

Jim Long

THE LONG

AND THE SHORT OF IT



The Mayor of Limerick, Jim Long, has been embroiled in a number of controversies recently. So who is he? What does he represent? And is he really a racist, as his accusers claim?

INTERVIEW *Olaf Tyaransen* PHOTOS *Ken Coleman*

Councillor Jim Long, the 815th Mayor of Limerick, has never read Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, though he has seen the movie version. "I thought it was quite good," the 60-year-old local politician tells me in his soft Limerick accent. "But there was too much rain in it. We don't get rain like that here. I mean, Jesus, if someone in America looked at that, they'd say there's rain in Limerick all the time."

He gestures out the window of his spacious City Hall office at the sun shining down on the sparkling Shannon. "I have a statement about Limerick which is very positive because I'm a positive Mayor for Limerick, and my statement is that the sun shines over Limerick 365 days a year. We have one problem. The clouds! But we certainly don't have rain like it was portrayed in *Angela's Ashes*."

Born and raised in the Ballinacurra Weston area of the city, Long has been involved in local politics all of his adult life. A member of Fine Gael since his teens, he only became a City Councillor eight years ago. While generally considered a popular public servant (at least according to *Hot Press*' taxi driver), there was some national controversy in 2009 when, in the wake of Dell job losses following the company's relocation to Poland, he reportedly remarked that Eastern European immigrants who had lost their jobs and were now receiving benefits should be sent home. Long refused to apologise, stating, "I'd rather be called a racist than a traitor."

More recently the moustachioed Mayor hit the headlines over a fake Twitter account that had been set up in his name. Under the handle @MayorJimbo, some joker had been poking fun at Limerick's first citizen with tweets like, "Me chins is wobbling off da

scale today!"

A furious Long told the *Limerick Chronicle*, "When I discover this person, I would like to think all their assets are in their own name, because I will take what they have. The disappointing thing for me is that they don't come up and say these things to my face. But they wouldn't because they know what they would get."

It might be unfair to accuse Long of taking himself too seriously, for these are serious times in Limerick. With its reputation for criminality, drugs and violence, it used to be known as 'Stab City', but nowadays 'Clock City' might be a more appropriate moniker. We're meeting the week after the Collins family – whose son, Roy, was murdered for testifying against a local thug – have been forced to flee the country under the Witness Relocation Programme following a three-year campaign of intimidation by one of the city's more ruthless and deadly drug cartels.

OLAF TYARANSEN: When you were elected last year, you told the *Limerick Leader* that your "childhood dream" had finally been achieved. Was becoming Mayor really your childhood dream?

MAYOR JIM LONG: Oh yes (*nods head vigorously*). That story came about when I was about eleven years of age. We were brought before the classroom and we were asked, "Where do you see yourself going in life?" And when it came to my turn, I said, "Someday I'm going to be the Mayor of Limerick." They all started fuckin' laughing at me, but it was my dream.

How did you go about achieving it?

I started to read about the Civil War – the 1916 Rising. I got very interested in Michael Collins, and I got very disturbed in the whole cycle when I started reading the horrific stories about brothers shooting

brothers, and mothers and fathers being divided. I got so emotionally upset by that because my father's family came from a huge background. My mother's family were huge. I have six sisters and two brothers, so I was in a big family. And somewhere in the mix I could go back in time and see my family being destroyed over land, religion, politics, the whole lot. So I became a very one-party politician.

How do you mean?

