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FARCE . . . Taoiseach Harris

SIMON IS NOT UP FOR TASK

SIMON Harris' "Taskforce" for Dublin has a nickname among cynical Dubs: The Farceforce or as I have redubbed it, The Arseforce.

Cos just like an arse, it is full of wind.

The Taoiseach is following in a long line of Government ministers who like to pass the buck. And an Arseforce is the ultimate exercise in washing your hands of responsibility.

The Dublin Arseforce has 12 weeks, we are told, to come up with recommendations on things like public transport, litter and the public realm, which will then be considered in another forum/Arseforce set up to enhance life for those who live in Dublin.

A load of horse manure, if you ask me. Nothing will happen. It never does.

Those who can do, those who can't, set up an Arseforce, and Simon is continuing that age-old Irish political tradition.

He set up another one yesterday for the asylum seekers.

For Dublin to thrive again, the last thing it needs is an Arseforce. What it does need, urgently, is a directly-elected mayor, with real power.

Oh, and he or she should be a Dub, through and through.

Only a Dub knows what is required to make the city the Fair City it is deep down.

But Simon Harris is gutless. He hasn't the cojones to order an election for a mayor that has been long promised, because he doesn't care to devolve power to one individual.

The capital city will continue to stagnate until it gets its mayor, which will be...never.

LOSS OF A LEGEND

THE man who made me pick up a guitar is dead, from a heart attack, aged 61.

R.I.P. Steve Albini.

I saw Steve, *inset*, front his band, Shellac, three times in Dublin. On each occasion, I spent two hours in rapture, deafened by the chainsaw-like melody, made out of body by the beating of the drums.

He was the epitome of the underground. His sound was bare to the bones. His lyrics, a political castration of man. He was brilliant, all the big Indie acts wanted him as producer. He made Nirvana. He elevated the Pixies, he brought PJ Harvey back to her raw roots.

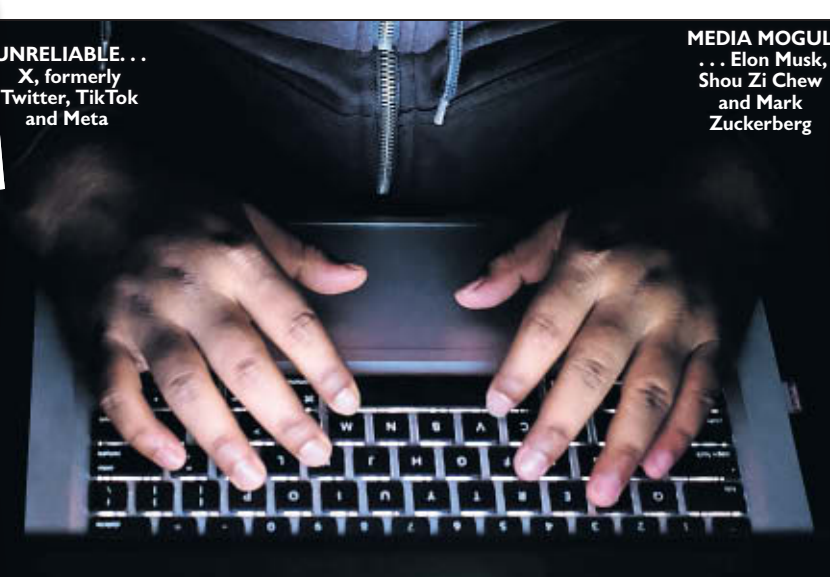
Albini was king. Long live the king.



We live the era of The Stupid. They triumph unless we can bring social media to heel



UNRELIABLE . . . X, formerly Twitter, TikTok and Meta



MEDIA MOGUL . . . Elon Musk, Shou Zi Chew and Mark Zuckerberg



I DESPAIR. We live in the era of the dangerously stupid.

Decency has been replaced by uninformed anger. The cultivation of knowledge (what makes human beings better) has been toppled in favour of concocted WhatsApp memes, lies-ridden Facebook (now Meta) and Twitter (now X) posts.

TikTok, far from being a harmless app showing funny videos, is a surveillance weapon of the Chinese state, whose goal, like Russia's, is to weaken the West. Targeting kids is the best way to do that. Catch them young to control their thoughts and their desires.

Social media is our greatest enemy. It is an amoral cesspit that must be brought to heel. It is no exaggeration to say it is dismantling western civilisation, post by post, meme by meme.

For nefarious state actors, like Russia and China, social media is a powerful tool to foment chaos.

It helps their cause that no-one under the age of 40 reads anymore. They stare at their phone all day and all they get is lies coming back at them.

The noble trade of journalism is on the way out too. We are the last sting of a dying wasp. Our words go through the sieve of truth before reaching you.

Unlike the tripe that purports to be truth on social media.

