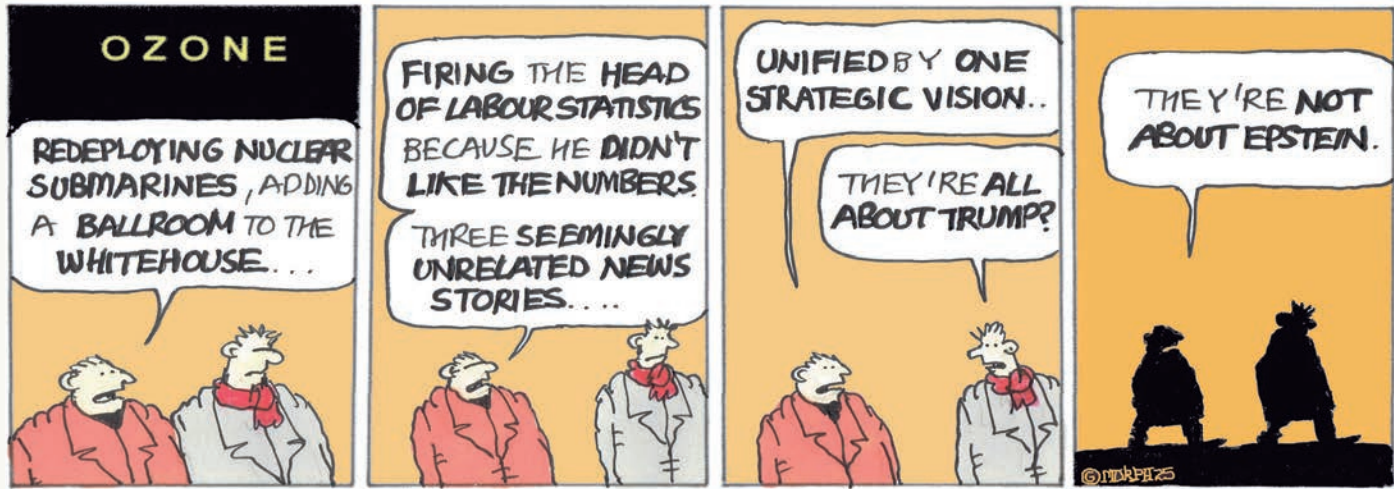
The position involves - if you're too lazy to work that

out for yourself then you should be in Dáil Éireann.

Average working hours will be - if you've a problem with long hours then f\*\*k off and join RTE.

Always remember that customer care is a prior... - B\*\*\*\*x. We're not a charity. Never mind, I'll stay on and do the job myself! P\*\*ck!

# MICHAELLA MCCOLLUM'S CELEB SAS APPEARANCE







Win a Shannon Rollerball in Bog Oak, (RRP €110), [www.irishpens.ie](http://www.irishpens.ie)





Crossword by Procrustes

ACROSS DOWN

- 1 Move it towards cup, of course, before you begin or it will just have to keep in glass. (5)

4 Girl embracing her baby's resting place? Oh, that's hard cheese! But, actually, not really. (7)

8 Find a pulse in back in vicinity of Barbados and St Kitts. (4)

9 Misses title pre Act of Union. (6,4)

10 Catch the bad guys who have broken in to fancy houses on the Riviera. (8)

11 Of course from the driver's position, following article shows what all babies have to do. (6)

13 For all of us, especially those with broken heart, poems provide a lifeline; it's all over for us. (10)

16 Gain height, but lose the head, or the arm or the leg. (4)

17 Girl coming from the opera gets a takeaway from American city centre. (4)

18 Defendant in civil court case may feel aggrieved by having to go round very small lake. (10)

20 Tackle a hard course by going for a trip in a yacht around Slyne Head. (6)

22 Being nervous I badly need one to remind me. (8)

24 A cargo ship was wrecked and bodies were found inside several special containers. (10)

26 How to get from Thurso hotel to somewhere in London. Or New York for that matter. (4)

27 In places like Japan, China and Korea, karaoke ends behind one at sea. (7)

28 They'll be coming together from all over next, endlessly, to you and me. (5)
- 1 Being qualified, I practised a branch of medicine that took care of minor ailments only. (11)

