



MARY LOU POISED TO RUN FOR PARK

A STRONG indication of the decision that the Sinn Féin leadership will likely take in the presidential election came with the circulation of a strong editorial in Belfast Media, the umbrella group composed of *Andersonstown News* and its equivalents in north and south Belfast. This was headlined: “WE SAY: Mary Lou should throw her hat in the ring in race for Áras”.

The editorial argued that SF should not fear the potential setback it might suffer if her election campaign proves a flop as no politician in Ireland is more popular than McDonald.

The real argument, however, is that “President McDonald would give Irish reunification the rocket fuel needed to propel it over the line... the greatest obstacle to a United Ireland is the deep-seated and resolute – some would say visceral – opposition of Taoiseach Micheál Martin to a United Ireland. When the ‘leader’ of ‘Ireland’ refuses to support the reunification of his own country (putting him at odds with his ‘sister party’, the SDLP), there is zero chance that the British, the EU, the Americans or indeed any other nation will back that goal. Yet, what an amazing counterweight to the partitionist Fianna Fáil leader a pro-United Ireland President McDonald would make.”

References are also made to various electoral initiatives that helped to improve the position of Irish nationalists such as Bobby Sands’s victory in Fermanagh-South



Mary Lou McDonald

Tyrone or Gerry Adams’s move south to the Dáil in 2011. But the real argument is that the presidential election offers a golden opportunity to argue for a united Ireland with a captive, state-wide audience.

Even more forceful, in the eyes of SF members north and south, is that while the message is published and posted in Belfastmedia.com, which is not an organ of SF, it does reflect what Belfast republicans and SF have concluded after months of debate about the presidential election.

A clear northern view may not be as conclusive in party decision making as it once was but it still goes a long way, especially when it comes to strategy on a united Ireland. And while Mary Lou’s campaigning prowess is a strong card in this case, some also argue that, if not the party



Catherine Connolly

leader, another party personality should run simply to put the united Ireland argument in the mainstream.

The arguments against running Mary Lou are several. One is that she may not trigger quite the same response as the northern membership

believes and the party could suffer a bad electoral and demoralising defeat. Two is that it will be hard for Mary Lou to simply walk back into the leadership of SF should she have a bad outing. Certainly, coming third behind the left unity candidate, Catherine Connolly – not entirely out of the question – would have a negative effect on more than one level.

Finally, there is the two-fingered signal that it would be seen as by many in and outside of SF if the party was to go it alone when three other parties, relatively small as they are, have organised a broad left platform for Connolly that could have a real chance of winning the presidency. Even more important is that the unity between the Social Democrats, People Before Profit and Labour was a sign that collective action by the opposition, or the left part of it, could look forward to a similar exercise that could defeat the Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael coalition in a general election.

If these groups can’t even coalesce on a presidential campaign, what hope is there for unity at a more crucial general election? This is the question that many on the left of SF

have put in the party consultations in recent months. In fact, this argument was making a lot of ground in the south but the ‘letter from Belfast’ has pushed back hard against this line.

So too has a post on Facebook by southern-based Seán Brady, an ex-SF director of publicity and former editor of *An Phoblacht*. His post last week, which like the Belfast message was read avidly by SF members, argued: “This is a moment that should not be wasted. This is the time to talk, plan and act for Irish reunification. The pace of change means the next seven years could be the most important in generations. We need a President who will speak proudly for unity, inspire people north and south, and lead the conversation. Electing someone who hasn’t thought deeply about Irish unity – or won’t champion it – would be a step backwards we can’t afford.”

This last sentence reflects the fact that SF members are familiar with the taunt that Connolly has not devoted much time or effort in her long political career to supporting a united Ireland. Her defenders say that she has signed up to a united Ireland position on her united presidential platform.

FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD ITEM

THE GRAND old gentleman of the Irish left, the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI), has undergone much in its 100-plus years of existence, with attacks from within and without, and in recent years it has been eclipsed by republicans and Trotskyist groups. Recently, internal wranglings have involved splits over the national question and ultra-leftist revisions but the latest row is perhaps the deadliest as it is founded on a charge of rampant misogyny.

According to a group of members, mainly but not exclusively female, a non-member

of the party complained that she was the subject of “inappropriate behaviour” by a young, Dublin-based member, resulting in his suspension from the party while the matter was investigated. The suspended member appealed his

suspension and a majority of the national executive committee agreed with his appeal. This enraged those who supported the complainant and they demanded that the person charged with misbehaviour be expelled.

The women claim that the old-guard members that control the leadership then closed ranks and began to cast doubt on the validity of the complaint and also on the character of the complainant. The women also allege that the young accused member was being coached and that a plot was under way whereby members were collaborating with the defence to ensure an acquittal.

As the split deepened and sharpened, as



Mick O'Riordan



AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

these things do, three women and a male party member resigned over the issue. They were followed by another female member of the officer board of the party. All the resignations were of long-standing senior party members and there is now not a single woman left in the party leadership.

The CPI lost its youth wing, the Connolly Youth Movement, four years ago in another faction fight and there have been multiple disputes with the northern membership amid name calling such as 'red unionists' and 'King Billy communists'. There has even been a Cork faction uniting with Belfast members against those f**kers in Dublin, while one of the latter gloried for a while in the nickname 'the Georgian', which was bestowed on him by revisionist elements.

