

Cuise/e

*The voice of
the members*

Edition 01 – Winter 2011

FIANNA FÁIL
THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

**YOUR PARTY NEEDS
YOU**

ARE YOU NOW, OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN, A MEMBER OF FIANNA Fáil, THE REPUBLICAN PARTY?

I don't know about you, but recently I've been having nightmares – they're all roughly the same, a knock on the door at three o'clock in the morning, burly men in black coats and fedoras dragging me off to a dark room, where the Junior Senator for Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy, shines a light in my eyes and asks the ominous question "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Fianna Fáil party?"

Before I can answer, to say 'Yes' obviously, I awake in a cold sweat. I don't know what the cause of these nightmares is, maybe it's eating biscuits before I go to bed or the fact that I watched the movie 'Good Night and Good Luck' a couple of weeks ago but I've a sneaking suspicion that it may have something to do with the fact that, at least according to certain elements of the media, I'm the worst kind of criminal — a card carrying member of the Fianna Fáil party.

The demonisation of Fianna Fáil by certain elements of the commentariat is nothing new, but what is new, is the frequency and virulent nature of the attacks not only against the party as a whole but also the ordinary rank and file. Two recent examples of this stuck in my mind.

The first was a piece entitled "Does it really matter if Gallagher is a de facto FF candidate? Yes, it does" which was published in the Irish Examiner on the 19th of October last. Having devoted half her article to attacking Sean Gallagher over his Fianna Fáil links, the author then goes on to have a go at the ordinary party member with such gems as "... after all the abuse this country has suffered at the hands of Fianna Fáil..." and "... I know this is a predominantly Christian country but haven't we turned the cheek one too many times when it comes to Fianna Fáil..." and "... I'm not suggesting its party members should be permanently branded, or kept in 21st century leper colonies but, in the interests of self-preservation, can we at least keep them out of high office for a generation..."

This fantastic piece of prose was followed by an article in the Irish Independent on the

24th October last entitled "Don't repeat old mistakes when casting your vote" which contained perhaps the nastiest cut of the lot "... We have to remind ourselves that we gave power to Fianna Fáil under Bertie Ahern, three times in succession, making sure to be sure that he would wreck us... Any democracy that can do that to itself needs its collective political head examining for brain disease or brain tumours..."

Accused of abuse, worthy of branding and likened to a brain tumour, nasty stuff isn't it? And especially upsetting for those committed members who feel they continually have to apologise for their membership of the party whether at work, at home or out socialising.

The demonisation of Fianna Fáil by certain elements of the commentariat is nothing new...

I'm not saying that Fianna Fáil is perfect and hasn't made mistakes, no-one reading this article would, and the very fact that Cuisle exists, shows that steps are being taken by the ordinary membership to voice their views on the past, present and future conditions of the party. We might never be able to persuade people like the authors of those articles of the value of our party and its membership but through this process I have no doubt that if we engage with people and hold our heads high, we will be able to persuade the public as a whole.

And that's the one thing that people need to remember about McCarthyism whether in the 1950s America or in the Ireland of 2011, its popularity fades when people are confronted with the truth – the only question is when they make a movie about modern Irish McCarthyism who'll be played by George Clooney!

Darren Lehane

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Cuisle The voice of the members

Hello & welcome to Cuisle, the new magazine for Fianna Fáil members.

This publication will be different. It is not the magazine of the parliamentary party. It is not the magazine of Fianna Fáil Headquarters. It is *your* magazine - "The voice of the members".

It is you the members who will drive the content of this publication. Our aim is to provide a platform for members from all over Ireland and abroad to express their views and help set the course for the future of the Fianna Fáil party.

Cuisle will give members the opportunity to share their opinions on party matters, on everything from the latest policy approach, to the efforts to revamp the party.

As the party continues to adjust to the fallout from the General Election in February, what is becoming clear is that if the party is to be revived, the membership will be the driving force. We hope that Cuisle will play its part in the renewal process that is underway.

There are a lot of great ideas amongst the membership on how we can move forward however there are too few ways of communicating them. We want Cuisle to be one vehicle for bringing these ideas and other issues to the attention of the approximately 50,000+ people who are registered members of Fianna Fáil. Cuisle will help to generate debate and keep members informed about activity within the party.

We want this newsletter to be thought provoking and represent the issues that are being talked about by members up and down the country. In order for the Fianna Fáil party to progress we must accept the challenges facing us and recognise that it can only be by the hard work and dedication of our members that the party can again reclaim a place at the heart of Irish society.

Whilst we need to face up to the mistakes of the past, we cannot continue to allow our detractors to define us by them. Fianna Fáil has a proud history. We need to celebrate and retain the positive aspects of our party and embrace this opportunity to redefine our core values and principles.

The objectives of this publication can be summarised as follows:

- To represent the various views of the Fianna Fáil membership.

- To keep members informed about what is going on in the party and the issues facing us.
- To help stimulate debate about the future of the party and how we will be organised into the future.
- To provide political information to our members concerning Fianna Fáil and our opponents.
- To assist in driving the renewal process, encouraging our members to take an active role in the rebuilding of Fianna Fáil.
- To help bridge some of the communications gaps which exist within the party.

All these objectives place the member as the central focus of our new publication.

So if you have a view on a particular Fianna Fáil related issue - tell us. If you disagree with something published, let us know. If you'd like to submit an article or a letter, then get in touch. This is your newsletter, so we need your content and ideas if it is to be a success.

We hope that you will see from this issue, that we are not afraid to do things differently. We are not afraid of publishing strong opinions and articles of interest. We will not shy away from publishing articles that are critical of aspects of the party when the criticism can be justified.

So why is it named Cuisle? Well, the direct translation of Cuisle is pulse. The membership has always been the life blood of Fianna Fáil. This newsletter aims to take the pulse of the membership on a regular basis.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and that you will help make Cuisle a success by engaging with the ideas raised. All the articles will be posted on the Fianna Fáil discussion forum if you would like to debate the points mentioned. You can also contact us directly if you have any views. You can email us at cuisle@fiannafail.ie or write to: Cuisle PO Box, c/o Fianna Fáil Headquarters, 65/ 66 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

The Cuisle editorial committee - Damien Blake, Maria Brosnan, Jane Dignam, Jimmy Healy and James Lawless

LESSONS FROM LEMASS

HOW THE CHALLENGES THAT FACED LEMASS IN REBUILDING THE PARTY ALSO APPLY TODAY

The task of rebuilding facing Fianna Fáil today resonates with that faced by the party when power was lost in 1948 and 1954. Back then the work was spearheaded by the inspirational future Taoiseach Seán Lemass, a historical colossus who requires no lengthy introduction.

But sitting back in a spirit of misty-eyed sentimentality and lauding Lemass's achievements is of little practical use. Instead, there are concrete lessons - both positive and negative - to be learnt from the way Lemass went about rebuilding the party after electoral defeat.

Fianna Fáil's defeat in 1948 stunned Lemass. At forty-eight years of age, and after sixteen years of continuous Ministerial power, the new reality was hard to stomach. But, characteristically, he rolled up his sleeves and set about the task of reorganisation.

With de Valera departing Ireland for a worldwide 'anti-partition crusade', Lemass was elected Vice-Chairman and Deputy Leader of Fianna Fáil. Convinced that party discipline was to blame for the defeat, he turned the screw internally, announcing that no motions could be tabled in the Dáil without the consent of the party hierarchy. Absenteeism from the chamber was no longer tolerated. He swiftly established an internal 'discipline committee' and chaired a new central steering committee.

Having streamlined the party structure, Lemass turned to the darker arts of political smear: an overlooked aspect of his success in undermining and destabilising Ireland's first coalition government.

In his eyes, Fianna Fáil, the sole guarantors of Irish national resurgence, had been displaced by a dolly mix of parties headed by an unholy alliance of right and left (Fine Gael and Labour). In Dáil debates and, most significantly, through an anonymously authored column in The Irish Press newspaper, Lemass cleverly exploited disagreements between the two main coalition parties.



In his eyes Fianna Fáil had been displaced by a dolly mix of parties headed by an unholy alliance of right and left.

To closely study Lemass's rhetoric in opposition between 1948 and 1951 is to be treated to a master-class in political mischief. At its heart is the relentless emphasis on the left/right tension that always characterises Labour/Fine Gael-led coalitions.

Lemass's assault was twin-pronged. Firstly, he claimed, coalition rule was harming Ireland's global standing. With strange bedfellows sharing power, the country was in a state of 'general paralysis'. Fianna Fáil may have made mistakes, but at least they did so in a forthright, forward-looking manner. With an uneasy situation in Europe and the world, coalitions were simply 'not designed for crisis administration'.

Secondly, Lemass concentrated on the domestic tensions caused by such an ideologically antagonistic coalition. He endlessly portrayed the Labour party, the smaller partner in government, as being swallowed up in the jaws of Fine Gael and in the process losing its radicalism. With Fine Gael controlling the key finance portfolio, Lemass repeatedly hit that same raw nerve: Labour's impotence alongside its larger coalition partner.

Lemass's combination of tougher discipline and shrewd political sniping seemed to have worked with the return to power in 1951. Throughout the campaign, Lemass repeated his theme: 'A Fine Gael government would have been bad enough. A Labour Party government tolerable. A government that was one thing one day and another the next has produced only confusion and ineffectiveness.'

However, three years later, Fianna Fáil once again tasted defeat at the polls. Remarkably, Lemass reacted by appointing himself Director of Organisation. Thus began the most romantic episode in Lemass's later career: he resumed the hard slog of the 1920s; setting out in his car to survey the position of Fianna Fáil around the country, armed for long journeys with his pipe, tobacco, and several chocolate bars.

In rebuilding the party from the grassroots, Lemass's emphasis was now on youth.

Lemass's elimination of complacency and self-interest within the party was also instrumental in ensuring the party returned to power quickly.

