Helen Buckley's Leisure Page

Too young at 24? No, says the new mayor

BRASH, fortright, ebullient, and in the true parental mould, the youngest mayor in the history of Limerick's charter has no inhibition about his lack of years and certainly does not feel that a single year's experience in the Corporation is an inadequate probationary period for his present office.

"Sure," expostulated Thady Coughlan, "my father was only there 12 months when he became Mayor, and Kevin Bradshaw who was mayor in '50/51 was only elected to the Corporation two or three days when he took office."

The question of whether his success was resented by older councillors, however, was a different matter: "I'd say a lot of them did resent it. You know Ted Russell was honest enough. Though he thought I was young he said he'd give me a chance. I'd say the rest of them feel the same way. Anyway there are not many older members in the Corporation. The average age would be about 40."

But whatever way one looks at it 24 is rather a phenomenal age for the mayor of a city with an ancient charter and when I asked Thady Coughlan to what extent his father, the indomitable Steve, had helped in his accession the mayor reacted: "Well I went to the party convention, there were five councillors there, I was nominated and I got the nomination by three votes to two. I was the official nomination of the paty."

Did his father not canvass the party on his behalf?

"No, he voted for me naturally. But they just made up their minds and that was that. I don't think he asked anybody in the party to support me beforehand . . .

Mind made up

"The Wednesday before the election I was told that nobody was interested in going forward. My father wasn't interested (my mother has not been well this year), Frank Leddin and Mick Lipper weren'tinterested. I made up my mind to go. Then Frank Prendergast said he'd go. That was it. It went to a vote and I won."

Thady Coughlan's attitude towards his fellow councillors, after a long ejaculation of "ah" . . . is that "most of them . . . . I would say all of them have the complete interest of Limerick at heart. But they way they go about bringing this into fruition leaves a lot to be desired—in my opinion. I may be all wrong but this is what I think.

"I try myself in the Corporation, if I am bringing up something, to have an answer or solution to it. There is no point in just throwing out stuff. If you bring a problem you have to have an answer or some way of solving it yourself. For example, on the wandering horses, just one issue, I gave them the way of solving it; go away, be independent of these people, buy your own horse box and tie up with the Prevention of Cruetly to animals, people.

"It could have been done . . . But there again, there were a lot of legal tie-ups. I would like the whole thing restructured, and have horses which are found wandering branded like cows."

Dealing with the subject of any personal animosity which might exist between himself and his fellow councillors, the young mayor said: "I'd say it is not our fault that my father and I have brought certain things with us into the council—certain old wounds on a personal basis. There are certainly a couple of old wounds, but I haven't tried to throw salt on these wounds. They (the councillors) "have tried to throw salt on our wounds. I would hope that everybody would work together for the common good. With back-biting and playing at politics, it is only the people who suffer.

"As I said, all the councillors have the good of Limerick at heart, but at times it is very hard to keep your cool. You can be subjected to a barrage and personal attack of mud-slinging. which doesn't get us anywhere: it only lessens our standing with the people of Limerick.

"People read in the local press the night after that so-and-so and so-and-so stood up for 20 minutes throwing mud at each other. They ask themselves, what we were elected for, and think that we don't seem to be serving them. I don't see the interest of the people of Limerick being served by several councillors standing up and attacking each other across the floor."

Demonstrating his own positive attitude: "The night I was elected, it was thrown up to me to involve myself in the Shannon Foundry strike . . . I did so, for the good of Limerick, for the good of the workers and for the good of the employers. I am glad that they are back at work, and thrashing it out between worker and management."

Education

And now back in the early years of our still youthful mayor, where it must be stated that his education, whatever other pronouncement could be made about it, did not lack variety. Thady Coughlan's first incursion into the realm of formal learning was at St. Philomena's School. From there he progressed to the CBS where he remained for 12 months before continuing on to the Crescent College. Then came a term of inculcation of Irish culture at Ring College, which was followed by the completion of his education at St. Munchin's.

After taking his 'leaving cert', Thady Coughlan embarked on a career in hotel management in the Great Southern Hotel in Galway.

Twelve months of this, however, was enough for the restless youth so he "chucked it up" and went to England. After a period, Britannic life also became tiresome and the young Coughlan returned home to sell cars for T.M.W. Eventually, he joined Welltrade where he has remained for five years and is at present in the plant hire department.