But we are no longer believed. We will continue to fight to reveal the truth, to our dying breath, but it's becoming an increasingly futile task.

Nobody is listening anymore. Their gaze and attention has been stolen by the publishers of lies.

Politicians are abused at every turn. Good people who served their state are leaving in droves. And fewer are willing to follow them into public service.

It's easier to hate than it is to be informed, so political discourse has become a swamp of blood, thunder and spit. Previously moderate people have

become poisoned by the waterfalls of untruth that flow incessantly on the pages of social media.

These are dangerous times. Civilisation as we know it, is dangling on the edge of the precipice. And I don't see how it doesn't fall - even in little old Ireland, which thought itself immune from the bile of the mob.

Not any longer. A great schism is upon us. The electorate - fired up by the dishonesty they believe on their phones - is preparing to revolt in a way nobody would have foreseen just a few short years ago.

So prepare for carnage at the ballot box next month. Two surveys - by Red C and Behaviour & Attitudes - that slipped under the radar this week provided the perfect illustration of how fast Irish people have been sucked into believing stupidities.

A third of voters - that equates to approximately **ONE MILLION** people - believe in the veracity of horse-s**t conspiracy theories, such as the one about a secret world government, and old-hat piles of manure that claim scientists deceive the public and people are regularly experimented upon without their knowledge.

When asked about the statement "a small, secret group of people is responsible for making all major decisions in world politics", ten per cent said this was "definitely true". A further 24 per cent said it was "probably true".

A further one on five per cent said they weren't sure. Only 24 per cent of folk said it was "definitely untrue".

People! Wake up. Almost a quarter of people, 24 per cent, said it was definitely or probably true that "experiments involving new drugs or technologies are routinely carried out on people with-

out their knowledge or consent". Ah lads, your minds have shrunk and shriveled from not reading.

Some 30 per cent of people said that alternative medicine is effective in treating long-term illnesses (like cancer) was definitely or probably true. Ye are the ones who will perish first when you become sick. That's definitely, or probably, true. Mark my words.

When it comes to our politicians, Irish people don't hold them in high regard at all. Six in ten (61 per cent) agreed that "the people, not the politicians should make important policy decisions". It's hardly surprising then that a majority, 54 per cent, said the Government is doing a "poor job".

What the surveys reveal is that a sizeable minority of adults' brains have been turned into mush, amenable to lies. And the blame for that lies squarely at the door of social media.

More specifically, the inability of governments to make them accountable.

Unlike traditional media; newspapers, magazines, books, radio and television, social media is not considered a publisher. Therefore they can't be sued in the courts for the lies that swim unmoored on their platforms.

This has to change if we are to rid ourselves of the tyranny of stupidity that is well cemented in the democracies of the West.

It's time the laws of the land treated social media as they do traditional publishers, like this newspaper.

Publications and TV stations are responsible for what goes on their platforms.

And that's right. Knowledge, truth and decency only prevail when lies are forbidden.

If we don't get tough with social media, we are doomed to be led by the stupid for generations to come.



POWER . . . Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin



TRIAL . . . Trump and Stormy

WHIPPING UP A REAL STORMY

STORMY Daniels made Donald Trump stop being rude by spanking his backside with a rolled up magazine with his face on the front when they had sex in 2006 at his Mar-A-Lago resort in Florida.

That little nugget came during testimony from the porn star at Trump's hush-money trial in New York on Tuesday.

Trump, who was back then ten years away from a tilt at the Presidency, called Stormy Honeybunch and said to her: "You remind me of my daughter." Not the best come-on line, you'd agree.

Stormy's evidence was excruciating for Trump, who sat expressionless, save for when he closed his eyes (so as not to blow his top, presumably) on several occasions as really personal details emerged.

Her testimony could make or break the prosecution's claims that Trump paid Stormy \$130,000 in 2016 to keep the affair a secret and not jeopardise his bid to become President. It remains to be seen what the jury made of it.



MODEL . . . Linda

TIRED OF BARING IT

A **BARMAN** friend of mine is exasperated. By the drinks industry, forcing him to hike up prices to the detriment of his business, certainly.

He is more exercised because of all the misery swirling around. The world is full of bad news. He is right, it is, and it is getting him, me, and, undoubtedly, you, down.

Fed up to the back teeth with doom and gloom he says he is.

And who wouldn't be? The long winter still hasn't ended, in truth. The heating is still on in the evenings. What are we doing living here?

So, he asked me this week to reinstate Page 3.

His reasoning is simple: We all need a bit of light relief.

And we do. I doubt his request will be met with a listening ear, however.

Times have sadly changed and bare-chested models are no longer acceptable.

So, sorry Mr Barman, you will have to imagine Page 3 girl, Linda Lusardi, *above*, without any top on, to bring you a dollop of joy in these miserable times.