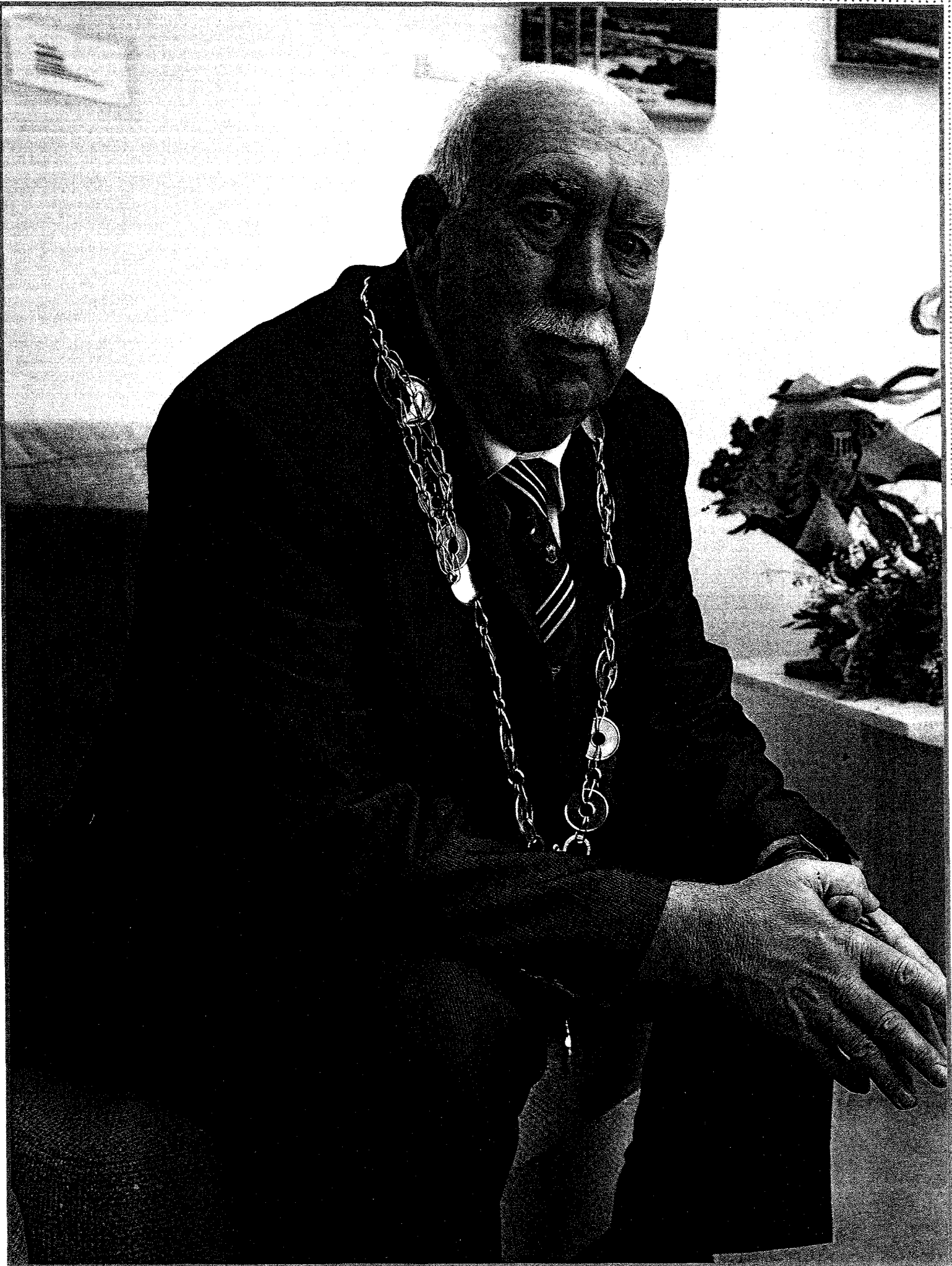
I got involved with Fine Gael canvassing, at about 14 or 15. I decided I would stick with Fine Gael because they were the underdogs, they were the party in the middle. I've always felt that someone in the middle can influence either the top or the bottom. Now this is my mindset, this is no-one else's. To this day, and as Mayor of Limerick City, I have successfully held a full Council together of all colours and all parties, because I engage with (*counts off on fingers*) Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil, the Independents, the Labour Party and, mostly, the Fine Gael party. I tick-tack the boxes of what's going on. For the first time ever, we have an all-parties meeting prior to the main meeting, so the thorny issues that are going to cause controversy we discuss prior. And if there's a common ground, we will deliver it for the people of the city. I found that was amiss in many of the council meetings. It was always a 'them and us'. I have successfully avoided that, and the city has benefitted from it.

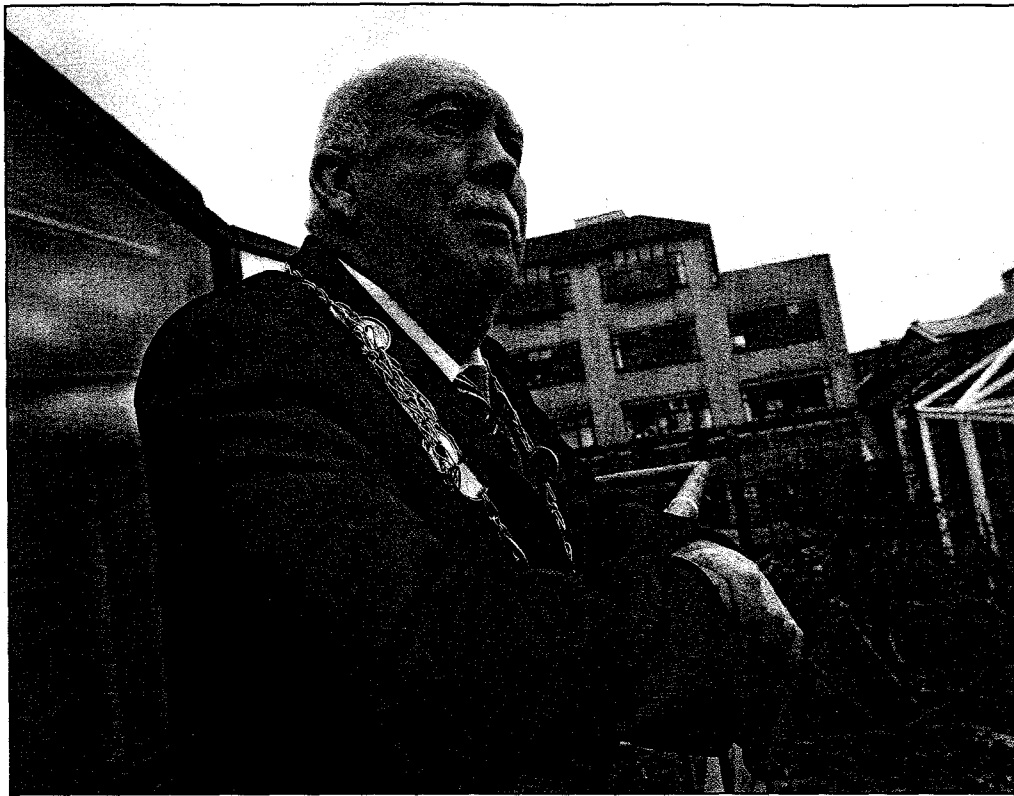
Did you have a happy childhood?

Very happy. I came from a family of nine. My father worked part-time so I came out of primary school at a very young age to help my mother. I used to go to school, for the first year, up to three o'clock, and then I'd go to work from five o'clock until midnight. I did that for a year.

What kind of work?

I worked in a restaurant, in the kitchen, and





“I HAVE NO AXE TO GRIND WITH THE POLISH, THE LATVIANS OR ANYBODY ELSE. THEY’RE ALL WELCOME. I’M A MAN OF INTER-CULTURE. I’M CERTAINLY NOT A RACIST”

then I went on to become a commis chef, then a fully qualified one. But this was all in my own time. And then I gave up the school and I went working full-time because I needed something out of it as well. I wasn’t being selfish. But if I was on ten bob a week, it was going to my mother. If I could go full-time and get 15 bob a week, now I had five bob for my labours. And that helped me then to buy books, about the Easter Rising and that kind of thing. I concentrated on politics, but I was fascinated with the Famine as well. Maybe it was in my upkeep or my rearing, but I developed a trait that I still apply. I never look up to any man, but equally I don’t look down on any man.

Did you ever feel looked down on because of the area you came from?

Not at all. Ballinacurra was one of the nicest, best neighbourhoods – and still is. We didn’t have a lot. We had a big open field, we had a handball alley. Once a year we would play for a silver cup that was made out of silver paper – hundreds of people would come around and it was like a soccer festival that would last for a week. There was always unity and community and we always helped each other. You’d give respect and equally it would be put back. That’s still there today.

Was it a religious upbringing?

Well look, being a 12-year-old boy we were obliged to go to confession every Saturday – which I would dodge three out of four. I often dodged the Sunday mass. I was never overly religious. When I visited my grandparents, the Angelus was sacrosanct. You had to get down on your knees every evening at six o’clock. That didn’t apply in my house because I was never there to do it. So not a religious upbringing, but we always respected the church. I’m never far from religion, but I wouldn’t be a fully-fledged practicing

Catholic.

Do you believe in God?

I would. I pray to God. You have to have something to believe in, and we’re no different to any other religion in the world. Rightly or wrongly, I believe I can speak to God any time I wish. I can speak to him in the car, in the office, wherever. I can honestly say that not a day goes by that I wouldn’t make reference to God. “Jesus, help me out here for a minute.” You’re always conscious that there’s a spiritual side of life.