He appointed an Organisation Committee composed of young men such as Charles Haughey, Brian Lenihan senior, and Jack Lynch. He did not want Fianna Fáil candidates who had been taken 'off the shelf' or 'out of the attic'. Instead, he wanted a party 'virile in personnel and spirit', not composed of cobwebbed relics.

In practical terms, then - as now - emigration harmed this youthful thrust and, as Lemass confessed, getting young people involved was 'very uphill work'. And yet he persevered doggedly. Members of Lemass's team attended local party meetings around the country. Then they reported back to him on the strengths and weaknesses of local organisation. Lemass himself undertook marathon red-eyed drives to far-flung corners of Ireland. More familiar with dictating national economic policy, Lemass became embroiled in maddeningly myopic local issues such as parish pumps, potholes, and pool tables.

Centrally, Lemass established 'Comh Comhairle Atha Cliath' in 1954, an elite new branch concerned exclusively with higher matters of policy. Under his influence, the National Executive now scrutinised candidates much more closely. Neither did Lemass take the heat off the coalition, continuing to bait Labour in particular and combat accusations

of Fianna Fáil cronyism by highlighting any whiff of political bias in the allocation of positions by Fine Gael.

In 1957, of course, it was mission accomplished once more as Fianna Fáil returned to power. So what lessons are to be learnt from Lemass's period of rebuilding and reorganisation in opposition?

On the one hand, the negative points are clear. Lemass's way of doing things was more attuned to the leadership style of the day and, as such, would today be regarded as unduly top-down. In vetoing the selection of certain locally-elected candidates, Lemass drew accusations of Dublin-centrism, sexism and 'dictatorship'; increased surveillance was in some cases met with increased disaffection by a weary membership. Moreover, Lemass's preoccupation with smearing his political rivals blinkered him to certain measures taken by the coalition government that were in the national interest.

On the other hand, that very engagement with the party's grassroots, that 'chicken and chips' (or more aptly for Lemass, 'chocolate

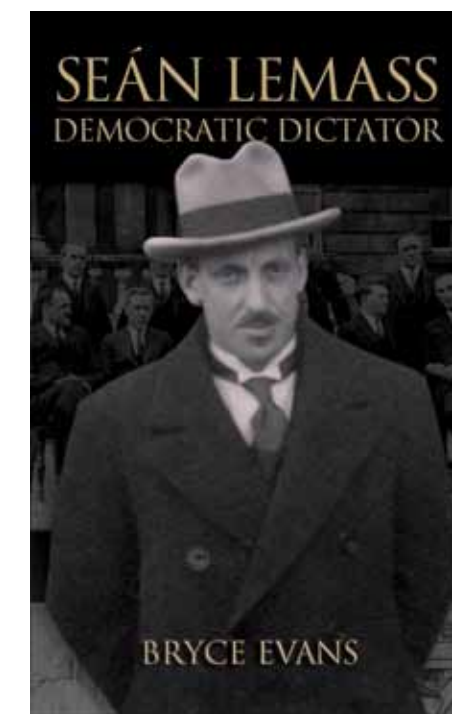
bar and pipe') approach remains a blueprint for the Fianna Fáil party today. Lemass's elimination of complacency and self-interest within the party was also instrumental in ensuring the party returned to power quickly.

His emphasis on youth is surely relevant today: our current generation of young people is at a historic cross-roads and must be elevated to key decision-making roles within our political system more broadly. Neither can the lessons to be learnt from Lemass's darker, Machiavellian side be overlooked. Some of his criticisms of coalition government were valid and resound today, not least the tactic of highlighting Labour's impotence when shackled to Fine Gael.

That very engagement with the party's grassroots remains a blueprint for the Fianna Fáil party today.

Lastly, however, it is essential that Fianna Fáil today acquaint itself properly with its icon, taking into account his weaknesses as well as his strengths, before letting him rest in peace and moving on. While many of his methods can be usefully applied, contexts have shifted rapidly. In this regard, name-dropping Lemass is something the great man himself would have heartily disapproved of and should be ditched as the party looks to the future. This, perhaps, is the greatest lesson from Lemass as the party rebuilds today.

By Dr Bryce Evans, Lecturer in Modern History, Liverpool Hope University and author of the best-selling 'Seán Lemass: Democratic Dictator'



THE DUBLIN WEST BYE ELECTION

THE CANDIDATE TEMPLATE

September 2011. Dublin West. The local organisation was still reeling from the death of Brian Lenihan. Worse, they would soon face a Bye Election. Given the horrific year the party had experienced there was little hope that we would perform well.

That was the expectation going into the campaign. Everyone was writing off our candidate, Cllr. David McGuinness. The pundits reckoned we had no hope. But they were wrong.

From the very off you could tell the mood had changed. Gone was the outrage that had existed last February. Instead of having people slam the doors in our faces or shouting

We might live in the information age, but Twitter and Facebook can't replace the face to face connection with people in their own communities, looking them in the eye and asking them for a vote.

There was enthusiasm for David McGuinness, and praise for his record of commitment and participation in the local communities. There was great encouragement taken from the Fianna Fáil supporters that we met, who are really urging the party forward.

A woman at her door told me that she and her family had always voted Fianna Fáil until the General Election of this year when they felt the couldn't, but she said that they would support David in the Bye Election. This story was repeated at other doors with people wanting Fianna Fáil to rebuild, to represent them, and to provide a meaningful and constructive opposition in the Dáil.

Understandably, we also met people who were apathetic or resentful of politics but, once approached, most people were willing to engage with us and consider the future direction of politics and the role Fianna Fáil has to play.

As an ordinary member of Fianna Fáil, going on the canvass was a genuinely informative experience for me. It was an opportunity to articulate what Fianna Fáil represents, what the party has to offer, and what it is doing to respond to the current challenges in the country.

Canvassing is a chance to talk to people, to show them that the Fianna Fáil party wants to engage with them and is interested in their ideas and opinions, not just their votes.

I'd like to say thank you to all the people who opened their doors and gave us their time.

The results spoke for themselves. David secured 7,742 first preference votes, finishing second. Well clear of the Fine Gael candidate who trailed in fourth position.

This was a great result, completely in contrast to the expectations of the pundits. It shows that the public does want to hear from our party. That a lot of people are prepared to listen to us once more.

And all this before Fine Gael and Labour bring in their first austerity budgets.

Ashley Beston

To harbour any aspirations for party recovery, the shift in public sentiment that occurred from 2008 culminating last February must be matched by a shift within Fianna Fáil. That shift, in the form of the renewal process, was evident in the campaign and candidacy of David McGuinness over the course of his campaign but also in the three years previously since David first stood in 2009.

Dublin West was an example of how to do things right in the new world. David was an example of a candidate hewn from a new cloth, whose first election was in 2009, who is more familiar with local community halls than with Government Buildings and who is a part of the fabric of his constituency.

David's strong showing has lifted the morale of the organisation

David's strong showing has lifted the morale of the organisation nationally and has confirmed to our detractors that reports of our demise have indeed been greatly exaggerated. David and the team gathered around him had energy, enthusiasm and, perhaps most critically, no baggage to check in. Whilst David had been actively involved in local politics and already built a strong profile from his council election and work on the ground before and after, he could shoulder none of the "blame" that many of the public retain about the party's previous actions in government.

He is a solid worker on the ground, a committed local activist, and has a genuine connection with community groups, sports clubs and real local networks all across the constituency. Though still a relative newcomer he had already proven his work rate and ability and was received on the canvass with a mix



Cllr. David McGuinness in his Dublin West constituency

of curiosity, warmth, engagement and most importantly open minds and open doors.

The anger of just six months before was simply not being directed at this new young contender.

The lessons from all this are clear. Fianna Fáil has a future once it is prepared to change to a new generation of candidates, active in their communities, busy on the ground, committed to the best party traditions of public service. These traits should be matched by the political ability to engage the voters and the media on the issues of the day in an open, honest and intelligent manner.

Candidates must be capable and enthused and justify their selection. Candidates should not be chosen on the basis of preferment, family ties, internal networking ability or past glories. Candidates should be chosen who can and will engage on the ground and who can tell a new tale for Fianna Fáil.

Candidates demonstrating a genuine commitment to public service will receive a fair hearing from voters. Any perceptions of being "in it for the wrong reasons" will not be tolerated. (Perhaps the one upside of historically low poll ratings is that very few today in FF could be accused of self interest).

Another critical factor for any candidate selection process in future has to be work-rate. Candidates appearing "only at election time" will not get a hearing and will not get

elected. All candidates in 2014 should be on the ticket from at least a year out and should already be in the field and working in the trenches. David had a work rate as a community activist and as a recently elected councillor.

In the days when the party had a 40+% first preference vote, names could almost be pulled out of a hat to choose candidates with a still near certainty of getting elected. But the days of getting votes "for free" are long gone. The real battles in those days were internal, getting on the ticket was the hard part, after that the work was done and it was seen as all downhill after selection convention.

Not so in 2009, not so in 2011 and it will not be so in 2014. We need candidates that are prepared to and are already putting in trojan work on the ground; in the party, in the community and winning votes, inch by inch, week by week from the first to the last votes. Old fashioned graft is crucial and even in this age of social media and nightly Vincent Browne; there remains no substitute for the doorsteps for meeting and engaging with the people one to one.

Graft, intelligence, honesty and a good backup team will help a new generation of candidates begin the work of restoring Fianna Fáil's fortunes. All that as well as a raincoat and a good pair of shoes.

James Lawless

ENCOURAGING MORE WOMEN INTO FIANNA Fáil

REORGANISATION IN PARTY HEADQUARTERS

The disappointing result of the recent General Election was compounded when no female TDs were returned for Fianna Fáil. The subsequent election of Mary White and Averil Power to Seanad Éireann improved this situation slightly but it does not hide the fact that Fianna Fáil has a deficit of women at the highest levels.

Fianna Fáil also has to encourage more women at all levels of the party. We currently have 56 female councillors, representing approximately 15% of the party's local authority membership. While 34% of the overall party membership is female.

