



'INDO' POLITICAL TEAM

THE ELATION of Philip Ryan, newly appointed group political editor at INM, was evident on Twitter recently. Ryan enthused about the *Indo*'s newsroom, himself and his charges on "The Political Team" and patronised his former boss, Fionnan Sheahan, telling how he had learned so much since he was given his chance at the *Indo* by Sheahan "many years ago".

Sheahan became group political editor in 2013 and then *Irish Independent* editor in 2015, before crashing and burning when Mediahuis bought INM last year and he was appointed Ireland editor with a roving brief.

Five years ago almost to the day that he got his new title, Ryan applied for the same post, along with Danny McConnell, and was interviewed by Sheahan, among others from the Stephen Rae regime. Neither applicant was appointed and the job eventually went to the then *Indo* news editor, Kevin Doyle. Now Doyle has been elevated to group news editor and so Ryan has finally got the title he has hankered after for some years.

One of the reasons for the turmoil among political staff at INM in recent years has been the *Mad Men* atmosphere in the newsroom, but another is the escalator belt of political and other INM hacks leading towards Fine Gael. In recent years, political correspondent Niall O'Connor departed to join defence minister Paul Kehoe's PR team and environment editor Paul Melia left shortly before that to take the most difficult job in public life, namely that of policy advisor to housing minister Eoghan Murphy. (How's that been going, Paul?)

Barry Duggan used to be news editor at the *Indo*, but he left to take charge of FG's communications and press office, a job that once played second fiddle to the strategic communications unit, but which must now



Philip Ryan

be somewhat more demanding since the SCU was abolished. And joining Duggan at the Blueshirt media operation a year ago was *Indo* political correspondent Laura Larkin.

That Sheahan was once a leading light in Young FG when studying at UCC would have helped to create a certain political tone in the newsroom, although his marriage to former Fianna Fáil senator Averil Power indicates a liberal outlook when it comes to party politics.

Similarly, the *Indo*'s political correspondent, Hugh O'Connell, while married to Theresa Newman – sister and political handler to ex-FG Dáil member Kate O'Connell – would argue that he is utterly objective in his reportage.

A joint enterprise by Ryan and O'Connell in 2018 came as an example of the sometimes symbiotic relationship between the *Indo* and FG. A front-page *Sunday Independent* story by Ryan listed some

absolutely fascinating vignettes from what he described as a "soon-to-be-published biography on the Taoiseach". However, such was his enthusiasm for the scoop that Ryan forgot to tell readers that he was a co-author of this compelling book, along with O'Connell, who was at this stage working for Minister Kehoe.

A week later, the two authors were interviewed by Brendan O'Connor – yet another senior INM journalist – on RTÉ's *Marian Finucane* show. In a near half-hour-long interview,

O'Connor devoted around a minute to querying if Niall O'Connor's role as a government advisor meant that the book was propaganda, jokingly asking the co-author to "explain yourself". Niall swatted away this relentless grilling by his former colleague and the interview reverted to discussion of the fascinating accounts of Vlad's gay 'coming out', his doting sister, the party leadership contest and so on.

O'Connor did elicit the information that the book had been sent to Vlad before publication, but the two hacks explained that they did so only to ensure that it contained no factual errors, not to secure official sanction. But of course.

One presumes that this fact-checking exercise is not applied to articles written by political correspondents in INM titles.

ALL KINDS OF WRITS

COVID-19 KNOWS no boundaries, but neither does the determination of Eurovision winner, ex-MEP and two



"OK Zoomer..."

times presidential candidate Dana Rosemary Scallon to exact vindication from various media. Dana's brother, John Brown, was charged with alleged child abuse, but was acquitted of all charges in an English court in 2014, following which the two have sued a raft of media for libel in their coverage of those events.

Dana took a sum of around £200,000 in damages plus hefty legal costs in a settlement in Belfast with the *Sunday World*. The newspaper had wrongly reported on its website and Facebook page that Dana had brought her brother to a priest to "cure" him of his alleged misbehaviour. The singer also pursued the *Worst* for the same transgression in the High Court in Dublin and a hearing had been set for the end of next month.

However, Dana travelled to Australia for the birth of her daughter's child in March and has been marooned in Canberra since then due to Covid-19 restrictions. This meant that she was unable to deliver a legally witnessed affidavit required for next month's hearing.

Failure to comply with this requirement and possible postponement of the hearing would not have been welcomed by Dana as a kind of sanctifying glow has surrounded her persona following the recent television broadcast of *Dana: The Original Derry Girl*. Screened by RTÉ1, BBC and TG4, the soft-focus depiction of 20th century Ireland's loveliest creature was seen by audiences approaching a total of ¾ million. With the hearing just weeks later, this was perfect timing, but failure to provide the affidavit and any postponement could have dulled the memories of potential jurors.

Dana's Belfast solicitor, Kevin Winters of KRW, lodged an unsworn affidavit on her behalf and it appears that the court has accepted it, which means that the High Court hearing will go ahead.

Alternatively, the *Worst* might again cough up whatever is necessary to pre-empt a hearing and make this case go away.

There are other cases that the vengeful siblings are pursuing that are unlikely to go away and they are also suing the *Irish Independent*, *Irish Times*, *Irish Daily Mail*, *Irish Sun* and *Donegal Daily*. However, the most dramatic litigation is that being taken by John Brown for malicious prosecution against the *Irish Independent* and its then reporter, Greg Harkin; as well as another sister, Susan Stein; and his niece, Susan Gorrell.

SUBS SALE

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