2 It's the quality of music we expect from Elton always. And Parton also. (5)

3 Big day for some non-Christians when Connacht river runs up most of Leinster mountain. (3,6)

4 Drunk uses ire concerning offspring to give the exact same orders again. (7)

5 Choosing one of only two musical symbols before start of Turandot will surely cause a split. (5)

6 As they passed through rock musicians prepared guitars to include little Dickensian heroine. (9)

7 Object to the name of Woody Allen's ex being brought up? (7)

12 Would crazy hitman shrug as he robs victim of what, ideally, are held to be universal? (5,6)

14 Are big shot multi-millionaire foreigners to be found mixing in rich Lagos society? (9)

15 It's shocking to think that by removing false cert, one can take proper lessons, so to speak. (9)

19 Mark follows you and me up for support. (7)

21 Sounds like they can go for round after round, staying on track, then fall back off the wagon. (5)

23 At last, couple from Thurles have it to consummate marriage in an English county. (5)

25 Get copy from paper centre. (3)

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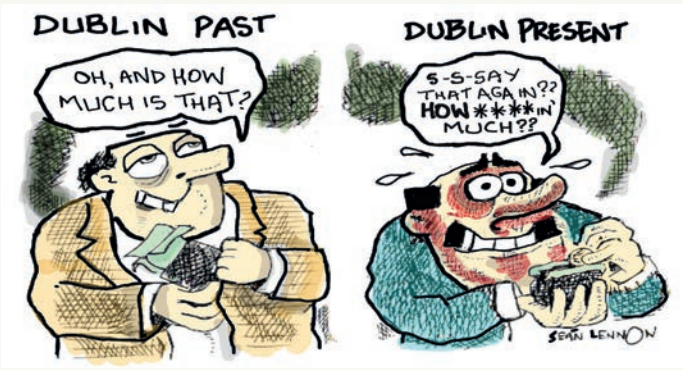
**Post only to: CROSSWORD COMPETITION, Phoenix Magazine, 44 Lr Baggot St, Dublin 2, Ireland**

**LAST ISSUE'S SOLUTION:**

**Across:** 1. Quack. 4. Macabre. 8. Calf. 9. Noel Coward. 10. Stalwart. 11. Animus. 13. Trampoline. 16. Each. 17. Lion. 18. Sanitisers. 20. Eskimo. 22. Generate. 24. Collateral. 26. Zoom. 27. Rosetta. 28. Doris. **Down:** 1. Quarterlies. 2. Awful. 3. Kangaroos. 4. Maestri. 5. Cocoa. 6. Bawdiness. 7. Err. 12. Ulcerations. 14. Mandibles. 15. Entangled. 19. Nigeria. 21. Octet. 23. Razor. 25. Oar.

LAST ISSUE'S WINNER: Elaine Kennedy, Lucan, Co Dublin

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




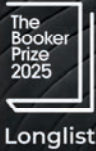
### Government unveils modular homes recommendations



- Micheál Martin constantly dwelling on what's next for his career
- More walls of silence about child homelessness
- Fine Gael denying they're planning to oust Simon Harris
- Cabinet happy to mortgage people's futures
- Public to be led up the garden path on housing figures
- Roof will continue to fall in on James Browne

## That Booker Prize longlist – Irish writers dominate as usual

by Phil More-Pages



FANS OF unflinching dystopian literature have hailed the continuing dominance of home-grown novelists on the 2025 prestigious Booker Prize longlist.

Although there are no Irish-born authors among this year's nominees, Trinidadian-Irish writer Claire Anon, whose mother is from Cork, has allowed us to shamelessly plug her inspiring story, *Love in the Title*.

The book has been hotly-

tipped by *Irish Times* columnists to repeat the success of the cream of our award-winning national literary glitterati such as Jawn Banville, Sally Looney (*We get the idea* – Ed.)

Roddy Doyle, chair of this year's judges, said: "Claire Anon's buke isn't half as brilliant as Roddy Dull Ha Ha Ha, but she once spent her summer hols in Cork – and that gives our hacks more than enough to write about."



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## DCC's share price undervalues company

IT IS hard to fully grasp CEO Donal Murphy's conversion last November to stripping DCC down to its energy division by dumping the other divisions (a strategy Moneybags has been recommending for over 20 years) and "transforming to a leading multi-energy business with a clear and resilient strategy". Although there are question marks over this energy strategy, the current share price does not reflect the real underlying value to shareholders.

Given that DCC's energy division is dependent on fossil fuels – ie distributing oil and gas – Murphy could hardly have chosen a more difficult time to make this decision. According to company chairman Mark Breuer, the strategy will result in "a simpler, leaner and more focused business with a clear and resilient strategy".