We are not the only party who have difficulties in this regard. All political parties in Ireland have struggled to ensure parity of representation from both genders. In fact only 91 women have been elected to Dáil Éireann since 1918. Only 12 women have served in Cabinet.

With just over 15% women's representation in Dáil Éireann, Ireland falls behind both the world average of 18% and the European Union average of 24% per cent.

As an integral part of the renewal of Fianna Fáil we must address this issue. As a party that strives to serve all in our society we must ensure that our representatives reflect the society they serve.

Party Leader Micheál Martin announced at the 2011 Arbour Hill Commemoration in April that the party will seek to run a female candidate in every electoral area at the next local elections. To make this a success we must ensure that new high calibre candidates are found.

Sometimes people decry this supposed favouritism, feeling that selection should be on merit only. In an ideal world this would be the case, but such arguments assume naively that all election candidates make it into politics 'on their own' coming from a level playing field. This is not reality.

Many candidates experience forms of advantage, some have family connections, some have access to significant campaign finances, some even secure favour from

retiring politicians or the party leadership, while some have a pre-existing strong local profile due to sporting fame or community involvement. These forms of advantage are considered normal and are rarely questioned.

Ireland has been regularly criticised for the low representation of women in elected office. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has recommended that Ireland introduce measures, such as gender quotas, to increase the number of women in public life.



Senator Averil Power, one of only two women representing Fianna Fáil in the Oireachtas.

In recent months this cause has been given timely political impetus with the establishment of a group dedicated to this issue. Determined to tackle the barriers to women participating in our political system, Niamh Gallagher and Michelle O'Donnell Keating set up Women for Election (www.womenforelection.ie) a non-partisan organisation whose vision is of an Ireland with balanced participation of women and men in political life.

In the 2011 Social Entrepreneurs Ireland Awards this organisation won a €200,000 bursary in support of their mission to increase the number of women running for and winning elections. They aim to make sure political parties have competent, prepared female candidates putting themselves forward for selection.

Last May, Minister Phil Hogan announced his intention to introduce legislation whereby political parties must ensure that 30% per cent of their candidates are women. If parties

fail to comply, they will lose 50% of their state funding. The proposed legislation is due to come into affect at the next General Election.

We need to get ahead of the game in this issue and reform Fianna Fáil to ensure that these targets are surpassed not in order to meet an arbitrary quota but because more than 30% of our best candidates are women.

In 2004 the Ard Fheis adopted gender equality recommendations which introduced a number of measures into the organisation. At least one third of delegates to conventions must be female, The Ard Chomhairle's Committee of Twenty is 50% female. Both genders must be represented on the officer board of your Comhairle Dáil or Comhairle Ceantair.

A midterm review of this project undertaken last year found that while significant improvements are evident, much progress is needed to address the more substantive problem of a lack of women candidates. Party Leader Micheál Martin has established a task force to address this deficit.

The group will examine issues such as:

- What changes should be made to the Fianna Fáil organisation in order to encourage more women to join the party and be actively involved?
- What supports such as election monitoring schemes, media training, etc should the party put in place for women who are interested in running in the Local and General Elections.
- What processes need to be put in place to ensure that the FF candidate selection process results in at least 30% of our candidates for the next General Election being female.
- What policy proposals should the party put forward at the national level to encourage more women to enter political life.

This task force is welcoming submissions from members. If you have any suggestions on this matter please write to the task force on gender equality c/o Fianna Fáil Headquarters, 65/ 66 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2 or e-mail genderequality@fiannafail.ie.

Niamh O'Shea

Following the disappointing performance by the party in February's General Election there was a dramatic downturn in the number of TDs and Senators serving the party in Leinster House.

There has also been a significant impact on the number of staff working for Fianna Fáil Headquarters, with the number of staff dropping from 35 to 17 since February. This follows the implementation of a voluntary redundancy programme.

Fianna Fáil's staffing costs are covered by state funding based on the number of Oireachtas members and the percentage first preference vote received. Due to the fall in the party vote and number of members elected, state funding dropped from €5.2 million per year in 2010 to €2.8 million for 2011 (see article on page 29 for more details). This meant cuts across the board, including to Fianna Fáil staff.

As Fianna Fáil General Secretary, Seán Dorgan explained to Cuisle, "Obviously the election results had a pretty significant knock on effect on the funding the party receives."

These were all very loyal and dedicated people who gave their time and went well beyond the call of duty over the last number of years.

"It effectively meant the funding was halved. Clearly the party has to operate within its means. The regrettable impact in terms of the party was we had to implement a significant cost reduction programme."

"We looked all of our budget lines and all of our expenses and cut them significantly. The most obvious and most difficult side of that was we had to implement a redundancy programme whereby 18 people left Fianna Fáil's employment over recent months."

Headquarters staff consists of two groupings. Those working specifically from Mount Street and those based in Leinster House and working in the party's press and research offices. Job losses were across all areas of the party's operations.

"These were all very loyal and dedicated people who gave their time and went well beyond the call of duty over the last number of years," Seán Dorgan added. "They were friends and colleagues, they were popular within the party and well known. Their loss was deeply felt and very regrettable but it was unfortunately essential that the party put in place a system that allows it to live within its means. That is what we had to do."

"In Mount Street we are in the process of reconfiguring the roles here. We have very limited resources but this has allowed us to look at what actually is the purpose of a party headquarters and a party staff in a modern political organisation. Clearly we have to communicate more frequently and more effectively with our members. Sometimes when you do more with less you might get a better result."

"Despite the reduction in staff however, we're determined to be effective. Our focus is on growing the organisation and on ensuring that Fianna Fáil is resourced and supported effectively to be the leading opposition party."

"While that means doing more with less, it is do-able. The requirements of the party in opposition are different from in government and we are determined to get that right."

The party is also hoping that the members might help fill the gap left by some of the staff who have left by volunteering to help out with various tasks.



Fianna Fáil Headquarters in Dublin.

"The roles we have require people and we are looking for people," Seán Dorgan continued. "So if there are members out there who have a few hours a week or a few hours a month and would like to offer that to the party to help us we'd be delighted to hear from them."

The roles we have require people and we are looking for people

Anyone wishing to volunteer for working in Fianna Fáil Headquarters or in other parts of the country should contact Seán Dorgan at 65/66 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2 or by emailing seandorgan@fiannafail.ie.

Jimmy Healy

CRISIS/OPPORTUNITY

WHY MEMBERS NEED TO START DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

One of the biggest shifts in culture that members must now adopt is from a hierarchical culture to a DIY one where if something needs to be done they should “Just Do It” rather than waiting for approval or an instruction that may never come. The loss of so many TDs has left many constituencies in limbo but this need not mean things grind to a halt.

Rather this is the time when more than ever members need to step up to the plate and start just taking the tasks on themselves. Despite media perception the collapse of the party in the last election was not an overnight one but a gradual one built up over a decade of neglect. One plus side of which is that those that remained are among the most committed and are ready now to assume responsibility now that the changing of the guard has come.

The party is now embarked on a quest to look back to its soul, to go back to basics, to reform the structures and to drive real change right across the party.

Prior problems had meant that the once fabled party machine had become derelict, not fit for use, no longer maintained and a large part of this decay had grown up from neglect by its owner. An assumption of power, a boom-time

tide, an element of franchise and personality politics all meant that the structures and machinery of a functioning party organisation had become unnecessary at best, an inconvenience at worst and that grass roots rasion d'être had become increasingly trying.

One either made it through the gap and became part of the all-powerful parliamentary party or one toiled at the bottom with little input or influence. Which are all some of the reasons the organisation found itself so unable to cope when the tsunami hit home as members views had long gone unheard.

However as is so often the case, within the problem also lies the solution. The crisis brought many forward, an empty bridge driving many members above the decks to take the wheel themselves. How many heroes of Fianna Fáil will emerge as the party renews?

Those activist members still exist across the country while many of the layers on top no longer do. The expected and seemingly unstoppable electoral disaster has happened and the party is out of government. Yet also “the monkey is off our backs” as the train is no longer hurtling towards the cliff edge dragging all carriages behind it, and whilst the party is now a smaller train, those on board now control their own destiny.

The loss of power has resulted in a clear-out, not only of the power players, but of those who cling to power, and has cleared a space where only the committed and the faithful now seek to tread. It would be naïveté in the extreme to think the defeat of Fianna Fáil would see a disappearance of mé féin culture in Irish politics overnight. That negative culture has not left politics any more than it has left human nature, but rather following the power, it has surely moved onto the ranks of Fine Gael and Labour, the new parties of power, where favours are owed, patronage exists and payback queues are in place.

But for Fianna Fáil, driven partly by base instinct of survival, but also partly driven by those who understand the darkest hour is always the one before the dawn, the party is now embarked on a quest to look back to its soul, to go back to basics, to reform the structures and to drive real change right across the party. Micheál Martin TD is embarked on a renewal tour across every corner of the island. Dormant cumainn are

reawakening and looking up with anticipation. The members are energised, the engagement is there and the will exists to rediscover ourselves and become a member-driven organisation once more.

The party is rediscovering democracy. A vacuum from the toppling of the oligarchs is now being filled by members re-emerging from the cold and finding voice. In every crisis there is opportunity. Replacing the sometimes suffocating rivalries of the past, there is every opportunity now for enthusiastic, interested, committed members to just start doing it themselves, to take the reins and start providing leadership in every cumann, parish and constituency in Ireland. The members must re-take the party and the process is long overdue.

A vacuum from the toppling of the oligarchs is now being filled by members re-emerging from the cold and finding voice.

In fact new members are now joining the party, post-election and right up to the present day. At this point in time no patronage is owed, no pot of gold exists rather a pot of debt. But Fianna Fáil post General Election is a party in rebuild, out of office and with no expectations, no favours owed and no spoils to be squabbled over. The free loaders are surely gone, the users and abusers vanished and what remains are the true soldiers of the rearguard, a legion of energised, capable and motivated members ready to take on what could be the biggest political project the country has ever seen. The rebuilding of Fianna Fáil. One member, one vote. One vote at a time.