Combining his position with Welltrade with his duties as Limerick's premier citizen poses no problem for him: "They have given me time off as long as I make sure that my work is done. It will be easy enough to fix up."

Talking about whether he over had any other career ambitions, Thady Coughlan said: "At the time I left school, it was just after the general election in '69, my brother Stephen was already in university in Dublin and my father had no other source of income than his Dail salary . . . he had the book-making but it had to take second place to the Dail . . . and there wouldn't have been enough to keep both of us in university. So I said to my father leave me alone to paddle my own canoe. There was no sense in putting another strain on the home."

Had he thought about a political career then or at any time prior to last year?

"At the local elections in '73 I had been asked to go forward by the branch and I was prepared to go. I was just as well pleased though that there was the two year extension of the council which meant no election. I don't think I would have been elected at the time; I was too young."

Thady Coughlan attributes his interest in politics sheerly to family background: "It is due absolutely to my background. I can't disassociate myself from it. I enjoy it."

Did the fairly neophyte politician have any Dail ambitions? "I suppose I have all right. But it is a matter of the time being right."

Had he merely followed in his father's footsteps in his choice of the Labour Party or had he made an objective decision himself?

"My first involvement in politics . . . the first I can recall really was with Clann na Poblachta. Sean McBride and all the big political people of the time, were calling at home. They impressed me and I don't forget these things."

Thady Coughlan has been married for three years and has two children: one aged 15 months and the other nine weeks. They are known as Thady and Robert, and as yet there is no Steve in the household. Their mother, nee Kay Carmody, lived virtually across the road from her husband in Clontarf Place and was educated in St. Vincent de Paul's School and at Laurel Hill. In true Hibernian style the couple were going out for seven or eight years" before they married.

Background

Like Thady, Kay too inherited a political background: "My grandfather, Patrick Carmody," she told me, "was on the council." And "in our home you had to be interested in politics; there was always a political atmosphere there. Life with Thady was nothing new for me. I campaigned for Thady for the council and for his father before that."

Kay Coughlan (23) welcomed her husband's election to the mayoralty and does not resent the fact that it will curtail their time together. Philosophically she says "He'll be out a lot but we'll find time for each other at week-ends . . . after all we've seen enough of each other during the last three years!"

Kay's reaction to the news that she was Limerick's latest mayoress was "one of a kind of shock first of all" . . . Afterwards: "I felt very honoured that being so, young people had confidence in us to make a success of it." And hubby coming it quickly with family exuberance: "which we will do."

Dealing with what she could contribute during her year as first lady, Kay Coughlan said: "I would like to help Thady in every way I can in help him make a better job of it. I would like that we would discuss any problems he has together."

As far as Limerick is concerned the Mayoress would like to see "full employment . . . I think Limerick people are the best; there is no place else I would prefer to go."

Mrs. Coughlan, Jnr., would also like "to see more sports and recreation areas for young children. I would like better facilities for teenagers. You have the community games for youngsters but when they come to their teens they have nowhere to go except to the streets. I would like to keep them off the streets and keep vandalism off the streets."

On the personal level of her husband acquiring a Dail seat?

"Well, if he wants it, I'm behind him."

Thady Coughlan's own plans for his Mayoral year centre mainly around unemployment. "The main thing to deal with is unemployment. It is our biggest problem. The housing question is OK. There are about six or seven hundred on the waiting list at the moment. But housing in Limerick has been a very continuous thing for the last eight or ten years. There will always be a housing list; you will never see a day when there is nobody on it. It would be a bad thing if there were not. It would mean that people were not taking on the responsibility of marriage and a family . . .

"What I find hard is when a husband, wife and children have to move in with a father and mother-in-law. I have known as many as 16 in one house, though this is not usual. But, however, many it is, it is a hard thing.

"When we got married we lived at home for six months . . . and my father can be very demanding (but then political life is very demanding) . . . "

Unemployment

On tackling his priority, unemployment, the new Mayor has "the idea, myself, at the back of my mind of bringing all the interested parties into one room and thrashing out the whole thing. The different organisations of the whole Mid-Western region should be represented.

"The Limerick city population is representative of something in the region of 60,000 people. But if we go as a body of the whole Mid-West, which is representative of about a quarter of a million, to the Minister for Industry and Commerce and the Taoiseach, we will have more force."