Did you go to secondary school?

No, I educated myself. I put my own meanings to words from the books I would read. I would write down two or three pages, about the books I read, so I got the value out of them. I think that was a great ability, to write down in two or three pages what the book was about.

Did you stay on working in kitchens?

I did, and then I worked for CIE as a bike porter. My father got me the job there when I was 16. I stayed there for maybe two years and then moved out to Shannon, to the industrial estate, and became a machinist.

So you were always a blue collar worker?

I was always involved in labour. Even when I was very active in Fine Gael, my role at executive level was limited, but it was always on the labour panels. I was a very strong trade unionist. When the Troubles broke out, and Bloody Sunday happened, I actually deliberately, single-handedly, shut down the full Shannon industrial estate, virtually on my own, because I was shocked at what happened. I went out to the personnel manager and I said, ‘Look, I want this factory shut at 12 o’clock’. He said, ‘If you even attempt it, you’re sacked!’ So I said, ‘I don’t feel well’, and I clocked out, so I couldn’t get sacked. I went into

another factory, because we weren’t unionised at the time, and I went to the next guy and said, ‘At 12 o’clock, we’re marching around the industrial estate’. So at five to 12, everyone clocked out and the whole industrial estate shut down. We walked around for two hours. A couple of the lads asked, ‘Where do we go from here?’ And I said, ‘We meet at seven o’clock on O’Connell Street in Limerick and we have our own little rally’. We managed to get placards made and printed up, and a couple of thousand of us met in O’Connell Street. Unfortunately, the sad thing was there was a British Rail office on O’Connell Street that was damaged, but it wasn’t premeditated (*laughs*). The crowd got overawed.

Well, the British Embassy in Dublin got burned down the same night...

It did, yeah. We marched on Limerick prison – don’t ask me why, it was just an iconic place.

Are those not more the actions of a Sinn Féin activist?

Well, maybe some people might be shocked by what I’m going to say, but aren’t all Irishmen Republicans? Didn’t we all come from oppression? Dictatorship? Didn’t our forefathers fight for our freedom? So is there not a Republican in most of us? I have no axe to grind with Sinn Féin. I wouldn’t agree with their policies, and I still have a public opinion, it’s not a political opinion, that we’re not ready for a Sinn Féin government here yet, because they haven’t been proved and tested. We know where they came from. We know how they got there. But we are a democracy. Some of them are still lagging very far behind in democracy, and we found that out this week in our own Chambers when there was a protest about the household charge. I chaired the meeting. They were entertained, they were given the house rules, and when they didn’t get the decision, they went ballistic. That to me is clear evidence that they’re not yet ready to accept a democratic decision.

Are you in favour of the household charge?

I’m not. But by the same token, and I try to explain this to people, the Irish government, namely the Irish people, signed up to the Troika agreement. The people didn’t have a say in it. In my opinion, it was rushed. I have looked at it and we couldn’t have survived without the bailout, and the bailout was part of the Troika agreement. I always try to put it in simple terms. If I go for a loan of €2,000, and I have €200 income and if the manager says to me, ‘I can’t give you €2,000 because you’re short-falling €50, but come back to me and show me where you’re going to get the extra €50, and I’ll give you the loan’. It’s no different to what the country signed up to. We had to show where we were going to get extra money, and we were only going to get it out of our own. I’m not in favour of the household charge, but I would be slightly comfortable that it was a once-off, a flat charge.

At what age did you get married?

Oh, I was married at 20 years of age. A local girl, Mary. We have five children. 40 years on, we’re still married and still depend on each other. I have a great relationship with my wife and family. I made a good move that day and I never regretted it. Can’t give her back now anyway, the guarantee is up on her! She’d love to hear that (*laughs*).

Do you drink?

I love a bottle of Miller. I wouldn’t be an excessive drinker. I can handle it. I can walk away from it. Fair to say that I enjoy a bottle of Miller most evenings. I take one in the comfort of my own home. Might have one or two on the way home. It’s down to one now. When I go home, I might pop three bottles.

You were 52 when you became a councillor.

But I elected an awful lot of people in Limerick! We had the ability to go to the door and listen to people, that’s where it paid off. We didn’t go looking for something. We’d hear what they had to say and then we’d ask for something, but even if we couldn’t do it, we’d go back and say, ‘Sorry, we can’t do it.’ And that’s what won them over. Again, it’s having the

ility to engage with people.