What would James Connolly or CPI legend Mick O'Riordan make of all this?

UNIONS SIPTU and the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) have for several years now exhorted successive transport ministers to create a dedicated transport police to halt the rising tide of assaults on their members. NBRU assistant general secretary Tom O'Connor stated recently that no less than five ministers – Leo Varadkar, Paschal Donohoe, Shane Ross, Eamon Ryan and current incumbent Darragh O'Brien – have talked of transport police in the last decade but no such force has materialised. But it is Micheál Martin as Taoiseach who is the real culprit.



"It may be the case that the Presidential election campaign hasn't caught fire just yet."

Just a fortnight before last November's general election, Martin gave a five-page interview to the Irish Mail on Sunday in which law and order was the main thrust and a transport police was the single most important proposal.

Martin's electoral assault was fierce – with then justice minister Helen McEntee the main target – and he declared that opposition to such a force from Garda commissioner Drew Harris would not stop him from creating such an entity.

That was last October, when Martin and Fianna Fáil were exploiting law-and-order concerns to outflank their coalition 'partners', Fine Gael.

Only those with short memories would

have forgotten what happened in the Seanad nearly two years before that. At that time, a motion to create a dedicated transport police service was moved by FF senator Mary Fitzpatrick with the support of FG, the Greens and Independents, thereby ensuring its passage. Or so it appeared.

But as the debate concluded and senators prepared to vote, the then junior justice minister, James Browne, hastily entered the chamber to inform members that, unfortunately, the "independent" Garda commissioner, Harris, did not intend to create such a service at this time.

Browne did this on behalf of the government, and his leader and then tánaiste, Martin.

IS FF LEADERSHIP BACKING JACK CHAMBERS?

IS MICHEÁL MARTIN really intent on retiring as Taoiseach and Fianna Fáil leader in September and then going for the presidency? That's the forecast of *Irish Mail on Sunday* political editor John Lee, whose paper seems to have also decided who is going to replace him as leader of the country and the party. And it's definitely not the man that almost everyone else believes is on course to be the next leader, justice minister Jim O'Callaghan. Instead, the *Mail* is backing public expenditure minister Jack Chambers and in recent weeks has claimed that Jack is a virtual shoe-in as next leader of the party.

On July 20 Lee gave his end-of-term marks to the 15 Cabinet members, awarding eight out of 10 to Jack (joint highest with Jennifer Carroll MacNeill) and predicting that he would be the next leader if Martin left in September. Bizarrely, Lee said that "Chambers's temperament is positively Zenlike", a quality that would be needed in the face of squalls to come in the public finances. Really?

During an RTÉ *Claire Byrne Live* debate on climate change in the 2020 election Jack lost his cool, provoking much hostile reaction from listeners. Shortly afterwards, on appointment as government chief whip, he managed to alienate practically every other party whip at their first meeting of that Dáil – a meeting normally regarded as the most collegial of any Dáil committee meeting.

At last year's election Chambers, as director of election, engaged in an unedifying verbal debate with Fine Gael's discreet

minister, Hildegard Naughton, while Sinn Féin's Pearse Doherty looked on with a wide grin on his face. Little was seen of FF's director of elections for much of the election campaign after this performance.

Lee finished his school report on young Chambers by saying that, if "the party has not lost its political sense, Chambers is the next leader".



Jack Chambers



Jim O'Callaghan

Lee also argued that "Martin has never rated O'Callaghan" – a more accurate read would be that Martin has never trusted O'Callaghan as he has been the main leadership challenger for five years or more. Lee gave the justice minister three marks out of 10, the second lowest of the 15 ministers and just one mark more than his predecessor as justice minister, Helen McEntee.

A week later Lee interviewed the man he predicted is on course to become taoiseach and, in a most benign interview, showed proper respect by not cross-examining him about Government economic policies, public

spending or the next budget.

Two weeks later, the *Mail's* political columnist, John Drennan, followed with an article dissecting O'Callaghan "as he comes under pressure to address deepening crises in his department". Worse was the citing by Drennan of a remark by an anonymous FF cabinet 'colleague' that O'Callaghan was like Darragh O'Brien, with lots of

announcements, photos and the like, but that "no-one is quite sure as to whether he is actually achieving anything".

As Goldhawk noted (see *The Phoenix* 30/5/25), the perception in the FF parliamentary party post election is that Jim is to be the next party leader but that Martin was anxious not to rubber stamp this succession result in advance or at the time of his retirement. O'Callaghan as the newly anointed successor was a scenario created largely by Martin's heavy reliance on the senior counsel as his second-in-command during a general election campaign that threw most of his mediocre frontbench into sharp relief. O'Callaghan came out of this smelling roses; Chambers, previously seen by some as the dauphin and, despite his titles as finance minister and director of elections, emerged with less fragrance.

The real question now is whether the veritable campaign against O'Callaghan and pro Chambers is being stimulated by Martin's people or those of Chambers – or both. And is it really credible that Martin is planning to go early, be it to the Áras or some EU sinecure under his close colleague, EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen?