**Council of State tells us much about Higgins**

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**As in the past, much can be gleaned from the new appointments to the Council of State, writes John-Paul McCarthy**

Presidential appointments to the Council of State may seem like thin gruel, but they can be quite enlightening on occasion.

In appointing token Anglophiles like the baronet John Keane to his council, President Hyde revealed himself to be just that -- a token Protestant in an overwhelmingly Catholic country.

President O Dalaigh used his council to battle his boredom, and appointed the actress Siobhan McKenna at one point supposedly to advise him on Supreme Court referrals and Dail dissolutions.

This appointment suggested that the office itself was in danger of becoming a hollow shell. President Hillery appointed the widow of his deceased predecessor, President O Dalaigh, thereby unwittingly giving new legs to the old jibe that Fianna Fail was nothing more than the 'women and Childers party'.

President Higgins's recent recruitments to his Council of State were equally revealing.

Having worked the academic card fairly hard during the presidential election, it is unsurprising that he would seek to associate his presidency with intellectuals like the former Supreme Court judge, Catherine McGuinness, and Professor Gearoid O Tuathaigh, author of what is still the best book we have on Thomas Drummond, one of Ireland's greatest mandarins who worked wonders for Catholic Ireland from his desk in Dublin Castle during the fallow years of the 1830s.

I paused somewhat though when I saw that President Higgins had also appointed the solicitor Michael Farrell.

I only know Farrell through his book on Northern Ireland, The Orange State, written in 1976. President Higgins is obviously not a man to hold a fellow socialist's past literary excesses against him. IMF Ireland has a short memory span, it seems. I say this because Farrell's book always struck me as especially ungenerous towards our unionist brethren.

Even by the standards of the Seventies, a grim decade that saw self-proclaimed radicals in The Crane Bag claim kinship with cultural reactionaries like the UCC revivalist Daniel Corkery, Farrell's book contained some fairly bracing passages.

He compared the Stormont regime to the Nazis at one point. He wrote that 'in so far as the total identification of party and state was one of the hallmarks of European fascism, the comparison was apt'.

That's pretty rough stuff, especially if the Provisional IRA are let off with a comparatively light slap on the wrist. By contrast, Farrell called them the architects of 'an urban guerrilla offensive'.

He ridiculed Sunningdale as a 'classic piece of neo-colonialism' and mused about the way Loyalist paramilitaries seemed 'unsure of their identity'.

When they insisted time and again that they were British, Farrell batted all that away with a wave of the hand, insisting that 'there is no reason why the bulk of Northern Protestants should not acquiesce in a united Ireland with as little resistance as their fellow Ulster Protestants in Cavan, Monaghan, and Donegal offered to their inclusion in the South in 1922'.

Fourteen years ago, no President would have risked association with these kinds of insights, if only because Nazi parallels tend to play badly regardless of the topic. (Ask President McAleese about that).

But even an atheist and a dialectical materialist like President Higgins seems to believe that there can be life after death.

It's called the Council of State.

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Jude Collins

This article would be useful if it didn't reveal its bias with unsupported remarks like 'he ridiculed' 'he mused', 'batted all that away with a wave of the hand'. Either Farrel's claims are valid or they are not. Name-calling is a poor rebuttal.

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Sliothar

If Mr McCarthy had the dubious pleasure of being battened off the streets in the North by RUC thugs and their hired assassins, he might have had a more generous interpretation of an Ulsterman who lived through the tyranny of the Unionist state. And, if he had done even a half-a-cent's worth of research, he might have found that the main reason why Mr Farrell now resides in the South of Ireland is that the lives of himself and his family were threatened by the same people. But then, for Mr McCarthy and his ilk, their ignorance serves as their comfort blanket.

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John McMahon

Michael Farrell is a victim of Protestant tyranny. John Paul McCarthy is not.
Mr McCarthy has a hell of a cheek. Would he reprimand a Jew for having said unpleasant things about Nazis?

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Myles\_Duffy

The enthusiastic warmth expressed by the youth of Ireland to President Higgins when he visited the Young Scientist exhibition tells much more about the President.