What's your feeling on Limerick's reputation as a 'Fab City'?

I used to get annoyed but, then again, we made a hell of an effort about seven years ago... We created a slogan that you wear on your lapel called 'Fab City'. We were really chuffed with it and we nearly got a message out, but when we launched 'Fab City', Limerick City Council were also rebranding the city 'Riverside City'. They had the money, the power and the marketing, and we lost. But Limerick City is a beautiful city. I know I'm being biased and Limerick City has its problems, but the problems were given to the city. We were the only local authority in the region that was given the remit of social housing. There's very little in the county. Limerick took 60% of all social housing units. In fairness, people needed houses. Limerick City Council responded. They are servicing the needs of the people, but it had an adverse effect on the city.

From an industrial perspective, it is a city in decline...

If you only go back 30 or 40 years ago, Limerick had 150 industries. They had four baking factories, they had two shoe factories. They had sweet factories, tanneries, cigarette factories. When they built O'Malley Park, a huge housing estate... I worked in tannery and what people fail to remember is that every morning at seven o'clock, two double decker buses would leave O'Malley Park for Shannon. There'd be one at three o'clock and one at 12 o'clock, and 90% of the people they moved in to O'Malley Park and the other areas were actually working. Then the jobs went, and then we had a second generation of no jobs, and now we have four generations of no jobs. The jobs went, and the areas came down.

Given Limerick's problems with gangs and drug-related violence, what's your opinion on the legalisation of drugs?

I would be dead against legalising drugs because you have that minimum one, what's it called? The one that they smoke?

Cannabis.

Yeah. We turned a blind eye to that and that led to ecstasy and other drugs. And our big fear in Limerick was the heroin. We flagged it 12 or 15 years ago, that we don't start stopping the heavier drugs, they will lead to heroin. Heroin is a big problem. Drugs kill people anyway, but heroin brings violence with it. It's a consignment problem. Take a consignment of heroin, nine times out of ten there will be a gun accompanying a consignment. Now, if you take 100 consignments into a city like Limerick, that's 1000 guns. That's a lot of guns. Those 1000 guns will probably be in the hands of no more than 30 people, and this is where these guns were hired out, not only in Limerick but everywhere else.

So what can you do?

The problem that we didn't address with drugs happened up to a kind of intimidation control area – and that controls areas with intimidation is the gun. So when we take the drugs out, we probably take the guns out, but where do we start and where do we finish? A huge problem for me as a public representative is that I don't want to be disingenuous to the Gardaí but the way I see the problem at the moment is, they are trying to address the problem at the bottom. I would like to see us address the problem at the top.

How do you mean?

The prisons are full. If you've nowhere to put prisoners, and they have nowhere to go, the courts are failing because they can't convict you and give you 10 years because there's nowhere to go. The guards and the detectives, there's a lacklustre [effort] to bring these guys in, because the courts can't deal with them. So it starts to come back down the line. That's where law and order is winning [sic] out because they know, even at a very young age, "Sure, they can't touch me!" The Gardaí cannot prosecute anyone under 18 years of age. They now have to go before a supervisor or a superintendent for an ASBO, so there's no feeling out there that, lads, you can get away with this. We have too many do-gooders. Society

has changed, but the law hasn't changed with it. In Limerick, up until recently, we had 90% of Garda resources dealing with 5% of a huge problem. Now that huge problem is more-or-less under control, but it took an awful lot of lives, an awful lot of resources to get there, and now we have to go backwards to address the problem.

Were you disappointed that the Aljeff Centre [for treatment of drug addiction] closed?

I was. I never got involved with the Aljeff Centre, only to give them a few bob and support them. But I knew the two lads, the Roches, the cause, the setting up of Aljeff [the centre was opened following the suicides of drug addicted brothers Alan and Jeffery Roche – OT]. It shouldn't have closed, but it was down to resources. Politicians, and local politicians, and where I'm at a loss at the moment is, because of the law and order situation, people don't have the confidence in getting the guards involved, because the guards have to take statements and they need people to come out front and point the finger. That does not work in our society anymore. So what is happening now is that politicians are being brought out into the frontlines of criminality.

How so?

In other words, 'Jim, there's a fella out in my front garden and he's threatening me – will you do something about it?' We are now the frontline of defence as politicians, and the Gardaí are next line back, and we need that to change fast.

