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If Trump has his way, this election is the last of its kind

On Friday, we will vote in new members to Dail Eireann. Those TDs will in turn elect a taoiseach and a government. If opinion polls are to be believed, it is likely that a variation of the outgoing government will be re-elected. In a very fractured field, it helps that Fine Gael and Fianna Fail can aspire to win about half of all the seats that are up for grabs. If they are willing to work together again on the far side of the election, it is difficult to see what political combination might combine to thwart them.

The campaign has been lacklustre so far. It is no great advertisement for democracy and has featured no memorable life-or-death debates on any particular topic. It calls to mind the old saying that democracy is the worst form of government, apart from all the others.

The economic environment facing the next government looks like it will be very different from the present environment. That's down to one man: Donald Trump. If he has his way, this may be the last general election fought with American multinationals contributing so mightily to prosperity here. The president-elect plans to reduce the US corporate tax rate to 15 per cent, the Irish level, in an effort to entice multinational jobs back to the US. He has also said that he will impose an across-the-board tariff of either 10 per cent or 20 per cent on every import entering the US, as well as a tariff upward of 60 per cent on all imports from China.

Mr Trump's designated commerce secretary, Howard Lutnick, said this month: "It's nonsense that Ireland of all places runs a trade surplus at our expense. We don't make anything here any more – even great American cars are made in Mexico. When we end this nonsense, America will be a truly great country again. You'll be shocked."

Ireland's trade surplus with the US for the first nine months of this year

amounted to a staggering €35 billion. Annually, that's close to €10,000 of a trade surplus with the US for every man, woman and child in the state.

An economic study by the Danish industry confederation, using an economic model developed by Oxford Economics, showed that Ireland would be the European Union's biggest loser in the event of a trade war involving Mr Trump's proposed tariffs of 10 per cent on EU imports, 60 per cent on China, and EU retaliation. The study predicted a loss of 4 per cent of Irish gross domestic product by 2027, as well as a loss of 30,000 jobs, because Ireland is the most exposed European economy thanks to its massive integration with the US. But the situation may be even worse than the Danish analysts imagine, because the state collects a disproportionate amount of its tax revenues from multinationals.

When it comes to corporation tax, it is estimated that the foreign multinational sector paid 87 per cent of all corporation tax in Ireland in 2022. In that year, only 14.2 per cent of the workforce was employed by the multinational sector, but that sector contributed 54.6 percent of total income tax. To top it all, foreign multinationals also accounted for more than half of all VAT payments, at 53.8 per cent. In short, our public finances are utterly dependent on heavy payments from foreign multinationals.

Ireland will be further handicapped in responding to this White House policy in that we will have to channel our response through the EU. At least that gives us access to size and influence, and the scope to be heard. But although EU involvement will give Ireland a powerful ally, it may come at the cost of a speedy solution to any unfolding trade war.

Next weekend, the winning politicians had better enjoy things while they can. Politics will look very different if Mr Trump is successful in undermining Ireland's multinational appeal.

Biden's release of missiles to Kyiv may be too little, too late

More than a thousand days into Vladimir Putin's grisly war against Ukraine, the outgoing Biden administration has given Kyiv permission to hit targets inside Russia with American-supplied weapons. It is a big policy shift but, like so many of President Biden's wartime decisions, it has come on the slow train, too late to change the situation much on the battlefield.

The mobile army tactical missile system (Atacms) requested for so long by the Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky has a range of 300km and lets Kyiv hit supply centres deep behind front lines. Used efficiently, it could help Ukraine retain a slice of the Kursk salient, captured earlier this year from Russia. Some prime targets, such as bases from which Russia mounts glide bomb attacks, have already been moved out of range of Atacms.

Mr Biden's previous reluctance to approve the use of these missiles was to avoid escalation by the Kremlin. The same logic prevailed in the supply of other western weapons systems such as tanks and F-16 fighters: promise, delay and eventual delivery but in diminished numbers. Now, in the final months of his presidency, with Russia deploying North Korean troops in theatre, the American president's calculations have changed. Russia, it seems to an all but burnt-out White House, has drawn the conclusion the US is ready to support the Ukrainians only long enough to weaken President Putin, but not to secure them a definitive victory. Mr Biden's last act of solidarity with Ukraine could therefore be to make Mr Putin think twice by allowing Kyiv flexible terms of engagement when using the tactical missile.