Actually, it makes DCC's life far more difficult in light of the EU's interim plan to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

Despite this challenging environment, Murphy still plans to "double our 2022 energy profits to £830m by 2030" – by helping customers to migrate to cleaner energy products – while also increasing DCC's fossil fuel liquified petroleum gas (LPG) business by 50% over the next five years.

It is worth highlighting that the direction of travel has been clear in DCC ever since Tommy Breen was installed as CEO back in 2008. The board carried out a strategy review at the time and, although not finding any need for change, Breen eventually began to dramatically rationalise the conglomerate, more than halving the number of divisions to the current three by the time he retired in May 2017.

But when Murphy arrived, he began reversing the strategy by expanding the healthcare and technology divisions through acquisitions, notably the £500m purchase of a US audiovisual equipment distributor, reflecting his commitment to building up the group's two weaker divisions.

Breuer was hand in hand with his CEO and, in his May 2024 annual review, he stated that his

"group-wide priorities are directly reflected in a market-focused strategy for each of the group's three divisions. DCC Energy, DCC Healthcare and DCC Technology each have a clear set of strategic objectives and the resources in place to achieve them."

Overseeing a U-turn just five months later, in November 2024, came as quite a shock (maybe to Breuer too) and it suggests that he



and his board are not laying down a strategy for Murphy to follow but rather the other way around.

It is hard to know what changed Murphy's outlook but falling profits in the healthcare and technology divisions would have concentrated the mind.

There has also been no clear coherent strategy relating to these divisions, which were made up of a hotchpotch of acquisitions. DCC Healthcare, for example, has a facility in Wales producing gels for third parties while the company also distributes medical devices and produces nutritional supplements.

The division's sales in the year to the end of March 2024 rose 5% to £859m but operating profits fell 7% to £72m, resulting in trading margins down from 9.5% to 8.4%.

There was a further fall in earnings in the first half of the financial year to September 24, so shareholders are fortunate



Donal Murphy

that Murphy managed to sell the healthcare division for such a good price – at an enterprise value of £1.05bn.

But for some reason brokers had been claiming that DCC could have secured a much higher figure, with Goodbody suggesting the whacky sum of £1.6bn. After stripping out some liabilities, the net proceeds being paid by Investindustrial Advisors Ltd will be £815m when the deal closes as expected next September, with a further £130m payable

in two years.

And there is clearly greater concern over the sale of the technology division. Sales fell 12% in the two years to the end of March 2025 to £4.65bn, with operating profits down a chunky 23% to £82m, to return trading margins of a tiny 1.8%.

DCC confirmed that it has exited its 'infotech' operations in France, the Middle East and Scandinavia, but without any awkward details revealed. In his financial review, however, finance director Kevin Lucey (now COO) advised that the Exertis France consumer product business and Exertis Iberia were sold in April 2025, which resulted in a so-called non-cash impairment loss of £52.2m. This is less than reassuring.

Last month, a further announcement regarding DCC Technology related to the disposal of the Irish and UK infotech businesses to Aurelius, for what looks

like a knockdown enterprise value of £100m. After adjusting for working capital of £156m, "the net cash proceeds to DCC of the transaction are not material".

This leaves only the North American audiovisual distribution business, which appears to be delivering sales of around £2bn but the level of profitability is a mystery, with the business going through a restructuring process.

DCC has two big fossil fuel distribution businesses, with the performance of the LPG side last separately disclosed in 2022, when operating profits of £238m were returned. The heating oil distribution business earned a profit that year of £169m.

These days Murphy is allowed to combine these two very different businesses into one division, which is usually a tactic to leave shareholders in the dark. It cannot now be stated which operation is the more significant.

Murphy does say that LPG is less polluting than oil, so part of DCC's contribution to the EU's net-zero target is to increase its LPG business by 50% over the next five years, while also helping customers to diversify into solar panels. The idea is that "DCC Energy will be focusing on the 2030 objectives of doubling profits while significantly reducing our customers' carbon omissions". This has 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 &amp; Shares

# FD Technologies sale looks like the deal of the decade

IT LOOKS like the CEO of FD Technologies (FDT – previously First Derivatives), Seamus Keating, pulled a rabbit out of the hat when flogging off the KX analytics database engine – the last remaining business inside FDT – for a remarkable €655m. The shareholders must be a relieved bunch.

