



**The Leader
Interview**

Niall O'Donovan
**'I've had far more
ups than downs'**
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n cleared is father

slaughter ■ Jury's decision after 54 minutes



other Regina, walks free this Thursday afternoon after being cleared of manslaughter

Long: 'I'd rather be called a racist than a traitor'

Mike Dwane

A POLISH businesswoman who is running for election in Limerick City South has told Fine Gael's Cllr Jim Long to brush up on his history before making any further remarks on immigrants.

Fianna Fail's Anna Banko said Cllr Long's remarks that migrant workers were largely not contributing to the local economy as "dangerous" and "unfair". But Cllr Long, who has since suggested to German TV that it might be time for some immigrants to go home, has again defended his remarks, saying: "I'd rather be called a racist than a traitor."

Independent candidate Pat O'Sullivan has blasted Cllr Long saying the economic contribution of immigrants to the city was invaluable and Polish people alone had opened 75 enterprises in the city in the past two years.

One such is Ms Banko, who runs a salon on Foxes Bow. "We have seen more and more Polish people open businesses, paying all the personal and business taxes, giving jobs to other people, both Irish people and Polish people. I have my own business and I have loads of Irish girls coming for interview at the moment," Ms Banko told the Limerick Leader.

Ms Banko, whose grandfather fought the Nazis with Polish partisans, said Cllr Long's remarks were "improper" and "dangerous".

"I spoke with a friend of mine who is into politics yesterday and we were talking about the Second



Cllr Jim Long: criticised for saying non-nationals have not contributed to city



Anna Banko: unhappy with Cllr Long's comments

World War and what had happened to Jewish people. It started with abuse about giving them jobs, and that they were taking money from the German people and so on.

"So I wonder does he know his history? Does he realise what kind of words he said and how small words cause great trouble. It's very unfair. Polish people are very hard workers, like Irish people who I think work hard also. We are in the EU. We are not talking about refugee status. We have a right to work here and I don't understand what he is talking about."

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'I'd rather be called a racist than a traitor'

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➔ Declining the offer of a history lesson, Cllr Long said he was "well aware of the history of Poland and World War II, but equally I'm aware of Irish history and how we were held back by over 700 years of oppression".

Prosperity was a recent development and had attracted too many immigrants during the boom, he said.

"We have allowed a situation to develop where the numbers are just too much. Ireland is too small a country to carry such a heavy burden.

"At the time of the Nice Treaty the Fianna Fail/PD government was negligent in not capping the numbers as was done in other countries.

"We had at least 100,000

Polish arriving on our shores more or less straightaway.

"We took them in, companies were screaming for them during the boom, and we were able to show the EU what good Europeans we were, that is the same EU that within a short while facilitated the relocation of the Dell factory from Limerick to Poland with grants," Cllr Long said.

"I am already being called a racist by political adversaries but I'd rather be called a racist than a traitor to my country as we try to recover," he said.

An ESRI survey published this week found that fictitious job applicants with Irish-sounding names were twice as likely to get a response from Irish firms as applicants with Asian or African sounding names.

This showed a "relatively high" level of workplace discrimination in Ireland, according to the institute.

But Cllr Long said he was aware of Irish people who were losing out on work because Eastern Europeans were prepared to work for less and Irish business owners were exploiting this.

Irish people were ending up on the dole queue quicker than their, for example, Polish counterparts, particularly for low-skilled work.

"A relative of mine was getting his house painted and got a quote of €1,900 from the Irish contractor but three Eastern Bloc lads came along and gave him a price of €850, exactly half-price.

"Something has to be wrong there. I don't know whether people are work-

ing and on benefit," said Cllr Long, who also claims to have seen CVs from overseas job applicants saying they will work for as little as €5 or €6 an hour.

"There is probably a group of people like that," Ms Banko responded. "They might come from very poor cities in Latvia, in Russia, in Poland, from different countries. They need to make some money. In those countries there is no work. That is why they would see it as not too bad to work for anything in Ireland.

"I'm sure there are people who would work for anything. But how can we say Irish people don't do it too?"

Ms Banko, meanwhile, said she did not want to be seen as a Polish candidate alone and would be happy to get votes from anybody.

Running a business and an election campaign at the simultaneously makes for "busy times", she said.

She faces the challenge of winning a seat for Fianna Fail at the lowest ebb in the party's long history.

And as if that wasn't daunting enough, Ms Banko is expecting her first baby two months after the local elections.

She only found out she was pregnant after she decided to run but her doctor is happy for her to remain in the race.

"It is going to be very difficult," she said, "but at the same time I was thinking to myself that I won a seat, I would have to do everything to make this country a happier and a better place for my baby and for every child."

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UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
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T: +353 (0)61 234377 F: +353 (0)61 233287



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