This would humiliate the Kremlin leader to such an extent that he would more readily sign up to the ceasefire

mooted by the US president-elect, Donald Trump. Mr Biden's last-gasp war aim, therefore, may be not to defeat the Russians but merely to dent Mr Putin's credibility – a statesmanlike contribution to a future peace. Republican supporters of Mr Trump have a less charitable explanation, seeing it as an attempt to bind the new president's hands.

There are plenty of reasons for believing Russia and Ukraine are suffering serious war fatigue. An estimated one million people, Russian and Ukrainian, soldiers and civilians, are thought to have died in a war that is over 1,000 days old. Ukraine, with a population less than a third of Russia's, has suffered grievously. Daily blackouts lasting 20 hours are not unusual in Ukrainian cities. Coming generations are likely to struggle with mental health problems, the legacy of nightly Russian bombardment. Millions have been displaced internally and across Europe.

If Mr Trump is to launch a peace initiative, as he has signalled, he will want an outcome that awards the US a notional win. He will be reluctant to be linked with a messy compromise that might unravel under Mr Putin's malign influence.

If Mr Trump exercises his powerful leverage by scaling back US military aid to Ukraine, that should happen only following negotiations and after America's aid has been replaced by increased assistance from its European allies.

Ukraine's struggle, so long and so courageous, may finally, under Mr Trump, be approaching its endgame. But its people's cause – to protect their homeland's independence – should nevertheless remain a western cause. After more than 1,000 days of suffering, they deserve a just and honourable peace.

Weather makes muppets of us

Giving human names to storms has led to an odd phenomenon: the anthropomorphism of the weather. As the mild spell came to an abrupt end last week with snow in the south and west, forecasts warned that coming storms and snowfalls would be "treacherous". The dictionary says that word comes from Old French, *trechier*, to cheat, or *trecheor*, a cheat, and is defined as "guilty of or involving betrayal or deception". Forecasters use the word to indicate conditions may be

worse than they appear but treachery implies a perfidious intention to cause injury. It is hard to deny that human behaviour has harmed the planet, but by using "treacherous", "hostile" or even "inclement", do meteorologists signal a belief that Mother Nature wants her revenge? Naming storms deepens the impression of malign entities on the attack rather than indifferent natural phenomena taking their course. Given that Storm Bert raged yesterday, can Ernie be far behind?

Brenda Power
Nikita Hand has struck a blow for all women



Hairdresser has shifted stigma from victims to rapists like Conor McGregor

No, Nikita Hand was not the perfect victim. This was no Gisele Pelicot, the heroic Frenchwoman globally hailed for rejecting anonymity, victimhood and most crucially shame in pursuing her multiple rapists. Pelicot refused to accept the presumed stigma of her status as a raped woman, and has done much to shift that stigma to the culprits, where it always belonged.

But shame, in Pelicot's case, would have been an obscenity. She was a happily married middle-aged woman. She went to bed each night, unaccountably fatigued, in her own home. Unknown to her, she'd been drugged by her husband and, as she slept, she was raped by dozens of strangers as he watched and filmed. She didn't go out partying; she didn't drink and take recreational drugs; she didn't contact a rich, famous but patently volatile man she barely knew and go with him to a hotel; she didn't leave an unsuspecting partner at home while she partied with other men.

Rape victims don't come more perfect for prosecutors than Pelicot – but that is what makes Nikita Hand's case, and her victory, arguably more important for women everywhere than Pelicot's slam-dunk outcome. Because perfect rape victims are vanishingly rare. Whether because they were wearing the so-called wrong clothes, because they were out too late alone, drunk or drugged, or maybe they had a boyfriend already, there is usually some element of their behaviour that will be wrongly used to shame them.

That is why only one in three rape victims report the crime, for fear that their so-called wrongs will amount to his right.

There was much in Hand's behaviour over those three days that could have shamed her out of pursuing her action against Conor McGregor. There was much we didn't know that might also have mitigated against her persistence, but the evidence to come would not paint a picture of an Irish counterpart to Pelicot.