Approval was obtained on July 17, despite an 8.8% vote against the scheme at the preceding EGM. But the fact is that this looks like a hell of a deal given that the KX operation was burning cash at a ferocious rate.

In the financial year to the end of February last, Keating opted to capitalise £21m in R&D spending, which prevented the company reporting a loss of €50m for the 12 months.

On a turnover of £80m, such a deficit would be very hard to swallow and it is scary to imagine what could have happened if Keating had continued to run FDT for too much longer. No doubt, the buyers of the KX business, Kairos Bidco (backed by private equity house TA Associates), know what they are doing but FDT shareholders will be over the moon at the arrival of this generous purchaser.

The real credit for FDT goes, of course, to company founder Brian Conlon. He managed to build one of the most successful information technology companies in the country before his premature death in July 2019, when FDT was valued on the market at €2bn.

Moreover, the success was in one of the most esoteric spheres of the financial world, delivering software platforms for the compliance and supervision services of derivatives trading floors. Given the scale of damage done by derivatives trading in the likes of Baring's Bank and AIB's First Bank subsidiary in Maryland, it is easy to understand why compliance and supervision is so essential.

It took Conlon six years to get to the stage where he managed to float off on the AIM market, raising €1.3m at the equivalent share price of 60c and going on to capture the 20 biggest financial derivative traders globally, including Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan and Citibank.

With a few acquisitions, like the €100m spent on the KX data management platform, Conlon built up a staff of 2,500 in 15 of-

fices around the world, retaining his home town of Newry as the head office.

The growing band of investors in FDT did remarkably well over the years, with the company growing to a market cap of €2bn and the shares hitting a peak of €50 before Conlon died in 2019 – not far off 100 times the 2002 float price. This remarkable achievement remained relatively unheralded here.

Realistically, there was nobody who could have filled Conlon's shoes in the role of CEO, given his insight into the arcane financial derivatives world and proven ability to manage and incentivise FDT's staff. In his last full financial year in charge, the company



delivered sales up 17% to £217m with operating profits rocketing 27% to a record £19m, delivering trading margins of 8.8%.

There was no succession plan in place at FDT, with Keating brought on board in January 2020, six months after Conlon's death, by which stage the company had already begun to drift. Although the accountant had at least some exposure to the software world, having worked for Logica a decade earlier, he had no exposure to financial derivatives trading and the kind of compliance software platforms that Conlon had developed.

The result was even worse than might have been predicted. Keating did push up sales somewhat to £238m in 2021 but profitability collapsed 40% to £11m. In 2022, sales were up again to £263m but operating profits dropped a further 19% to £9m.

In the year to the end of Febru-



Seamus Keating

ary 2023, FDT managed to turn in a pre-tax loss of £1m, with the negative momentum continuing the following financial year, when losses hit £8m. On top of this the new CFO, Ryan Preston (ex-INM/Mediahuis), delivered the bad news of a tax charge of £5m, to push net losses up to £13m.

It is not clear exactly when Keating and chairwoman Donna Troy decided to throw in the towel but splitting the group into three separate divisions was an obvious strategy to enable FDT to be sold off bit by bit.

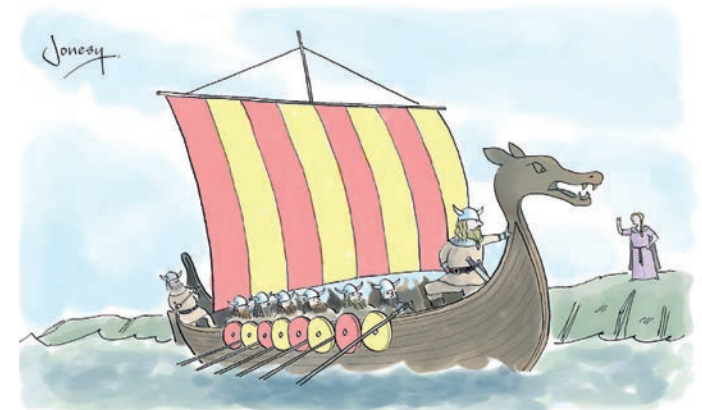
The marketing technology division, MRP, which dropped £8m in the year to February 2023, was offloaded in March last year in a paper deal with CONTENT-gine in return for a minority 49%

shareholding, while there was also a £21m impairment provision on the disposal.