James Lawless

USING OUR RESOURCES

HOW MAKING THE MOST OF OUR MEMBERS IS THE KEY TO REBUILDING THE PARTY

Despite living through three of the most horrific years of my membership of Fianna Fáil since I joined in 1998, I am still in no doubt that Fianna Fáil will not only survive as a political party, but recover to being a viable, strong party of government. Where does my confidence come from?

It's definitely not coming from the opinion polls or indeed the media. Quite simply - my confidence comes from talking to ordinary members of the party, either in real life or via other means.

There are just too many of us. However, we all must look at our respective roles within the party and assess how we can do more to help.

US Democrat politician and political commentator, Robert Reich once said, “Your most precious possession is the people you have working there, and what they carry around in their heads, and their ability to work together.” This is something we all must remember and place firmly at the centre of our party's renewal.

For too long, most Fianna Fáil members have been mollicoddled by a large, all-powerful and far-reaching headquarters, and while they gave out about them at various times, most never ever did anything to change the status quo because it was easier that way. Things must change. Things must change or else we can forget about being a large, political movement with an influence on everyday politics on this island.

Going hand-in-hand with all the internal soul searching and naval gazing which is ongoing as we speak must be a distinct realisation that all cannot continue as it has for the past 20 years in terms of our organisational back up. Gone is the state funding based on having over 100 members of the Oireachtas and with this should go the unwillingness of a lot of members to use their innate skills and talents for the benefit of the party.

Yes we lost a serious number of Oireachtas members last February, but the number of

It is up to the members of Fianna Fáil to stand up, front and centre and take a leading role in ensuring our party is bigger and better than our competitors.

TDs and Senators our party has does not define the strength of the organisation. In practically every single cumann throughout the country, we have accountants, teachers, logistic experts, people with practical skills in design and marketing and by and large, we don't make use of them.

Whether this has come about because of the massive supports we received from being the dominant government party over the past 85 years or the fact that we failed to see that the organisation is a distinct entity from participation in government. Regardless of the why, we must now look at the how of getting our members involved at every level of renewing Fianna Fáil.

Politics in Ireland is becoming more and more professional with every election. Political parties are going to find it very difficult to raise the resources needed to pay for these services. As such, it is up to the members of Fianna Fáil to stand up, front and centre and take a leading role in ensuring our party is bigger and better than our competitors in everything that we do.

Why is it that we are happy to fork out significant sums of money to companies to perform tasks that I have no doubt members in the party would dearly love to do for free or at least for cost price? By setting us free from these costs and engaging in these activities together in the pursuit of common goals, we all take ownership of the revitalisation of our movement.

We need to audit each and every member to see what skills and experiences they can bring to the table. Every member should be contacted, preferably by email as Oireachtas envelopes are scare, asking them to outline what they can bring to the mix. We have somewhere between 50,000 and 60,000 members in the party. Surely we could use all these individual skills and put them to use.

In order for us to put our case to the people again at the next election, it is imperative that we know, within ourselves, what skills we can rely on.

Let us once again create a truly national movement, built on the solid foundations of an energised and skilled membership. A national movement that relies on its own skills rather than the skills of hired help and one which puts its members at the heart of everything it does. This is the chance most of us have been waiting for - and moaning about - for a very long time. Let's not waste it.

Donnacha Maguire



Former Minister of State, Seán Haughey presents a bust of Donogh O'Malley to Fianna Fáil on behalf of the Haughey family. The bust was made in 1968. Seán Dorgan accepted the bust on behalf of the party.

ONE MEMBER/ONE VOTE

At the next Ard Fheis in February 2012, the members of Fianna Fáil will be asked to vote on a set of rule changes that will make major changes to the way the organisation of the party operates. The main change will be the proposed introduction of a ‘one member, one vote’ system.

Adopting this approach will make a major difference to all units of the party. Instead of having delegates from each cumann, ‘one member, one vote’ will give all members of the party the opportunity to vote at selection conventions, at Ard Fheiseanna and at the election of officer boards for Chomhairlí Ceantair and Chomhairlí Dail Ceantair.

Ahead of the formal proposals on ‘one member, one vote’ being brought before the Ard Fheis, the party is currently undergoing a consultation process regarding the proposals. The first step in that was the recent publication by the Ard Chomhairle of an initial consultation document entitled “Organisational Reform Proposals”.

while there are many strengths to the organisation, there are many Fianna Fáil cumainn not fully functioning.

This document set out a number of recommendations for the future operational structure of the party. The major points included:

- The Fianna Fáil organisation would move to a one member, one vote system to

replace the delegate votes per cumann at convention.

- Each member of at least 12 months standing, who is a valid active member of a registered cumann, will be entitled to vote at cumann meetings, Comhairle Ceantair meetings, Comhairle Dail Cheantair meetings, AGMS, candidate selection conventions and Ard Fheiseanna.
- A clear, effective route to membership will be put in place for new applicants looking to join the party.
- Those unwilling to engage in political activity for the party cannot be considered voting members of the party. They will instead be registered as individual members/ supporters with Fianna Fáil HQ. Provision will be made for those who are no longer physically able to remain actively involved and retain their voting rights.
- Each member will pay a modest annual subscription to Fianna Fáil HQ. The subscription fee will be set by the Ard Chomhairle. Individuals who don’t pay the fee may remain members of their cumann but will not have voting rights.
- Cumainn will be asked to register with Fianna Fáil HQ every January and make a declaration of its activities, membership and finances. The financial declaration is to ensure compliance with the Standards in Public Office regulations.
- Cumainn which are inactive or paper cumainn will be asked to merge with other local cumainn.
- Chomhairlí Ceantair will be asked to register every February and hold their AGMs in the first quarter of the year. They should meet at least six times per year with at least two of these meetings being open to the general public in a “Town Hall” style. A social element should also be built into its annual programme.
- Chomhairlí Dail Cheantair will also be asked to register every February and hold their AGMs in the first quarter of the year.

- The Comhairle Dail Cheantair management structure will be headed by a constituency manager to replace the chairperson and an officer board, all of whom will be selected by the members. The officer board will also include a secretary and chairpersons of four activity based sub committees: political activity and communication, finance and compliance, recruitment and membership development and Ógra constituency development.

- Constituency delegates and Directors of Elections will also be expected to undertake formal responsibilities.

- Each unit of the party should have an email address for internal and public communications. Social media and email should also be used to enhance member communications.

The document also contains a number of other proposals which should result in major changes to how the party operates. These include:

- Fianna Fáil HQ will organise annual training days for all cumainn officers.
- There is a commitment to improve communications throughout the party.

- Members and public representatives will be encouraged to campaign and to distribute party or candidate literature door to door outside of elections.

- Specific resources will be set aside for setting up a Dublin team to help re-establish the party in the Dublin area.

“The consultation document is based on two separate recent reports carried out by Gerard Collins and Chris Flood into the strengths and weaknesses of our party organisation,” according to Fianna Fáil General Secretary, Seán Dorgan. “Both reports clearly found that while there are many strengths to the organisation, there are many Fianna Fáil cumainn not fully functioning.”

“Both Chris Flood and Gerard Collins found that there are quite a few cumainn that make little worthwhile contribution to the work of

A lot of members have views on this subject and it’s great to see so many members taking an active involvement in helping the party renew.

the party. This was supported by the views expressed by many different members and party officers in different parts of the country who have strong local knowledge of how the party is operating.”

“The purpose of the proposals is to help renew and open up the party.”

The document was distributed to all cumainn, Chomhairlí Ceantair and Chomhairlí Dail Ceantair secretaries and emailed to all registered members of the organisation. Members were asked to send in their views on the document by 4th November.

“We’ve had a huge number of submissions based on the document, which the National Executive will study,” Mr. Dorgan added. “A lot of members have views on this subject and it’s great to see so many members taking an active involvement in helping the party renew.”

“The next step is to bring these various submissions together. They will shortly be put to the Ard Chomhairle. Based on that meeting the Ard Chomhairle will circulate the final recommendations to go before the Ard Fheis in February. These will be sent out to all members of the party during December for discussion in advance of the Ard Fheis,” Mr. Dorgan concluded.

The thinking was that we need to create a structure that will better reflect how Fianna Fáil operates.

A copy of the initial consultation document is available by email from Fianna Fáil Headquarters or can be accessed on <http://www.scribd.com/doc/66952388/Organisational-Reform>

Jimmy Healy

AR AN BHFÓD

Cnag ar an doras—an feithimh—fuaim na h-oscailte—aghaidh an vótáilí, agus ansin deis chur in iúil ar duine ár bhfís, an t-aon seans amháin sa lá atá linn. Seo an láthair catha mar a bhí, mar atá, mar a bheidh go síoraí. Tá ár dtodhchaí, cosúil leis an am atá thart ar an bhfód inár mbailte, sráidbhailte agus amuigh faoin tuath.

Ar dtús Fhianna Fáil, bunaíodh ar cruth seanÓglaigh na hÉireann í, le cumann i ngach paróiste agus bunaithe ar saoránacht ghníomhach. D’athraíodh brí The Volunteers ó bhrí míleata chuig ghníomh pobail. Tá dóchas sa dhúchas. Ba féidir gluaiseacht láidir náisiúnta a bhunú as an bpraiseach catha caillte, is féidir gluaiseacht a athbhunú anois. Tá stair fhada ar an bhfód i ngach pobal in Éirinn againn—agus is iad na pobail seo todhchaí ár dtíre.

Níl aiséirí an Páirtí chun teacht trí athrú meoin sna meain cumairsáide—níl ár gcinniúint de shuim acu—tá aiséirí chun teacht trí athrú dearcaidh ar an bhfód i measc an pobail. Tá an dualgas orainnse mar bhaill na ngluaiseachta a bheith ábhartha agus fiú riachtanach i ngach aon bhaile, ceantar agus contae.