Last Wednesday week the Mayor met the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Justin Keating, to arrange a future meeting between the Minister, the Mayor, himself; Ald. Steve Coughlan, Ald. Russell and Deputy Des O'Malley. The Minister agreed to receive the delegation "whenever they were ready."

This was Thady Coughlan's primary step towards putting into operation his overall plan for advertising Limerick. "People don't know about Limerick. Around the world they know about Ireland and Dublin, but not about us and what we have. We have several sites available . . . the harbour is derelict, the Shannon Estuary is derelict and we are wide open for development. We have Galtene, the Raheen Estate and Southill. Every consideration will be given to anyone who wants to come in. It is just a matter of sitting down and seeing what we can cater for and what we can bring in."

The new Mayor's other aspiration for Limerick, and the message which he has for its people, is that of civic pride: "I suppose for the younger people the thing I'm looking for is an awareness of pride in Limerick. People should have it but I don't think they have this interest in the city.

"Here we are in 1975 with all kinds of organisations trying to undermine the statutory bodies of the State and the Gardai and the Army and these people who have been put there for the protection of the people and the State are being so treated . . .

"A few months ago bombs were placed in three Limerick hotels and the Gardai and the Army helped us then . . . It is about time that we realised that the Gardai and the Army are there for our own protection and that they need the assistance and co-operation of the public . . .

"We are trying to bring full employment and industry to Limerick and if the people interested in coming here read this sort of thing, they will think that there is no law and order at all and will think again about coming . . .

"On that issue I am not really interested in what happens in other parts of the country (you have to be interested in broader issues, of course) — long as Limerick is alright . . .

"People should remember too that the Gardai are human being as well as everyone else . . . The sooner Limerick people care for and spare time for these matters the better.

"Next year is Leap Week, when on a Monday, would it be asking too much getting all of Limerick people. This Week next year will be a golden opportunity for Limerick to really show itself for what Limerick people are. When we go to say looking for various things for the week such as organisations and bands we want to be able to say that a great change of pride has taken place; and this is done not by me but by the people . . .

"I am Mayor but I act only as spokesman for the people of Limerick. A lot depends upon the image I portray when I meet these people but the more people who keep the dark sink and become actively involved the better. Mayors come and go but if people are actively involved in whatever is on in Limerick, Limerick will benefit from it.

"There are a lot of hard-working people here working for youth, people organising the community games which are an outlet for the surplus energy of the kids. But they need the co-operation of the parents of the kids who are benefiting through this. By just saying that they will drive kids to places and by doing little things they will be helping their own kids and strengthening community life.

"Examples had been given, continued Cllr. Coughlan, "by the people in Glenview Gardens and by the population of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish and of Ballynanty. The other areas haven't done this and with the exception of Glenview Gardens and, of course, the works of Ita" agenda. We can was involved with Our Lady of Lourdes . . . and people came for and spare time for these matters the better.

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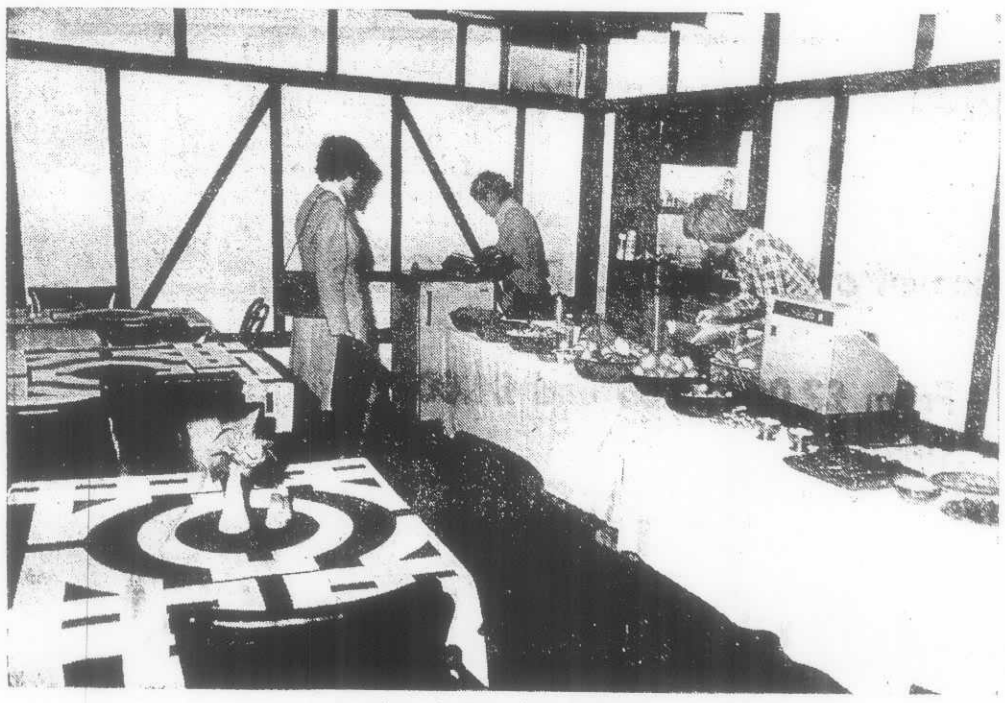
Mayor Coughlan, his wife, Kay, and their sons, Robert (left) and Thady.