The sale of the original core First Derivatives operation in December 2024 to EPAM Systems Inc for £230m was a much better deal, although shareholders were presumably disappointed that instead of this money being distributed to them as advised, Keating used just over half of this (£120m) for a formal tender stock buy-in, although at the equivalent €21.50 the price was an awful lot better than the March 2024 low of €11.90.

It is perhaps surprising, given FDT's difficult trading situation, that New York hedge fund Ionic Capital Management, run by Bart Baum and Daniel Stone, built up a 21% stake in 2024, which it increased to 29.2% by the end of this January. Clearly, the boys recog-

*Continued on page 26*



"Don't forget to pillage something for the kids"

## Stocks & Shares

*DCC continued from page 24*

ring of 'mission impossible'.

The doubling of profits, however, relates to the £407m fossil fuel trading profit turned in in 2022 and a target of £830m by 2030. Given that last year the energy division turned in an operating profit of £536m, the current target is to push up profits by 55% over the next five years, which does not look quite so daunting.

### LPG STRATEGY

It is odd, given that DCC is planning for 50% growth in LPG over five years, that it started this process by flogging off its leading LPG position in Hong Kong, which was highly profitable.

Along with the decision not to provide any breakdown of the LPG sales and heating oil sales, DCC's divisional performance review does not contain details of revenue, with only volume sales disclosed.

It is necessary to analyse the financial statements to get the turnover of the whole energy division, which amounts to £13.4bn. This reveals that the division is delivering only a 4% trading margin. No doubt Breuer's board prefers to highlight volume sales that last year were the equivalent of 10.9 billion litres, up 2.3%. On the other hand, revenue fell 6%.

DCC is the largest heating oil distributor in the UK, Ireland, Denmark and Austria, while also the largest LPG distributor in Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands, and the second largest in France, Ireland and the UK.

The group was a late entrant into the US energy market, initially targeting only LPG, with the purchase in 2018 of a small operator in Illinois. Even though

it has picked up other firms since, the group currently boasts double-digit market shares only in Kansas, Tennessee and Kentucky.

Clearly, there are major opportunities to pick up small operators across the US to really expand there. Given that DCC has net debt of over £1bn, however, and is planning to distribute virtually all of the net £815m from the sale of DCC Healthcare, there is no plan to go big across the Atlantic.

The group has 1,173 petrol stations in Europe but has no clear strategy for these stations. Most of the unmanned outlets are located in the UK, Sweden and France, while the manned stations are mainly in Denmark, Norway and Luxembourg, with 200 of these upgraded in the last four years to include convenience stores.

The strategy remains a mystery. In Ireland, for example, DCC took over Tesco's manned petrol stations under the Certa brand but immediately closed all of the attached retail shops.

DCC can only cut its dependence on fossil fuels by diving into renewables and Murphy has decided that solar panels are the best route. He has been buying small solar panel installation firms since May 2021, with the first two being Solewa and Soltea in France.

Since then, DCC has added solar panel supply and insulation companies in the UK, the Netherlands and Norway. Last year Murphy paid out a significant £90m for Next Energy, a UK solar panel installer, also adding Wirsol in Germany, as well as Acteam ENR and Habitat, both in France.

The strategy is to offer existing LPG customers commercial renewable energy propositions, based mainly on solar panels and backed up where appropriate with heat pumps and solar batteries.



Mark Breuer

Whether this can ever make up for profit DCC foregoes on its fossil fuel business is unclear but Murphy is presumably convinced the strategy will deliver.

Analysing the accounts, it turns out that DCC's revenue fell 10.5% in the year to March 2024 and, even on a restated basis, was down a further 5% last year to £18bn.

The adjusted operating profit was up 4% on the preceding year to £683m but, stripping out the healthcare business, DCC now claims, on an adjusted basis, that the operating profit last year was up 3% to £618m and earnings per share increased 3% to £4.70.

Taking into account the billion pound-plus sale of the healthcare business and the likely poor sales outcome for the technology business, investors are clearly not happy with DCC. The shares at £46.60 are now down almost 38% on the 2017 peak.

With DCC effectively stagnant

for the last few years, it is perhaps still surprising that the company is trading on a price-earnings multiple of only 10.2 – little more than half the UK market average of 18. It is now capitalised at only £4.56bn, over a £1bn drop off in the last 12 months and £2.7bn down over the last eight years.