Among women, these past few days, there was a low-level thrum of resignation to the possibility that Hand could lose and McGregor would swagger from court to a braying mob of adoring fans, hopping into his Rolls-Royce to

● The Green Party's housing spokesman objected to 330 new homes in an empty field beside his own house, it emerged last week, on the grounds that the garden of one of the houses would overlook his kitchen.

Francis Noel Duffy, who is married to Catherine Martin, the media minister, complained that the scheme breached the development plans for the area of south Co Dublin where he lives on the basis of height and density – but he was also worried future neighbours could look into his kitchen from their garden. While I suspect the thrill of lingering on the lawn to watch Duffy doing his washing up might eventually have paled, it was clearly too great a risk.

The Green Party – of which, again, Duffy is housing spokesman – has committed to building up to 53,000 new homes a year over the next government – so long, presumably, as none of them overlooks anyone's kitchen.

Yet locals in towns such as Roscrea, Baltinglass and Newtownmountkennedy do not have the luxury of objecting to the height and density of accommodation for asylum seekers in their neighbourhoods. And people struggling to find affordable homes to rent or buy may have little sympathy for a homeowner who doesn't want his kitchen overlooked from the garden of a dwelling in a much-needed development that could have housed more than 300 families.

Being overlooked, when you live in a city, should never be grounds to object to a neighbouring development. The solution to Duffy's concerns may also prove his party's fate: curtains.

party with his retinue of yes men. Perhaps he'd even give a press conference, later, wearing that famous suit with the words "F*** you" stitched into the pinstripes.

For Hand to lose, it would have meant that her perceived inconsistencies had damned her more than the overwhelming forensic and medical evidence had damned him. Would the jury abhor Hand's cocaine-fuelled partying, her lies to her boyfriend, her reaching out to McGregor whom she'd never met?

Or would they look at the injuries, the bruising, the scratches, the fingerprint contusions on her buttocks, and especially that tampon hammered so far into her body that it took a gynaecologist with a forceps to remove it, and ask how that could possibly have happened during the joyous, consensual sex that McGregor had described in such detail? The CCTV was one silent witness, as the court heard, but one that arguably came down eloquently on McGregor's side. In pathology, however, the silent witness is the defiled body, and that rarely lies.

In dismissing the case against James Lawrence, the jury obviously concluded he had no case to answer. In the circumstances of the injuries she suffered, an award totalling less than €250,000 seems slight, and hardly the punishment that McGregor, with his massive fortune, deserved.

But regardless of its restraint, the jury's verdict was nonetheless decisive and, after a lengthy trial, clearly determined in just six hours. And aside from the medical evidence, there was one other factor that surely helped them find as they did. Only a profoundly wronged woman would have put herself through the ordeal of a rape trial in a civil court where there was no prospect of anonymity. This was no Pelicot, secure in her blamelessness. Unlike the Frenchwoman, Hand faced shame, embarrassment, public humiliation and the prospect of loss. As Pelicot never had to do, she faced it down with bravery.

If her courage gives one raped woman reason to hope that, in all her errors and ill-judgment, despite the alcohol in her blood, she would still be believed, then Hand has done women everywhere a remarkable service. brenda.power@sunday-times.ie

“The jury’s verdict was decisive and clearly determined

Dominic Lawson
Putin's nuclear bang is more of a whimper



As deterrence goes, this was not effective. Last week President Putin warned that he had changed the doctrine governing Moscow's use of nuclear weapons, to authorise a strike against other nuclear powers should they license the use of conventional weapons to attack Russian territory. Ukraine duly responded... by for the first time using its new permission to fire missiles supplied by the US and the UK at military targets in Russia.

And now, World War Three? Not exactly. After prudently telling the US in advance what he was going to do, Putin fired a "new" intermediate-range ballistic missile configured for nuclear use, but without any such warhead, at a military base in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro – causing no casualties. It was the absolute minimum Putin could do not to lose face, especially given his warnings a few weeks ago that if the West started to attack Russian territory, he would respond with "overwhelming nuclear firepower".

We have been here before, many, many times – starting on the day Putin unleashed his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, when he snarled in a television broadcast: "Whoever tries to interfere with us should know that Russia's response will be immediate and will lead you to such consequences as you have never experienced before in your history", adding that Russia was "today one of the most powerful nuclear states".