Demanding

Different



Lunchtime buffet a la Mary Feely.

Fine food, spotless surrounds, easy pri

ANYONE interested in three *genuine* factors —good lunchtime food, pleasant, pollution - free and spotlessly clean surrounds, and reasonable prices—should visit the new *bistro* in the basement of the Cecil Hotel, which together with these tabulated assets offers delightful informality of manner coupled with superb efficiency.

Open from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., to incorporate both the morning coffee and lunch trade, the restaurant's bill of fare is an ideal seasonal food with the emphasis on freshness, quality and presentation. Bacon, ham, chicken in sauce, tomato and salame salad . . . can be had either on their own or as a general mixture with a slice of each, and are complemented by the usual side salads offering mushroom cucumber, pepper mix or fruit assortment. A salmon salad is also part of the menu and perhaps the cuisine piece de les dance is the salad tide, an assortment of fruit and savoury delicacies between two pieces of gateau. Soups include . . . and also Kimbie.

Desserts are equally tempting though they tend to negate the weight watcher's para-

of the main course. Coffee and coffee gateaux, cheesecakes and rhubarb tarts with mouth watering pastry, are there and meringues alternate daily.

And with all this, prices are amazingly reasonable. Those opting for the salmon salad pay 82p, beef salad costs 78p, other salads are 64p, soup is 12p, coffee 11p, and tea 11p.

Mary Feely

Mary Feely, the dynamic organiser of the restaurant, insists on keeping the prices as low as possible. "I want to keep the prices reasonable so that our clientele are people who spend about 60p on lunch and don't want to go over it." She also sees that originality "everything" is home made and that little dainty varieties are included in the menu. Barring the . . . with Mary . . . Mr. Bingham and Mr. O'Neill. Both Mary and Patricia prepare all the food at home and Patricia . . . to their policy of . . . wholesomely said. We . . . perfect specialty . . . for example today's . . . made vegetarian . . . on our misunderstanding . . . one . . . good . . . in the case of Mary Feely, a girl who up to now has been engaged in the

. . . of food . . . more surprising. . . . Limerick Hill and . . . U.C.D., where she . . . B.A. and B.Dev. Mary . . . some time but ending . . . what unengaged . . . with the Department of Social Service. It was while she was working in Dublin and having lunch out that she started toying with the idea of going into catering. "I used to go to a place called Murphys in Baggot St. that had a few other branches throughout the city. I thought it was . . . Voted nice when I was . . . felt that something . . . was needed. Most places where you have . . . marble — and I know I . . . sick was even worse. You either had to have a sandwich or a heavy meal.

"Last year I wanted a complete change so I . . . rooms, more . . . Now that . . . Mary . . . work making . . . kitchen . . . and . . . Mary . . . some time but ending . . . what unengaged . . . with the Department of Social Service. It was while she was working in Dublin and having lunch out that she started toying with the idea of going into catering. "I used to go to a place called Murphys in Baggot St. that had a few other branches throughout the city. I thought it was . . . Voted nice when I was . . . felt that something . . . was needed. Most places where you have . . . marble — and I know I . . . sick was even worse. You either had to have a sandwich or a heavy meal.

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