Agus ár mbunaitheoirí ag taisteil timpeall na tíre, bhain siad amach spás i saol poiblí na hÉireann do ghluaiseacht poblachtánach leathan a h-ionadaíonn na ndaoine—daoine de gach saghas, rang, creidimh, is ar eile. Tá sé de dhith ag ár sochaí go mbeidh an t-ionadaíocht agus an tuisceant seo ar fáil arís, mar a bhí. Ní fiú polaitíocht muna bhfuil baint idir an Oireachtas agus riachtanais na ndaoine. Foghlaimítear i bhfad níos mó as siúil sráide sna bailte, as bualadh cnag ar doirse, as déanamh comhrá le cairde ná as léigh nuachtáin á insint an scéal céanna lá i ndiaidh lae. Agus foghlaimítear níos mó amuigh sa domhan mór ná ar líne nó ag cruinniú cumainn ag caint linn féin. Is ionaid foghlama agus scaipthe tuaraim iad clubanna spóirt, grúpaí pobail is mar sin de.

Ba féidir a rá gur chaill Fianna Fáil a croí le linn na blianta fada cumhachta—cumhacht a bhí bunaithe ar saibhreas na tíre, agus a chuaigh i bhfad ó riachtanais an saoil. Ba chroí é ghnáthmhuintir na hÉireann lena mianaidhmeanna agus a bhfís, agus ghlac siad linn. Ní fiú faic Fianna Fáil gan tacú leathan láidir ó gach rang agus gné den sochaí. Caithfidh seachaint ó polaisaithe a churann gné amháin den phobal i gcoinne ghnéithe eile, mar is ní neart go chur le chéile agus drochrud na daoine a scoilt. Le aigne ar oscailt, intinn macánta agus cluas éisteachta, caithfidh muid dul go dtí ár ndaoine á cheistiú céard atá ar iarraidh anois ón tír agus muid ag dul ar aghaidh le chéile.

Ní féidir linn fanacht go dtí go n-athraíonn an scéal, tá orainn é a athrú. Tá orainn é seo a dhéanamh go sciobtha agus i slí agus ba féidir linn a bheith bródúil asainn féin.

Joe Byrne

REFORM AT THE TOP

THE NEED TO RESTRUCTURE THE ARD CHOMHAIRLE

I recently learned that there are nearly a hundred people on the Fianna Fáil National Executive/ Ard Chomhairle. This body is the highest authority within Fianna Fáil, responsible for its success and overseeing all aspect of its administration.

It is answerable only to the Ard Fheis. We rarely hear of its activities except when it suddenly emerges centre stage to exercise its power to make decisions that can change the course of Irish politics.

Its most famous hour was undoubtedly the expulsion of Dessie O'Malley from Fianna Fáil in the 80s back when it seemed as if it really was at the heart of running Fianna Fáil. In recent years the Ard Chomhairle has lost its good name and seems peripheral to the real decisions. Some of its members seem to court publicity and self promotion at the expense of the party's reputation.

Possibly its worst moment in the past few years was the decision to ignore members' wishes and to select local election candidates by interview. Our party rules clearly vest responsibility for electoral strategy with the Ard Chomhairle.

Since that fateful decision many of its members have claimed that they weren't involved or that they didn't know the consequences. No one on the Ard Chomhairle has accepted responsibility for failing the membership. This ineptness isn't a defence. This decision and the clear evidence that our National Executive does not provide leadership to the party proves we must look at every facet of its existence.

It must be asked what does this body do? Who actually runs the show? How can executive power possibly be properly vested in such a large group? Do all the members have the political expertise and capacity to rebuild Fianna Fáil and return it to the centre of Irish political life?

Do they really know what they are doing or as I suspect is the large size of this committee an opportunity for the party leadership to obfuscate, confuse and escape from real scrutiny. Who really runs Fianna Fáil?

I suspect that the Ard Chomhairle is not fit for purpose. An executive should have authority and also responsibilities. It must

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be accountable and effective. Our National Executive does none of this.

Our parliamentary party (a body that isn't even mentioned in the party's rules) seem to make all the key decisions. Party members had no say in whether Fianna Fáil should have contested the Presidential Election.

Party members were not consulted on our stance in the referendums. They were powerless to intervene in the disastrous course of action taken by the last Government. When people say Fianna Fáil wrecked the country I get angry. Many of us saw the destruction of our party coming too and it seemed were powerless to stop the train wreck. Our executive must shoulder the blame for once again being inept.

The structures of the Ard Chomhairle must also be examined. Can anyone explain why it is necessary for each constituency to have a representative?

Does a "constituency delegate" really add to the running of the party bringing special expertise to its governance? Could the secretary not just send an update back to each CDC officer board? Do the members of the Committee of Twenty generate election strategy or are they just experts in getting themselves elected at the Ard Fheis?

Do the myriad other delegates question and analyse party strategy and policy decision? Or do they just troop up to meetings and sit dumbly delighted so as to be able to tell their mates they were at a meeting in Leinster House with some TDs and the party leader.

Do they do anything between meetings? The Ard Chomhairle should be the final arbiter on our behalf on major policy decisions such as whether we should run a presidential candidate.

We are a party in serious trouble. We need to get real. To get out of this mess we need to know who's making the decisions and we need to have confidence in them.

Let's have a small executive. It should have real powers and should command the respect of the parliamentary party. Such an executive must then be held to account by the organisation.

Perhaps the party needs a board of directors and then a larger council which meets a few times a year to hold this board to account. Perhaps that larger council could have regional representation like the current National Executive but the executive could be made up of people with specific expertise and abilities.

It is regrettable the reforms suggested for the organisation to date to not go as far as to reform the governance of the organisation at the top levels.

One member one vote as a proposal has merit, but it wasn't the cumann's that destroyed Fianna Fáil and we'd be foolish to think this is the panacea to cure our malaise.

We need proper leadership structures with a democratic core and genuine accountability. I hope that this oversight in not offering reform at the top will be rectified before the Ard Fheis. Otherwise organisation reform is just moving the chairs on the titanic.

In the meantime there is one thing we as ordinary party members can all do. The members of the Ard Chomhairle will be up for election at the Ard Fheis in a few months time. Lets not re-elect the same old faces just because they've been doing the job for years and they're solid party men or women.

Changing the delegates should not be seen as a personal vendetta against current incumbents. It is just a case that a change and a fresh approach is needed. Lets shake it up and put onto the Ard Chomhairle people with new vision and a willingness to work for change in Fianna Fáil.

If the Ard Chomhairle can't reform itself then we should reform it for them.

Frank Brannigan.

MICHAEL FITZPATRICK RIP

It is with a mixture of sadness and pride that I pen this tribute to a friend and mentor and a man who inspired all of us here in the party in North Kildare and beyond.

Michael Fitzpatrick passed away on 14th October after a brave struggle with motor neurone disease. In the course of his political career he served as Teachta Dála for North Kildare, as councillor for the Clane electoral area and as Mayor of County Kildare.

Michael was a man of wisdom, courage, honesty and above all of public service. He was also very much a family man and our thoughts are with Maureen and Darragh at this time.

Michael typified the traditional values of Fianna Fáil and was a true party man. He never let politics define him though. I remember one heated confrontation with the local opposition. It was only after that battle had run its course when he mentioned, to my surprise, a friendship with the other party involved. "Sure you'd hardly fall out over a bit of politics," were his exact words. It was a lesson to me in the collegiality of politics and never letting the human side become secondary to a political position.

Neither have I ever before or since seen opposition politicians share the stage at a Fianna Fáil election celebration. Yet it was a mark of the man that such was the case the night of his General Election celebration in Allenwood GAA Hall. A quintessential party man but one held in as high regard by the other side as by his own. Indeed it was the Fine Gael Mayor of Kildare who led out politicians and public figures from all persuasions in Michael's cortège. His loss will

be felt across the county including in electoral areas outside his own which could never vote for him but which he often served regardless.

Michael considered it a huge honour to be elected to Leinster House and to Kildare County Council before it. He called it straight and was not afraid to take an unpopular position on either a local or national matter when he felt it was right. He also believed passionately in the discipline of party and of government and his job was to support a Fianna Fáil government and a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach whether it was popular or profitable.

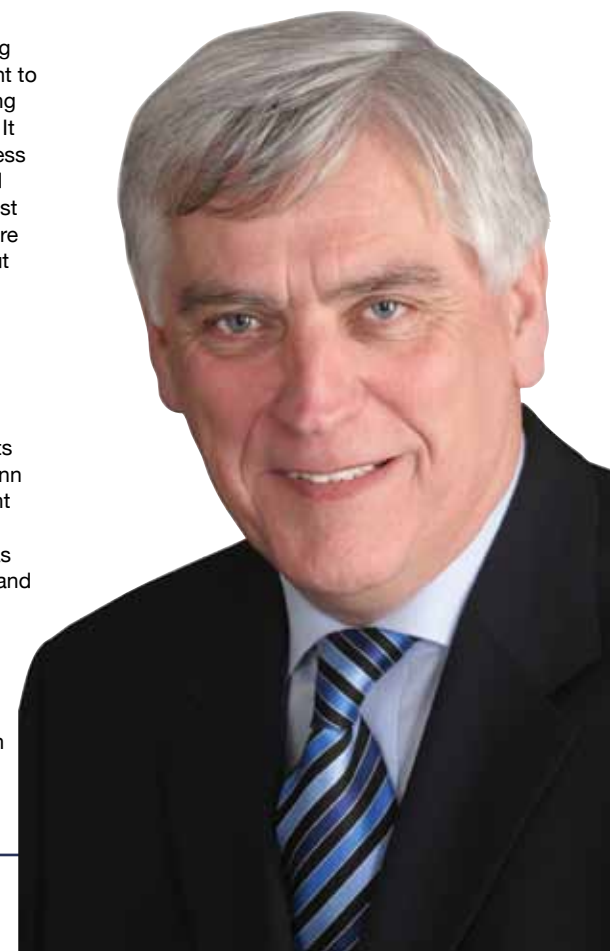
If Michael had a flaw it was a political failing but a human virtue; he was always reluctant to publicly take credit for work done, preferring quiet satisfaction in a task performed well. It was more about the end result than the press release yet he was the hidden hand behind so many minor miracles. His canvassers lost track of the number of doors knocked where they found he had already been at work but always quietly and without fuss.

