<http://www.independent.ie/opinion/columnists/eoghan-harris/casement-a-heart-of-gold-in-the-heart-of-darkness-34944692.html#comments>

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Jim Cogan's illustration

Local heroes like Roger Casement can also be global heroes. That's the ambition of the three women and two men of the Skibbereen Rowing Club whose local Ilen river has carried them to Rio and the Olympics Games.

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Driving the coast road beside the idyllic Ilen Estuary, I often stop to watch the peaceful scene: slim silhouettes sliding along the calm surface as the sun sets.

But inside the boats, Dominic Casey's gruelling schedule calls for hearts of oak and lungs long past the last gasp.

Like Kilkenny hurlers, the Skibbereen rowers do not distract themselves with other sports. They focus on the goal of going faster.

This Tuesday, they start their epic endurance test in search of gold medals and global fame. We will all be lining the banks.

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**Sunday Independent**

**7 August 2016**

**Eoghan Harris**

**‘Casement: a heart of gold in the heart of darkness’**

Last Wednesday, 100 years ago, Roger Casement was hanged in Pentonville Prison. The formal charge was high treason, but he was more easily hanged because he was a homosexual.

The photograph of Casement, marching with dignity despite his handcuffs, a brave white handkerchief in his breast pocket, would harrow the hardest heart.

Regular readers know I am no enemy of England. But there is no excusing the evil treatment of Casement in life and death by some British politicians and civil servants.

Jeffrey Dudgeon, whose revised and annotated edition of Roger Casement: The Black Diaries I have been reading all week, does not excuse that evil either.

Seldom has a scholar been so well fitted for the task of tracing the contours of Casement's complex life and courageous death.

Dudgeon is homosexual (like Casement, he deserves the dignity of the old, hard word), a liberal unionist and a graduate of Trinity College Dublin.

Accordingly, he is alert to both unionist and nationalist nuances. He is also a natural storyteller and his narrative gripped me like a novel.

Like most historians, Dudgeon believes the diaries were not forged, but he doesn't think this will ever satisfy some nationalists. Me neither.

Time we called a truce in that pointless battle. Time we celebrated our local and global hero, Roger Casement, who brought his heart of gold to the heart of darkness.

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John Halligan is another kind of local hero. His primary mission is to look after Waterford City.

But his wider concerns - abortion, decriminalising prostitution, assisted suicide - are debated across the world.

Halligan refuses to be restricted to levelling labels. His conclusions can annoy both left and right.

Liberals like his position on abortion, but feminists disagree with his desire to decriminalise prostitution.

However, more people than you might think, especially those who have watched relatives die in agony, agree with his support for assisted suicide.

But what really brought wrath down on Halligan's head last week, was him taking sides on a local issue - the leadership of Fine Gael.

Asked whom he favoured, Halligan straightforwardly answered: Simon Coveney.

As there are realistically only two horses in the Fine Gael leadership stakes, support is a zero sum game. Back Leo Varadkar and you are not backing Simon Coveney, and vice versa.

Last week, Leo Varadkar's media elves were everywhere. Varadkar was photographed looking visionary, Halligan looking distraught.

All this agitation can be dismissed as August madness. But Fine Gael members should note why Halligan favours Coveney.

Like Micheal Martin, Halligan thinks Coveney was crucial in cobbling together a government while Varadkar vacillated.

As long as we have proportional representation we will always have coalitions - and a good thing, too.

Accordingly, the primary task of a modern Taoiseach is putting a principled coalition together.

Halligan is not alone in thinking that Coveney has the edge here, not least because of his lack of ego.

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Michael Healy-Rae, another kind of local hero, but of a type which has long gone global in Africa, Asia and Latin America, was the subject of Marty Morrissey's riveting interview on Radio 1 last week.

Let's hope Dee Forbes, the new director general of RTE, herself a local hero in West Cork, was listening for two reasons.

First, Marty Morrissey brought no metropolitan prim mouth nor suppressed sneering to the table. He respected Healy-Rae's right to be heard and Healy-Rae rewarded him by telling him the truth as he saw it.

The result was a masterclass on local politics conducted by Healy-Rae with the same calm dispassion with which Machiavelli dissected the deployment of power in The Prince.

Second, let us hope that it helps Forbes return RTE to its real mission - to represent the people of Ireland, warts and all, and be racy of the soil.

Forbes deserves full public support during her first difficult days - especially as elements of the media seem obsessed by the exit of some senior executives, commonly known as the suits.

For some reason, these retirements were presented as creating a crisis rather than a chance for creativity.

You would think the suits had bequeathed Forbes a land flowing with milk and honey rather than a deficit of €2.8m.

To add a further mad dimension, some disgruntled RTE sources have even speculated that Moya Doherty, chair of the RTE Authority, favoured Forbes as the first step to the feminisation of the station.

Let me try to bring some sanity to these speculations, and speaking as a former RTE producer, tell you three tough truths.

First, the suits do not produce the television shows the public wants to watch. Producers and presenters do.

The Fowler Commission on Canadian broadcasting put it in one pithy sentence. "Broadcasting is about programmes, the rest is housekeeping."

Second, good programmes are made by gifted men and women who are almost always demanding creative characters like Dermot Morgan.

Third, creative talent needs growing time. Marian Finucane, Mary Kennedy, Ryan Tubridy and Tommie Gorman have all got better with age.

As for foolish talk about feminisation, I believe women are better talent managers than men. Here, too, I speak from experience.

In my 25 years in RTE I worked for three women bosses. All three were good leaders who did not let you down when you made a mistake from excess of enthusiasm.

Finally, I hope Forbes will start modestly, fixing things the suits never fixed. Like bringing back Brendan O'Connor. Like giving Marty Morrissey his own chat show.