So if someone says that to you, what do you actually do?

I get on to the Gardaí straight away. All they can do then is send around a patrol car with the lights flashing. Even if they get somebody, they need a witness. They need a statement. I can't give that statement because I'm only acting on behalf of a complainant. Who won't allow me to use their name. So it's a merry-go-round.

The Collins family had to leave the city recently because of death threats from a local criminal gang.

It's a very sad day for democracy. Ireland let the Collins' down. Under no circumstances was Steve [Collins] and his family under threat with the 24-hour protection. He was always safe – but he had no life. I witnessed that first-hand. I saw his wife, his daughter. They kept looking over their shoulders. They didn't feel safe. Now, there are people who gave [evidence] and have had witness protection and have lived and are living in Ireland, in different parts, but that was not the case for the Collins'. The State could not provide a safe living environment for them, hence they had to go abroad. That is very sad. That is democracy failing.

Last year there were 21 men convicted of soliciting prostitutes in Limerick following a sting. They were all named and shamed in court and, subsequently, in the media. What was your take on that?

Yeah, this is a very unusual one [smiles]. First of all, I clearly stated that I was unhappy with the sting operation, and I wasn't listened to, so I hope I can get the same point across. I have no issue with the Gardaí arresting people for soliciting, but was it ever proven? My contention was that if I could drive up Catherine St. and identify the prostitutes – which I could – why couldn't they be picked up? There was not one prostitute arrested. I won't go as far as to say that there were innocent people, but there was a few characters with €5 in their pocket who went to these women for the craic, and they're listed as soliciting prostitutes. It couldn't have been done anyway! There was one who approached the car window of a driver and he was arrested. Because there was the presence of armed detectives, it was to safeguard the sting Garda, but sure there were armed detectives within fuckin' four feet of them [the prostitutes]. Where I got annoyed was, if I walk up O'Connell St., I'll see gangs of youths intimidating and robbing people. Why can't they put a sting operation there and eradicate the bastards? Now I'm not condoning prostitution in Limerick. Legalise it, get rid of it, do whatever you want with it.

So you think prostitution should be legalised?

I wouldn't go as far as to say that. I've never used

their services [smiles], but there's another argument that where you have prostitution, young women and elderly women are actually safe, because sex is a need for a lot of people. For most men it's a need, and these [prostitutes] are providing a need. Now again, I'm very clear. I'm not condoning prostitution, but let's sit up and kind of deal with it and regulate it. I'm not saying legalise it, but we are no different to any other country, and if it suits a need, maybe we should take a look at it. The question you asked was what was my take on the 21 men. Those prostitutes are still operating. They're still there. Where's our sting operation today? We don't have the resources to stop it. Now, I can drive past and identify the same young women seven nights a week. And if I can do it, surely an undercover guard can do it. That's my bone of contention. They're still operating. Their services are still being used and they're still making money, but because of the sting operation, they've made the public wise as to how not to get caught.

In 2009 you were accused of racism when you allegedly said that migrant workers who hadn't contributed to the local economy should be sent home.

Yes, but my comment was not taken the way it was meant. My comment was made right outside that window with a television crew who edited part of what I said, and what I said was – I'm going to say it again – that when we signed up on the Nice Treaty, we opened the floodgates to the Eastern Bloc countries. We didn't do what other European countries did, and we should have capped the number coming in. It is very fair to say that we had a section of jobs abundant in the country, but there was too many allowed in that we should have capped. What we did as a country was we fast-forwarded the recession button [clicks fingers]. Everything happened too quick. We then tried to compromise by bringing down the minimum wage, but we drove people from the top down instead of bringing people from the bottom up. Those people on €15 [per hour] or more were exploited in the sense that if they didn't want to work for €8 an hour, there would be nine Polish guys who would do it. That was buried in the argument of job creation and full employment. But we actually suffered and we are still suffering because of that. We drove the people who had €500/€800 mortgages, they couldn't get those mortgages again. You wouldn't get a mortgage on €8 an hour but you got it on €15. Now you had the mortgage and you were expecting these people to pay one on €8. They couldn't pay it. What I said and I'll say it again was: I have no axe to grind with the Polish, the Latvians or anybody else. They're all welcome. I'm a man of inter-culture. I'm certainly not a racist. My son is marrying an Indian next week in Malaysia.

Are you going to the wedding?