When Michael became ill his efforts immediately turned to helping others with the condition and he set about a series of fundraisers and awareness initiatives. He never stopped representing his constituents or his party in either Kildare or in Dáil Éireann where he continued a near hundred percent attendance, surely surpassing many in the whole of their health. Above all Michael was always encouraging and upbeat to others and remained positive about all things in life.

It was an honour to know and to support Michael Fitzpatrick. The greatest tribute to Michael now would be the restoration and renewal of the party he loved and served in North Kildare. We will not let him down.

James Lawless

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of wisdom, courage,
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TAKING THE PULSE

CUISLE TALKS TO MICHEÁL MARTIN TD

For our first edition, Cuisle secured an interview with Fianna Fáil party leader, Micheál Martin TD. Anxious to get responses on the issues the members of Fianna Fáil are talking about, we invited members to email through their questions. The response was overwhelming with questions coming in from members based all around the country.

Cuisle would like to thank everyone who submitted their questions. While it was not possible in the time provided to put every question submitted to Micheál, we hope we covered a lot of the subjects raised. Below is a transcript of some of the highlights from the interview. The full version of the audio will be made available on the Fianna Fáil website.

Putting the questions to Micheál on behalf of the members was Cuisle's Jane Dignam.

In your opinion what is the single greatest challenge facing the Fianna Fáil party?

MM: There are a number of challenges. I don't put one above the others. I genuinely believe there are 5 to 6 major strands to the renewal of the party. The first is a reevaluation of the core principles of the party. Update them and make sure they respond to the needs of the Irish people in the 21st Century and in the decades ahead and that work is underway.

From that will flow the policy challenge which means we have to develop fresh ideas and fresh policies for the people. There is an organisation and structural plan which we have circulated to the members which relates to 'one member one vote'.

There is the communications challenge which is an enormous challenge, which is to do with internal communications and we're working on that and external communications.

Then there is the role of the parliamentary party and its connectivity with the other levels of the party, with the councillors and the other members of the party.

I think the most important and most immediate priority is the core values but perhaps the most challenging one is probably more the communications area in terms of interaction with the modern media, what that means, online, print and broadcasting.

In relation to ordinary members, do you think they still have a say in the future direction of the party?

MM: Well I'm taking steps to ensure that members of the party will have a very significant say in the party. It is their party. The party belongs to the members in the first instance.

I spent the whole weekend with the Ógra members [this interview took place on Tuesday 8th November, just after the Ógra conference]. It was remarked on that I spent all Friday and all Saturday with the delegates because I wanted to hear what people were saying. It turned out the sessions were very good anyway in terms of the banking/ financial one, the education one and we had a very good town hall meeting on Friday night.

As you know I've toured the country. So members will have a say on policy. We've already asked people to send their ideas to renewal@fiannafail.ie and

also Darragh Calleary TD has his own email address as well in terms of policy suggestions. So we're asking members really to contribute to policy.

A lot of grassroots members were talking about the fact that we didn't run a presidential candidate. Do you still think it was the right decision?

MM: Absolutely. I'm very clear from a strategic perspective that it was the right decision at this time for the party. I've given the reasons for it. We have to take onboard the lessons of the General Election result.

Our capacity needs to be enhanced by that I mean our organisational structural capacity needs to be enhanced, our financial capacity, but that's doable. I'm also very conscious that in urban Ireland the party needs to be strengthened.

There's a lot of issues that we need to sorted.

The financial one was important because you can't go another €750,000 into debt on top of the €2.2 million electoral deficit in terms of expenditure. All of that would have retarded the renewal of the party. Instead we concentrated an exclusive focus on the Dublin West Bye Election with very good results.

I'm taking steps to ensure that members of the party will have a very significant say in the party. It is their party.

It shows what we can do if we pick certain areas, that we ruthlessly focus on and collectively work towards an end and an objective and we can achieve it. We came second in Dublin West against all the odds.

Are you surprised by how little reform Fine Gael have done given the promises they made in advance of the election?

MM: Well I felt the promises they made in themselves were not substantive, they were superficial. Secondly I'm amazed at the

absolutely lack of an agenda towards reform that's coming from the Government.

The Government, actually if you look at all their actions since they came in demonstrate one thing, they didn't actually have an agenda. I mean Enda Kenny did say his focus was totally on polling day. That's the truest statement he ever made. Because once the election was over they've taken the name plaques of our economic policy and they basically haven't come up with anything original themselves.

What do you see as the next three steps towards the further integration of North and South from a party point of view and from a national point of view?

MM: Well from a national point of view I think the review of the North/ South bodies needs to be published and acted on. I think we need to first of all consolidate what's been achieved there and add an additional body or two if that is required.

In terms of Fianna Fáil in the North, I commissioned a paper recently just to do some blue sky thinking about it. Since the Good Friday Agreement we do have an obligation to have a presence in the North, the exact nature of that presence has to be defined. I think we have to walk before we run on this one.

I think the initial announcement was done without doing our homework and that has been a problem. So we have to go about this in a very earnest but [by putting in place] a programme, you know we need to know what we're doing.

You can't just go headlong into it but I would like to think in the first instance we could create a policy presence in the North. Either a think tank or a group of people who have an effect on everyday policy as it manifests itself in the North, from the economy, to social policy and make a contribution to the political debate on that account.

We have a good cumann in Queens. I'm going to visit Queens shortly and meet with other members of the party in the North. We have enthusiastic members in the North. I will listen to them as well in terms of how we go forward.

When do you think it is likely that we would start contesting elections?

MM: I think it is some time away to be honest.



Fianna Fáil Leader Micheál Martin TD takes members' questions from Cuisle's Jane Dignam
Below left: Micheál Martin TD, Leader of Fianna Fáil.

In the party political broadcast before the last General Election you promoted yourself as a fighter. Do you think you have delivered on that promise?

MM: I do, a strategic fighter. It's an important point, I don't go flaming all over the place. You've got to in the first instance size up the challenge that's ahead of you. Identify the strategic steps that you need to take to win and be very clear about that and consistent about it and bring people with you.

My style sometimes gets criticised but I'm very clear where the party should go, what we should do. I'm not impatient. Many people within the party are impatient. People do say to me in the first couple of months, you know you haven't really come in and beat up on Enda and all that kind of thing. And I said that's not the way, that's not what we're about. We really are about creating a constructive, robust, but above all realistic alternative to the present Government.

What measures are Fianna Fáil taking to counteract the negative image being portrayed of the party in the media?

MM: Well I mentioned earlier probably one of the biggest challenges we have is the whole media, communications agenda. We will make our representations to the media. But ultimately we've got to create our own agenda and I think fundamentally Fianna Fáil and Fianna Fáil members must be the communicators on behalf of the party.

That means our internal communication channels must be far stronger, more effective

in the future so that members can actually communicate to the various channels out there. And I think the membership must become much more active in terms of communicating directly themselves to radio and various media programmes, in terms of articulating their views and their perspectives on issues and also on the party.

Were you disappointed that so many of your Ministerial colleagues decided to resign and not contest the General Election.

MM: I was disappointed. I mean I understand why some did. Some had very genuine reasons. I think the problem was it all happened so quickly. It came in the aftermath of the Christmas period when we weren't ready for it. It had a devastating impact on morale when such a large number in quick succession from January said they weren't running. We didn't even have replacement candidates.

So I think that had a devastating impact at the time. And I think that it was a bit like the top players on the Man United team or the Dublin team deciding they weren't playing in the All Ireland Final or in the Champions League and they were left without replacements in time to get prepared. So I think it had an impact on our performance.

For space purposes the questions and answers from this interview have been condensed. The full sound file of the interview is available on the Fianna Fáil website.

AN ALL IRELAND PARTY?

FIANNA Fáil AND THE NORTH

Fianna Fáil – “an páirtí poblactacha”. It’s in the name. It was founded as an Irish republican party opposing the partition of the six counties of Ulster. The first aim of its Córú clearly states: “to secure in peace and agreement the unity of Ireland and its people.”

Past leaders such as Éamon de Valera, Seán Lemass and Jack Lynch understood this and their work was crucial in cutting loose the formal ties the British Empire still had within the 26 counties’ political and social system and achieving real Irish independence.

In September 2007, Fianna Fáil registered itself as a legitimate political party in the six counties and is now free to expand itself and contest elections. In that very same year during the summer, Ógra Fianna Fáil organised a highly successful recruitment day at various universities across the North, most notably at Queens in Béal Fierste. That was five years ago.

Fianna Fáil will be able to offer the wider communities something its rivals here cannot.

In those years, there has been little to no indication from the Ard Comhairle na Páirtí that it wishes to really contest in elections here. The Assembly elections came and went and there was not a single Fianna Fáil candidate for either MLA or councillor positions. Members worked tirelessly to raise awareness and to assert the party’s presence in their home constituencies and this was indeed met with levels of success.

To this day, Ógra Fianna Fáil has consistently out-recruited the SDLP Youth and rivalled Ógra Shinn Féin at university recruitment

drives. Despite the negative portrayal the media has made of the party nowadays, Fianna Fáil has a definite appeal in the six counties. This year over one hundred people signed up to join the William Drennan Cumann at Queens, which was incredibly successful given the party’s current standing in much of the public’s general mindset.

Indeed, the timing for Fianna Fáil’s debut into the six counties could not be any better than now. The ever-decaying SDLP leaves a vacuum in the nationalist and republican electorate that practically has Fianna Fáil’s name on it.