In these circumstances, it is hard to justify Murphy trousering a 31% increase in his remuneration package last year to no less than €4.3m. Likewise, Lucey saw the reward for his work as CFO last year jump 44% to €2.5m year. Nevertheless, at last month's AGM only 3.2% of shareholders voted against Murphy, while a more significant 9.8% voted against Breuer.

Despite the poor recent record and the real challenge of shifting a business almost wholly dependent on fossil fuels to renewables, with an £800m payout to shareholders due in September, the shares look seriously undervalued.

*FDT continued from page 25*

nised that, despite the losses, there were some star assets in FDT.

Of the £110m left for the First Derivative disposal, £32m was used to pay off residual borrowings and fund the remaining data analytics platform business, KX, whose software platforms manage and analyse historical structured and unstructured data on any scale – a really interesting and exploding business area.

### R&D SPEND

Conlon had originally acquired a controlling stake in KX Systems in October 2014 as he used the platforms in his compliance and supervision software in FDT itself. A decade after the purchase, it would have surprised observers that KX is still losing

money. Moreover, in the 13 months to the end of December last, Keating spent £70m on research and development in a company where shareholders no doubt believed the software platform was a mature one.

Worryingly, he capitalised £54m of this £70m R&D spend, which can only be described as a high-risk strategy. On a sales base of £80m in the financial year to the end of February 2025, Keating managed to spend £30m on R&D. Remarkably, he also increased administration expenses by 38% to a whopping £50m, as well as lashing out £33m on sales and marketing.

Of the £30m R&D spend, a hefty £21m was capitalised but the company still turned in a pre-tax loss of £29m. If the R&D was taken as a cost, the loss would have hit £50m.



Donna Troy

Yet Keating *et al* have managed to land a huge £655m for FDT shareholders, working out at nearly €28 a share – a significant

premium to the price they traded at before the offer period. Pulling off this deal would have impressed even Brian Conlon.





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## Professor Green's gigs

GOLDHAWK SPOTTED some corporate activity by PR operator **Justin Green**, who will be familiar to fans of *The Phoenix* for his militant approach to those pesky music hacks who crossed his former employer, **Denis Desmond's MCD**, where he controlled the guest list for almost 20 years.

In 2011, however, the MCD veteran cut the apron strings and incorporated a company called Wide Awake Communications (WAC), where the other director and 50% shareholder is his wife, **Sylvia Green**. Business here was pretty good and by the end of 2023 the company was sitting on accumulated profits of over €1.4m.

Last year, however, WAC managed to drop a hefty €400,000, although it is unclear what led to the sudden change to the bottom line.

Certainly, Green has been keeping himself busy, sporting a multitude of other hats and has now taken the decision to voluntarily wind up the company, with **Micheál Leydon** of Outlook Accountants installed as liquidator at the end of last month.

There has not been much sign of activity by WAC on the lobbying register in recent times but around the pandemic the operation lobbied extensively for the safe return of ticketed music and entertainment events, as well as the establishment of a cross-departmental task force that included representatives from the commercial showbiz sector. It will come as little surprise that among the clients WAC lobbied for in this period were MCD and its festival partners, Festival Republic.

While WAC obviously took up a fair chunk of Justin's time, he also displayed a heroic capacity for schmoozing on the international stage and in 2019 became



the first Irish recipient of the Atlas Award at the Public Relations Society of America.

Landing that overseas gong would have been the least Justin deserved on foot of his exhausting list of international gigs. He is, for example, the president and academic council director of the big Zurich/New York-based Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GAPR), where he also served as CEO.

According to LinkedIn, Green also joined the board of something called the World Com-

mission in Ethical Standards in Public Relations, as well as the Kenya-based Cause Impact PR firm.

In the US, Green landed on the Commission on Public Relations Education in 2019 and he also joined the boards of CMC Connect, iOctane Digital PR and Re-Ignite Public Affairs, all in Lagos, Nigeria. Elsewhere on that continent he was given the role of 'global ambassador' for both the African Public Relations Association and the Public Relations Society of Kenya. Phew!

On top of all this, the PR

## Denis O'Brien's radio interference

IN RECENT weeks billionaire **Denis O'Brien** has been shouting his mouth off about the likes of **Ian Drennan** (boss of the Corporate Enforcement Agency), whose position "should be called into question", and also people who fancy working from home – "a total nonsense". It turns out that the Malta-based tax resident has also been losing patience with his radio business across the Irish Sea, where a slash-and-burn strategy has been adopted.