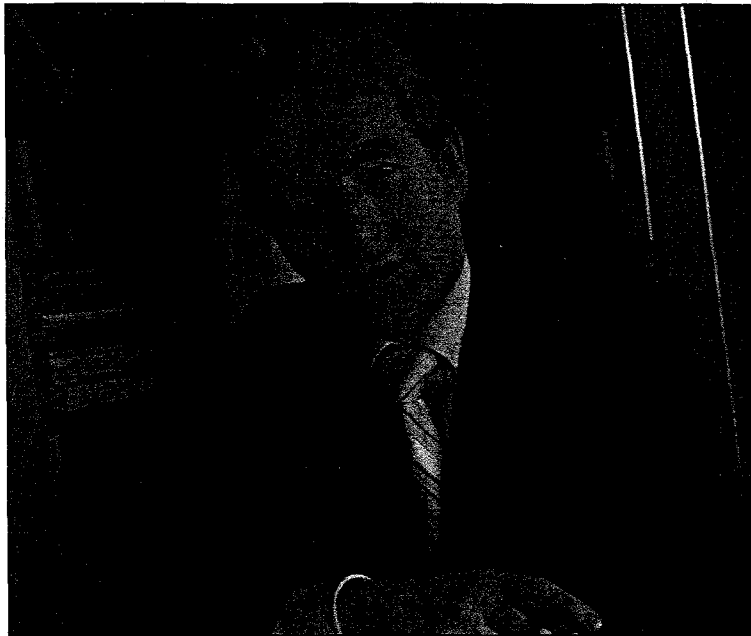
I am. I have huge connections with foreigners and coloured people. Absolutely huge connections. I was the only councillor in Limerick City who had a weekly clinic for the Africans, helping them with their wives and their visas and stuff like that.

Didn't a fellow Fine Gael member get into trouble in Naas...

[Interrupts sharply] He did, yes, but just let me finish my statement. What I clearly ended up, which was not broadcast in the transcript, and this was the final part of my statement and I'll stand over it. What I said was, "migrants and migrancy follows the plentiful, and when all these people came into the country, we had plenty of jobs, and now the jobs are gone I expect them to follow where the migrants are." Didn't ask them to leave. Never said anything like that. That was taken out and there was the words, "They should go home" – I didn't say they should go home. I said they should go where the jobs are, because we were suffering. I never said they're not welcome in the country, and I would never say it. Now [smiles], you asked me another question?

Enda Kenny asked Darren Scully, the former Mayor of Naas to step down following racist remarks. Did he have a word with you?

I had a chat with Enda and I explained exactly what was said, and Enda said, 'Now, that was a completely



Enda Kenny and Michael Collins

different version'. And he asked would I stand over it, and I said I would. He said, 'Would you be prepared to apologise for what you said?' I said, 'No, it doesn't warrant an apology. And I will go on television and I will go on radio and I'll go on any mic that you want, and I'll say to these people today, "You're more than welcome in Limerick but you have to come into Limerick and go on the same playing field as our guys." If I was accused of being a racist at the time or a traitor, then accuse me of being a racist, because I'm not going to be a traitor against my own. Don't ask me to represent my guy who's not working, then ask me to represent the guy who is working for €8 an hour. Give to my guy what you're giving to anybody else, and that is what we were not doing. That is the context in which I put it, and I stand over that. So there is no apology needed for a common sense approach. And he [Darren Scully] didn't have a common sense approach.

A few months ago you made complaints to Google and to the Gardaí about some anti-Semitic emails sent to your official email account.

Yes. I'm very limited in what I can say to you today because it has progressed into a serious investigation. It's pointing in a direction and I feel confident that we'll put closure on this one soon.

There was also a satirical Twitter account set up lampooning both you and the mayoral office...

Again, it's legal and it's under Garda investigation. I cannot give you any further comment.

Are you on Facebook or anything like that yourself?

I am on Facebook because one of my granddaughters decided to put me up on Facebook, but I don't use it. I think Google, Facebook, Twitter... we're not in America. They are American-owned sites and companies with offices in Ireland. We do not have the regulation to deal with unaccountable sites and unaccountable accounts. We have people who can go on all these sites, say what they like, and hide behind an anonymous address. And when they make very defamatory, insulting comments, it's impossible to get at them. I have found a way to get at them, but it took me a long, long road to do it. On the record, we do have, now, the IP addresses of these perpetrators. We will be involving overseas police and we will get to California.