With the party’s understanding of the importance of a state welfare system and worker’s rights, but also mindful of the crucial value of some form of free-market in the economy, Fianna Fáil would be able to not only soak up the SDLP’s usual voters but also tap into some of Sinn Féin’s habitual supporters. Their Irish republican ethos and cultural nationalism would certainly strike a chord in areas such as West Belfast, Tyrone or Fermanagh.

Throughout its history, Fianna Fáil has been renowned on the entire island for its activism and zeal of its members and public representatives to get the job done and their message across to the people of their constituencies.

Fianna Fáil will be able to offer the wider communities something its rivals here cannot – it is not tainted by the dark legacy of the IRA’s atrocities nor does it have the reputation of being as complacent and apathetic as most parties in Ireland. Its centrist ideology is much more open and acceptable than the dogmatic leftist ones – it is able to take the best aspects from the left and the right and forge them into something new for the Northern electorate.

It has been remarked by some commentators that Fianna Fáil has attempted to ‘steal’ the mantle of Irish republicanism from Sinn Féin in the past. I ask; how in any way does this make sense? To ‘steal’ implies ownership and for me, Irish republicanism is most certainly not an idea that is exclusive. It is not owned by any single person or organisation. It is an ideal our founders and heroes fought and died for no matter what their background.

The Ard Comhairle does not understand

the sheer amount of opportunities that are just waiting for the party to take in the six counties. They have been reluctant to take more action on the project of Northern development and cannot see the advantages. But we as grassroots members can make them see.

To ‘steal’ implies ownership and Irish republicanism is most certainly not an idea that is exclusive. Not owned by any single person or organisation.

So many people would be willing to not only say they are a member of and support Fianna Fáil but also put their faith into practice. We just need support. It does not need to be financial nor material. It needs publicity on a much larger scale than in one particular area. Visits from Teachtaí Dála agus Seandóirí na Fhianna Fáil would be able to generate a great deal of momentum and hype for their six county membership and greatly aid in the growth of their cumainn.

Ex nihilo nihil fit – nothing comes from nothing and this is where Fianna Fáil stands if it continues to treat the six counties with such apathy. It cannot expect that its members will stay with it forever if they will not get some form of encouragement from the main party, especially after five years with no real response of whether or not it will contest elections. Imagine the boom in membership and support if the party was to properly expand itself into the North. If the party was to really assert itself here as a much better alternative to the traditional nationalist and republican electorate, offering a real choice between itself, the SDLP and Sinn Féin.

Gaibhín McGranaghan

WHAT DOES FIANNA Fáil MEAN TO ME?



Kevin Doyle: To people of my generation, Fianna Fáil is widely seen as the party that brought us to our knees economically, and many would discourage association with the party because of this.

However, with many of these young people living lavish lifestyles, they do not give Fianna Fáil credit for bringing our nation to the previous dizzying heights of the Celtic Tiger, which allowed them and their families to live in such a way.

I recently started work experience with Fianna Fáil. When I told classmates where I would be doing my work experience, I was largely met with disconcerting, worried faces. Most of them do not understand the psyche of the political party, they just give out about whoever is in power, as it’s seen as the thing to do.

Fianna Fáil, in my opinion, does not garner enough respect among young people as it should. Young people do not believe, or even know, what Fianna Fáil stands for, and simply use the party as a scapegoat for the country’s problems.

I believe in Fianna Fáil and what it stands for. Fianna Fáil’s ethos and vision for the future of our country are subjects that I agree with them on, as they are both relevant and realistic. They provide hope for many different groups within our country, young and old, men and women, employed and unemployed, that their lives can be improved, and that they will not have to worry about Ireland’s economic situation.

Fianna Fáil allows myself and people around the country, to believe in republican ideals, and still play a huge role in mainstream politics on this island.

While many people may see Fianna Fáil as a party of regress, I see them as the party of progress in Ireland. Fianna Fáil advocate progress economically, socially and democratically, three issues that are high on people’s agendas. Fianna Fáil gives me the inspiration to rise to the challenge, to stand up for what I believe in, to do the right thing.

That is why I believe in Fianna Fáil.

ONAGH DOYLE: As a child, I remember our neighbour, the chairman of the local cumann, bringing our TD, to the door. Ours was one house wherein his vote was definitely guaranteed. Fianna Fáil? It was the milk in our tea, the meat in our sandwich. For as long as I can remember, Fianna Fáil, politics in general and “what’s wrong with that shower” otherwise known as the opposition, was the staple topic of conversation at my parent’s dining table.

As an adult, and member of a cumann, my children always knew when an election was in the offing. If it was a summer election, a new pair of comfortable walking shoes were purchased. A winter election saw the heavy weather gear being dragged out. There is nothing worse than standing freezing on a doorstep in our town, arctic gale howling in

off the Irish Sea, trying to win a vote from Mrs Somebody who, frankly, would rather curl up in front of a roaring fire, sipping a glass of Merlot.

There were the nights of standing in the lashing rain as Mr Otherperson, having eagerly awaited our knock, expounded on the national economic situation, and his solution to it, and still you did not know if you had engaged his vote. Still, my fellow cumann members and I did it, and did it willingly. Fianna Fáil was the party we wanted to lead the country and if that is what it took, then so be it.

So what does Fianna Fáil and being a member mean to me? It is the party that remembered the citizen voter. No matter what your station in life, your local TD, heard you and represented you in the Dáil accordingly. To me, Fianna Fáil was the party of realism. The party that, upon returning to power in 1977, saw to it that I received a living income. One that I could live on after four years of opposition led government. Four years of having to decide if I could afford the bus fare to the local train station or should I walk the two miles to take the train into Dublin to go to work.

Unfortunately, from the 1980’s the higher echelons in the party grew further distanced from the heart of FF. The “grassroots” member. Through the 2000’s it was almost like watching an ongoing episode of “The West Wing”. It became a soap opera that had to end, and end it did. Brutally.

Yet I am still proud to call myself a member of Fianna Fáil, despite the slingshots and arrows of the media and others. I have faith. Faith that the lesson has been learned, that the party will edit that era out; marry the old core values to the realism of today’s harsh political landscape and move on. Back to realising that, we are the main opposition party these days. Back to fighting Joe Citizen’s cause.

WHAT DOES FIANNA Fáil MEAN TO YOU? In our next issue, *Cuisle* plans on running a special section featuring contributions on what Fianna Fáil means to members from all over the country. If you would like to have your thoughts included please send no more than 300 words along with a passport style photo of yourself to cuisle@fiannafail.ie or post it to us at *Cuisle PO Box, c/o Fianna Fáil Headquarters, 65/ 66 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.*

FORGOTTEN ACHIEVEMENTS

SOME OF FIANNA Fáil'S SUCCESSES IN POWER FROM 1997 ONWARDS

During his 1980 presidential campaign Ronald Reagan posed the question that has become the hallmark of almost all elections since: “Are you better off now than you were at the last election?”

It is the question Fianna Fáil posed to voters in 2002 and 2007. The answer came back resoundingly: “Yes, we are”. This was in stark contrast to the overwhelming “No” they gave in February 2011.

While the intensive anger of the response may have caught some people unprepared, the reply itself was unsurprising.

Of course people felt they were not better off than they were back in 2007. They could see the results of the recession all around them. Almost every person and certainly every family was worse off, a lot worse off.

No matter that Fianna Fáil had gone into the 2007 election promising less than the opposition. No matter that the opposition had spent most of 2007 and 2008 urging the Government to tax less and spend more. Fianna Fáil had presided over a decline in the quality of peoples’ lives and it paid the price.

250,000 people, including 100,000 children were lifted out of poverty by Fianna Fáil led governments since 1997.

But though people clearly knew they were worse off now than they had been in 2006 or 2007, do they feel they were worse off than they were before 1997?

It is a question no one in Fine Gael or Labour wants to ask as the answer would only undermine their hopes to see Fianna Fáil consigned to history.

Across a range of criteria Ireland is better off now than it was back in 1997. These were the result of a Fianna Fáil led government working together with the people.

Since 1997, Fianna Fáil in government:

- Created over 600,000 new well-paid and skilled jobs.
- More than doubled the average industrial wage.
- Made Ireland one of the best locations for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the world. The stock of American investment in Ireland is over 80 times the level in Greece and almost 18 times that in Poland. Over 1000 world leading companies now have substantial operations in Ireland including Google, Microsoft, Intel and Pfizer.
- Increased old age pension rates by 3 times the cost of living, unemployment benefit by 3.25 times the cost of living and child benefit by 8.25 times.
- Reduced infant mortality rates by a third and halved coronary mortality rates.
- Provided 300,000 additional healthcare treatments a year.
- Increased average life expectancy from 75 years in 1996 to 80 years by 2006.
- Invested over €1 billion in cancer care and reduced cancer mortality rates by 15% in the under 65s.
- Created 10,000 new teaching posts, reducing class sizes and pupil teacher ratio.
- Produced the largest school building programme.
- Increased tourist numbers from 5 million visitors in 1997 to 8 million in 2007.
- Invested €6 billion in our road network giving us 750 km of motorway linking Dublin with the principal cities, reducing journey times and improving road safety (Road deaths have reduced by over 50%).
- Produced the youngest rail fleet in Europe with almost 250 new railcars and carriages along with almost 2,000 new buses for the Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus fleets.

These are no small achievements and this list is far from complete. It is just an indication of how Fianna Fáil invested the fruits of a boom that happened under its watch. Not only did it use that money to dramatically reduce the national debt and to invest in the nation’s future: it did it in the face of huge opposition from the parties now in office.

The fact that the voters rejected the policies Fine Gael and Labour put to them at the 1997, 2002 and 2007 elections left Ireland better placed to withstand the global economic recession that hit in 2008.

Yes, Fianna Fáil made errors in government. Fianna Fáil is right to stand up and openly acknowledge these - but there is a bigger picture. It got a long of things right too. It made many important changes and implemented key reforms that have made a big improvement to the lives of ordinary men, women and children.