A decade ago O'Brien's Communicorp group splashed out £35m to acquire eight UK radio stations (it now has nine) from the Global Media and Entertainment group: Smooth East Midlands, Smooth North West, Smooth North East, Real Radio North West, Real Radio Yorkshire, Real XS, Capital South Wales and Capital Scotland.

The Real stations were duly rebranded under the Heart franchise and while the assorted broadcasters are owned by the company DOB set up, Communicorp UK, they are mostly operated under licence by Global.

While Dinny offloaded his Communicorp Group in Ireland to the German Bauer Media Audio outfit in 2021, his UK radio business was kept separate from that deal and it is currently the fourth-largest operator "by

commercial share". Dinny holds the controlling stake through an Isle of Man entity called Stangar Investment Holdings.

After the acquisition of the UK radio stations, Stangar held a 98% stake, with the balance held by the CEO and COO of the Smooth and Real radio station group, **Mark Lee** and **Colin Everitt** respectively. Last year, Everitt exited the company and his shares were cancelled.

The British radio market is a tough one but in 2023 O'Brien announced an expansion strategy that would see the introduction of local breakfast, daytime and weekend programming on various stations, starting (but, it turns out, also ending) with Capital Scotland. Singer and social media star **Tallia Storm** was brought in as co-host with **Fat Brestovic** on the all-important breakfast show, a signing that was considered quite the coup.

Barely one year into the gig, however, La Storm changed frequency and exited Capital Scotland, where she was duly replaced by former *Love Island* contestant **Laura Anderson**.

Alas, just 10 months later Anderson also moved the dial and departed the show, with **Robyn Richford** since moving in from her mid-morning slot.



Robyn Richford

The latest Radio Joint Audience Research listenership figures covering the recent quarter to the end of June show that Capital Scotland increased its percentage of total listening time in its survey area from a 3.7% share to 4.8%. There were also increases for Heart Yorkshire, Heart North Wales,

Smooth Radio North East and North West.

The latest accounts filed for Communicorp UK do not, however, make for pleasant reading for Dinny. The figures were signed off last month and cover the year to the end of 2024. They reveal that turnover dropped 10% in the year to £30.6m "due to the challenging economic environment", with the impact exacerbated by problems at the company's sports podcast.

Radio revenue was down 8% on 2023 but the bottom line was protected to a certain extent by a hefty €4.4m slashing of admin-

istrative expenses, including a cut in end-of-year bonuses. The result was a loss of £600,000, while the cash balances at Communicorp UK plummeted from £10.7m to £2.6m. (Accumulated profits stood at £9.5m at the end of December 2024.)

Moreover, further "significant" cuts in administration costs are to be imposed this year, with the programming team to be reduced and offices to be vacated, apart from in Scotland, where the daily programme schedule is to be continued.

At the same time, however, the long-term incentive plan resulted in a €5m increase in directors' remuneration, with the bulk of this going to CEO Mark Lee. Also on board here is **Pat Claffey**, investment director of O'Brien's Island Capital.

The cutbacks will also impact in a big way on the GOMO Outdoor advertising subsidiary. In April this year, Communicorp UK made the decision to "move its outdoor media delivery to third-party providers... before planning to close this subsidiary in 2026".

It looks like O'Brien will have his work cut out making sure his radio operation across the Irish Sea remains a major player in what the company describes as the "highly competitive market" in the UK.



whizz is also now described as Professor Justin Green, no less. There are various reports on the GAPR website that feature the impressive tag, including JG's recent address to the World Bank Group at its headquarters in Washington DC, where he riffed on "responsible communication".

Justin picked up the appellation on one of his international beanos in far-off Asia, where in September 2023 he gave the opening address to GAPR's first World Public Relations Forum in India. From there, he jetted 2,000km to a gig at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, which hosted "a prestigious ceremony to confer upon Mr Green the title of Professor of Practice, recognising his outstanding contributions to the world field of public relations".

According to the GAPR website's account: "Prof Green's visit to Dhaka, Bangladesh, has left an indelible mark on the country's PR landscape."

And back home, although WAC has been liquidated, D6-

based Justin still has business ties here courtesy of a company called BA Corporate Management Strategy Ltd, jointly-owned by Justin and his missus.

In case you're wondering, the firm offers an "holistic approach" to clients, describing itself as "a dynamic and forward-thinking strategy and logistics organisation dedicated to empowering businesses with innovative solutions. Whether you're scaling up, streamlining operations, embracing new technologies, or navigating risk,

our expert team delivers the insights and support you need to succeed."

