

By **MARTIN BYRNES**

City Hall to get lady mayor

IN July, 1991, Alderman Jim Kemmy announced that his party and the Progressive Democrats would support his nomination for the mayoralty and that, in 1992, Labour would support the nomination of Cllr John Quinn to the city's highest office.

He announced too that Cllr Jan O'Sullivan would become mayor too – but in 1994/5!

The mayoralty of 1993/4, which commences next week, and that of 1995/6 – the final one before the next elections, were to be left blank, and no decisions were made, to facilitate, as Jim Kemmy said, genuine rotation.

Mr Kemmy said that there was no pact within Council but that, when he had issued invitations as the leader of the biggest party in Council, only the PDs had responded to discuss the future of the Council.

Therefore, as Council meets on Monday next to elect a successor to Cllr Quinn, anything, in theory, could happen.

Instead, Cllr Jan O'Sullivan will almost certainly be proposed – one year ahead of her stated time.

It is worth reminding ourselves of the composition of Council.

Labour have six members and, with the PDs three, command an absolute majority in Council.

Fine Gael have four, Fianna Fáil have one, Democratic Left have one,

and there are two independent socialists.

But pact or no pact, Labour and the PDs together can do anything they wish.

Is a pact on city Council the norm rather than the exception?

Yes; but pacts can break down. In 1990, for example, nobody was more surprised than Paddy Madden (FF) when he found himself pitchforked into his second mayoralty by the breaking of FG party ranks by Gus O'Driscoll – a reciprocal gesture which had the effect of depriving Kevin Kiely (FG) of the chain. Alderman O'Driscoll remarked at the time that he was merely abiding by the pact which had been agreed.

Over the past 39 years, the Council has had nine Fianna Fáil mayoralties, nine Fine Gael, eight Labour, four independents, one Clann na Poblachta and one Progressive Democrat.

There are some fascinating complications in the makeup of the present Council, with far-reaching implications for next Monday's choice of first citizen.

To begin with, Mr Kemmy has already pointed out that many members



Cllr Jan O'Sullivan . . . to be city's third lady mayor.

have already been mayor, and he would wish to see the honour spread more evenly. Fianna Fáil's Jack Bourke was twice mayor, as have been Fine Gael's Gus O'Driscoll, Bobby Byrne and Pat Kennedy; the fourth FG member, Tim Leddin has worn the chain once.

Within Labour, Frank Prendergast has been twice mayor. Frank Leddin has been mayor before – but that was nearly 30 years ago (1965/66).

The new members might have a claim on the chain. The new Labour members are Alderman Sean Griffin and co-opted member, Judy O'Donoghue.

Within the PD group, Cllrs Kieran O'Hanlon and Dick Sadlier are new members.

Alderman John Gilligan, and Cllr John Ryan are also new.

Jim Kemmy is on record as having reservations about the longest-serving member never to have worn the chain – Joe Harrington. Mr Kemmy said that he was unhappy with Mr Harrington's perceived stance on Northern Ireland. But he hinted that a statement of unequivocal renunciation of violence would help.

It is possible that, over five years, the Labour/PD pact might extend to the exclusion of all others, and the taking of a 3:2 ratio of mayoralties. If this were to come to pass, Jan O'Sullivan becomes Limerick's third woman mayor next week, either Dick Sadlier or Kieran O'Hanlon would take 1994/5, and probably Sean Griffin would be mayor in 1995/6. There is plenty of precedence for such pacts.

The pact forged in 1974 saw the five-year life of the Council taken 3:2 by FG and Labour.

Immediately thereafter, the 1979/85 Council produced two FG (one by something of a fluke) two FF, and two Labour.

The '85/91 Council had its surprises at the end, yet the FF/FG pact which ran it produced a 3:3 hold in favour of those two parties.

There is no pressing reason for there to be a mad scramble for the 1993 mayoralty. Despite a seemingly generous allowance, no mayor ever makes money and, in certain years, can lose many thousands of pounds while not giving the impression of any remarkable largesse.

Neither does there seem to be a general election in the offing, a good mayoralty being a consideration for the politically ambitious. This is strange as none of the five East Limerick Deputies had become mayor prior to their election to the Dáil. Two, Des O'Malley and Willie O'Dea were Councillors briefly before being assumed to ministerial office. Two others, Michael Noonan and Peadar Clohesy, are current Councillors – but in the County Council – leaving just Jim Kemmy at City Hall, a decade a TD before wearing the chain.

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