Surely what these people were saying was just part of the general ribbing you get as a public figure?

Yes, satire comments we can deal with, you get them all the time, but let me put it this way, I do not deliberately go out to offend anybody. I'm conscious all the time, no matter what remit I have, be it arts,

sports, culture, business, education... I go in and I represent the people and the office in a very balanced way. And there was a situation allowed where it was being twisted and unruly remarks made about me, my family, the office, that could seemingly go undetected and go unaccounted for. That's what hurts the most. If you want to discriminate or call Jim Long - and I know I'm on tape - a "bollocks," call it to me. Don't call it to my family or the office. Don't insult the people. That's where they crossed a line. I walked up the town last Friday and I met two adversaries of mine. "Ah ha, you're some bollocks!" I just said, "I do my best." But they walk away. I walk away.

You're saying what happens on the internet is different.

This uncontrolled, unregulated access to a site who you do not know who you're dealing with, feel they can say anything and everything. But the most crucial part is that there are people reading it who will actually believe it. It's very hard to insult me. I do not deliberately make racist statements. I'm a very inoffensive guy. If I don't like your point of view, I'll tell you. If I want to tell you to 'fuck off', I'll tell you to 'fuck off', but I'll leave it at that. I won't go and phone Johnny and say, "He's gone down the road now, go down and sort him out."

When was the last time you threw a punch?

When was the last time I got one? (*laughs*) I'd say about 30 years ago in the Gaelic Grounds. There was a fella in my way, a Corkman. A big guy. It was the Munster championships and he kept jumping up and down every time Cork scored and he'd nudge me. I said, "If you do that again, I'll clock you!" And he did it again so I clocked him!

He didn't clock you back?

Not that day, no! I've often got more than I bargained for. But it wasn't a fight.

When was the last time you cried?

Two weeks ago. I was at Scoil Carmel and I gave a very good lecture to the fifth and sixth years. They got very emotional and asked me something that was very emotional and I just couldn't answer it and I just broke down.

What did they ask you?

It was, 'A public servant loses their family life', which they do. I am actually a very family-orientated man. I've gone through all that. I am now in public ownership. My day is 15 hours a day. I miss my grandkids. I miss being with my wife, my brothers and my sisters. That's very hard. People don't see that. Public office is the loneliest office one can be in, at times. It can be very beneficial. It can be very enjoyable. It can be very progressive. It can be very negative, but 90% of the time it is quite a lonely place.

I mean, you don't see anybody dancing around here. We get down to serious business. You have to be fully alert, you're expected to know everything about everything, which is very difficult.

Is there much skulduggery and Machiavellian behaviour in local politics?

'Skulduggery' is a lovely word. Wheels within wheels and deals within deals. It has to happen. It's not corrupt. It's what makes the boxes tick, and it makes the wheel go around.

Have you ever been offered a bribe in your political career?

Never. Never got into a situation like that. That's one thing. If you have the kudos of politics, and again this is something that has stood to me. I was involved in politics at a very young age and you get to see things. You get the knowledge. You get the education. Most dangerous politician from his or her own point of view, is coming into politics very late. They don't see the cracks in the roads, they don't know what obstacles are in their way. They're the ones that trip you, they're the ones that break your neck. You are there to be used and abused by the people. Make no mistake about that. You are there as their servant. And if somebody comes through that door, they're there for their gain and for you to deliver what they want. Some people approach it in a purely different way, to achieve what they want. That's what you have to be careful with. To answer your question, I have never, never been offered a bribe, nor have I ever took one. I would hesitate to ask you for €1,000 to benefit my community.

What do you mean?

You can find yourself in situations where you will do your job, you will deliver in the best interests of the people, and they might come back to you and say, 'I'd like to make a donation. Who will I give it to, you?' And I would say not to give it to me, but to give it to some organisation. You would give it to them. You wouldn't give it to me to give to them. I wouldn't take it.

Following the Mahon Report, do you think Padraig Flynn and Bertie Ahern should be prosecuted?

Yes. And anybody else. This country, we have our forefathers, my grandfather was one, who died for this country. They died for our freedom and for our democratic right. It is not something that you pay for. It's free. And anybody that is corrupt and takes bribes for their own personal gain - out of the system straight away. No room for complacency with this one.

Do you have a motto in life?

I look up to no man and I look down on no man. We're all equal.