That is some high-quality PR gobbledegook but Goldhawk would expect nothing less.

## Pat McDonagh's bad news

IT'S NOT too often that **Pat 'Supermacs' McDonagh** reports losses of €½m but one of his multitude of investment com-



"Looking back, all the warning signs were there"

panies, Cave Projects Ltd (CPL), has just delivered less-than-tasty figures. In this case, however, Pat will be hoping that he can scoop a few million quid from a very lengthy legal battle.

Fans of Goldhawk will be familiar with the early stages of this saga (see *The Phoenix* 30/1/15), when CPL sought to have an €11m-plus judgment summarily registered against Athenry auctioneer **John Kelly** and (at the time) another member of the partnership, **Joe O'Hara**, who opted instead to settle.

Both boys made incendiary claims about the behaviour of Bank of Ireland (BoI), which had loaned their five-man partner-

ship millions for a land deal in 2007. (That loan eventually ended up in Nama and in 2013 was acquired by McDonagh's CPL, which subsequently sought to enforce repayment after being substituted into the bank's High Court action.)

In 2011, BoI had commenced proceedings against the partnership when the loan was not repaid. O'Hara later claimed that €¾m of the overall loan had only been advanced for the purpose of investing in one of the bank's own products, in breach of its own lending guidelines.

In relation to the other funds loaned, O'Hara alleged that the

*Brief Cases continued on page 30*



# Viva Verdi Viva Wagner

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Brief Cases continued from page 29

lolly was drawn down by parties other than him “for purposes not sanctioned by the contracts of the loan”.

Kelly made similar submissions, claiming BoI had engaged in reckless lending and also alleging an “improper relationship” between CPL and the three other members of the partnership, who had already agreed to settle.

Given the amount of mud flying around, Judge **Seamus Noonan** refused to grant CPL the motion for summary judgment in 2015, although O’Hara subsequently settled with the company, leaving Kelly in the firing line to eventually take the full hit in the Four Goldmines.

What formed an important plank of Kelly’s subsequent appeal was a public notification issued by the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) in September 2023, shortly before the Court of Appeal hearing, stating that it believed CPL to be engaged in credit-servicing services without

authorisation.

Not too surprisingly, Kelly was of the opinion that the notice retrospectively removed the legal right of McDonagh’s entity to acquire the debt in the first place. This would obviously have rendered any litigation by CPL on foot of the debt null and void.

Alas for the hapless Kelly, there were a number of factors at play here, not least the fact that the legislation relating to the CBI’s public notice had not been passed until long

after the debt had been acquired from Nama by CPL. Moreover, since the issue had not even been raised in High Court pleadings (for obvious reasons), the court of appeal opted not to consider it.

The issue, however, did form the grounds for Kelly’s appeal up to the Supreme Court at the start of this year, which had to rule on whether the auctioneer was even allowed to raise the matter, before examining any implications associated with the CBI’s notice.

As Judge **Gerard Hogan**



Pat McDonagh



determined that there were no exceptional circumstances to warrant such a departure from the usual approach, Kelly’s appeal was dismissed.

Given the scale of the €11m-plus judgment secured against him by CPL, the legal costs being built up could add salt to a pretty big wound.

The figures aren’t exactly great for CPL either, with accounts signed off on April 25 last covering the year to the end of August 2024. The shares here are shown to be held in the names of Nenagh-based **Tom Walsh** and **Tom Kelly** but the accounts make it clear that Supermac’s Ireland Ltd is the parent entity.

The August 2024 figures show that the company’s assets dropped from over €2m to nil during the year, following the disposal of its “financial asset” and an associated impairment based on a “permanent diminution in value” of €454,000. This resulted in a loss for the 12 months of just on €½m. Almost €600,000 was shown as being owed to Supermacs Ireland at the end of the financial year.

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## London Lunch in aid of Spinal Injuries Ireland

Queen’s Club Palliser Road, London – September 20, 2025



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Join us at the prestigious Queen’s Club in West Kensington on September 20, 2025 12:30pm - 6pm for a fantastic afternoon.

A great opportunity to meet Irish business people in London and friends from home – we can’t wait to welcome you!

If you require any further information contact [philip@spinalinjuries.ie](mailto:philip@spinalinjuries.ie)

Tickets are available at £140 p.p. or £1,400 for a table.

*Dress: Smart Casual*



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, sunlit room with large windows.

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