But the West did interfere, and on a scale Putin can never have expected. The threat proved hollow. This has not prevented the Kremlin from continuing with the same attempt to terrorise the public in western nations, such as the UK, to deter their governments from escalating their aid. Since our countries began supplying Ukraine with weaponry to defend itself, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies estimates that Russian officials have invoked the use of nuclear weapons more than 200 times (good that someone has been counting).

There was one moment when Washington really believed that the Kremlin was seriously considering deploying tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine. That was two years ago, when Russian forces were being pushed back in abject retreat. Two things then happened. President Biden sent the CIA director, William Burns, to Moscow in November 2022 to tell Sergei Naryshkin (his opposite number as head of the SVR) what the US would do if Moscow "went nuclear". Afterwards Burns recalled:

"Naryshkin swore that he understood and that Putin did not intend to use a nuclear weapon." And, second, as the military historian Phillips O'Brien put it in a paper for the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists: "China... publicly humiliated Russia by forcing Putin, in the midst of all his nuclear sabre-rattling, to agree a joint communiqué with President Xi, in which Putin disavowed the use of nuclear weapons."

The reason Putin might, at that point, have been seriously considering tactical nuclear weapons was that it seemed Russia might be "losing". But now the Kremlin will feel much less anxious about the state of the war (even though a "special military operation" that Moscow thought would end in absolute victory within a fortnight has passed 1,000 days). And for the same reason Putin, far from seeking a negotiation of the sort President-elect Trump may envisage, is completely set on extinguishing Ukraine as a sovereign state. Or, as the Kremlin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said last week, when asked if his boss would consider "freezing" the war along the territorial lines that now stand: "The president has repeatedly said that any option of freezing the conflict won't work for us. It's important for us to achieve our goals."

Even if this were some sort of negotiating ploy in itself, there is no way Russia would now entertain the widely promoted notion of the sort of arrangement that has kept the peace between North and South Korea since that war was frozen in 1953. That armistice has been guaranteed by the presence of almost 30,000 US troops. Trump, given his view that the Ukraine war is fundamentally a European matter, would want countries such as the UK and France to be the force providers for such a garrison, but it is improbable that Putin would accept what amounted to a Nato force on the Ukraine-Russia border.

That is why those who are arguing most vociferously that the West must do whatever it can now to end the war with a sustainable

peace deal should also be advocating the maximum amount of western lethal aid for Kyiv, to maximise Ukraine's leverage. They aren't, of course; but that is the only way Russia might be persuaded to abandon what Peskov called "our goals".

However, there is another source of pressure on Putin, one that does not involve yet more slaughter. While western financial sanctions are widely derided, the situation on the economic front is turning ugly for Russia. Its policy of guns before butter – prioritising weapons manufacturing at the expense of everything else, including agricultural production – has had the inevitable consequences: the price of butter has soared. Also potatoes: the price of that staple has risen more than 60 per cent in the past year.

This is making for a most unhappy public mood, however suppressed. The Ukrainian mother, Vera, who has been living with us with her son since July 2022 is in constant communication with close relatives in Russia and tells me that they are unhappier than at any other stage of the conflict, as well as being, for the first time, physically frightened (because of the increasing penetration of Ukrainian drone attacks into Russia).

Last month the Russian central bank put up interest rates to an astounding 21 per cent. This suggests that Putin's transformation of the economy into an overheated version of what the Soviets called "structural militarisation" may have similar disastrous effects. Sergei Chemezov, head of the Russian state defence conglomerate Rostec, complained: "If we continue to work like this, then most of our enterprises will go bankrupt."

Apart from weapons production, that is. Oh, and vodka. After two decades of declining consumption of the national curse – one of Putin's real triumphs, one might say – alcohol sales in Russia have spiralled upwards. Per head, the Russians, according to a report in The Times, "are now seeing off the equivalent of eight litres of pure alcohol each year". And who knows how much more of the homemade, off-the-books hooch.

This is an expression of the war's psychological toll on the Russian population: one that, unlike public dissent, cannot be muted by censorship or intimidation.

So, is Putin "winning"? Not, I suspect, in the minds of his people, whatever his own determination. And will he attack Nato countries with nuclear missiles, as he now threatens? No: the sadistic poisoner in the Kremlin would prefer to live.

“His policy of guns before butter has had the inevitable result