Key among these is the fact that 250,000 people, including 100,000 children were lifted out of poverty by Fianna Fáil led governments since 1997. This was the largest fall in poverty in such a short period ever measured in Europe.

It took the time to speak to the people, to learn from the experiences in other countries and to bring the results together to develop new policies and approaches.

Inequality and relative poverty had been on the rise when we came into office in 1997. It turned down and fell every year from 2001 to 2009. According to TCD lecturer Michael King consistent poverty halved between 2003 and

You won’t hear this particular achievement mentioned much because it does not fit the nasty image of the party that Fianna Fáil’s detractors like to paint.

2008 to 4.2%, and those at risk of poverty (i.e. people who earn less than 60% of the median income) fell from 19.7% in 2003 to 14.4% in 2008.

You won’t hear this particular achievement mentioned much on the radio phone in shows or in the opinion pages of the Irish Times – because it does not fit the nasty image of the party that Fianna Fáil’s detractors like to paint.

Nonetheless it is one of which it should be proud – because it is about improving the quality of lives of ordinary people. Fianna Fáil’s presence in government in those years made those people’s lives better.

It is also the hallmark of its approach to investing in education across all levels. We doubled the direct funding to primary schools. It improved supports for children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas. It created 45,000 extra third level places so that at 32% Ireland is now one of the world leaders in the percentage of working age population who have third level education (compared to 13% in Italy, 23% in Germany and 26% in France).

Fianna Fáil produced the first National Disability Strategy and backed it up with both legislation and resources but most importantly it cut long term unemployment rates by over 65%. This had been the overhanging scourge



Cartoon By Grant O'Hara

from the recession of the 1980s. It created the conditions that led to the record breaking increases in Irish exports right through 2010.

Fianna Fáil in government could tackle the problems our country faced in 1997 as it had used our time in opposition before that productively.

It took the time to speak to the people, to learn from the experiences in other countries and to bring the results together to develop

new policies and approaches. This is what it must do again now.

We need to renew our party and our organisation so that we can provide the strategies and policies to re-build the post recession Ireland and connect with the people once more.

Derek Mooney

FIANNA FÁIL ARCHIVES IN UCD

The story of how UCD became home to the Fianna Fáil archives is a simple one. As the party prepared to move from Upper Mount Street to its new premises on Lower Mount Street it was decided that like most of us when moving house they needed to de-clutter and the large volume of documents and papers going back to the foundation of the party in 1926 needed a new home.

According to Seamus Helfarty, who is the Principal Archivist in UCD it was the late Brian Lenihan who convinced the then General Secretary Pat Farrell to do something about the mountains of documents and party paraphernalia that had accumulated over the years. Philip Hannon a graduate of UCD was hired to put the house in order and spent a couple of years doing so.

A testament to the job done by Phillip is the fact that the archive catalogue in UCD today has changed very little from the one handed over by the General Secretary, Martin Mackin in around 2000. There is a large amount of internal party documentation including minutes of National Executive and parliamentary party meetings, correspondence files of the General Secretaries, Directors of Organisation and National Organisers, Ard Fheis clár and speeches.



Above: Election posters from the UCD Fianna Fáil archive. Below: The first Fianna Fáil parliamentary party taken in 1927.

Seamus believes that the Fianna Fáil archive is a very significant collection in its own right and it has added significance in UCD because it is also home to the private collections of some of the founding members of the party - Eamon de Valera, Frank Aiken and Sean Mac Entee. The documents within the collection relating to Sean Lemass and his time as Director of the Organisation are also very important because Lemass left very little by way of personal papers and according to Seamus, "that is why papers associated with him are very significant". The archives hold a lot of information on the work done by him in the period 1954-57 which paved the way for Fianna Fáil's long period of power.



While the archive is viewed regularly by researchers and academics, Seamus says there is also a "fair amount of viewing on constituency material" and that the archives show "how pervasive the Fianna Fáil party was throughout the country". Interestingly because of the family history associated with many local cumann and party organisations the collection is often viewed by those doing ancestral research.

There is a large amount of digitised imagery in the catalogue from election posters and leaflets to general photographs. According to Seamus they show how electioneering has changed over the years, "Many of the older election posters were more topical and had a lot of humour in them compared with modern electoral posters."

The archive is readily available for viewing by members of the party and the general public provided they apply to Fianna Fáil Headquarters in advance.

Jane Dignam

INTERESTED IN FIANNA FÁIL'S HISTORY AND HERITAGE?

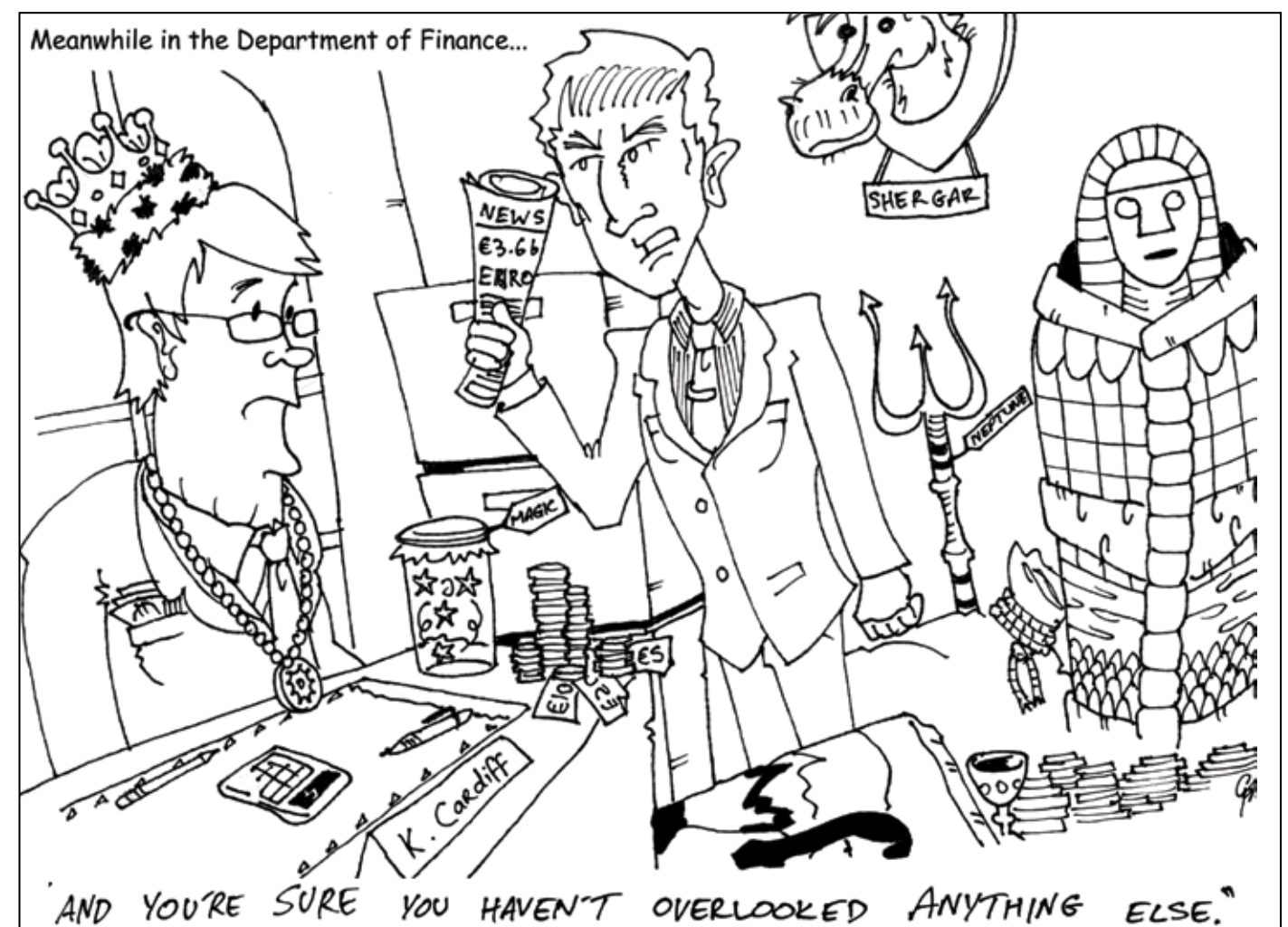
Cuisle is looking for people interested in researching Fianna Fáil's rich past. If you'd like to help please drop us an email marked 'History' to cuisle@fiannafail.ie or write to us at Cuisle PO Box, c/o Fianna Fáil Headquarters, 65/66 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.



Mary O'Brien, Ballyvaughan and Gerry Reidy, Ennistymon flying the Fianna Fáil flag at Uhuru Point recently on the summit of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the world's highest free standing mountain. Mountain leader and Clare CDC Secretary, Gerry Reidy praised the group of 14 people from Co. Clare they guided to the summit, for their determination and commitment.

"Despite extremely bad weather on the mountain for this time of year, with temperatures below minus 20 degrees on the final climb to the summit, the collective support within the group ensured everyone reached the summit at Uhuru Point. It was fantastic to fly the party flag at the summit of Kilimanjaro. Considering there were multiple rescue operations due to severe weather conditions, involving other groups on the mountain, everyone of our Clare group getting to the top was a major achievement."

IDEAS, PHOTOS, ARTICLES WANTED If you have any photos, articles or ideas you'd like to see covered in *Cuisle* please send them to us at cuisle@fiannafail.ie or post it to us at Cuisle PO Box, c/o Fianna Fáil Headquarters, 65/ 66 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.



Cartoon By Grant O'Hara

THE BIG DEBATE

SHOULD FIANNA FáIL HAVE RUN A CANDIDATE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION?

Yes

Do we have pride in our party, our community, and in ourselves? Do we care what happens to any of them, do the people of Ireland even care? I say yes they do, yes we do and together as a political party we should do.

Fianna Fáil had the biggest defeat any political party in this country has ever seen last February, the people got fed up with us after 13 years in government, they remembered our failures and forgot our successes. We needed to remind them, we needed to show our country and show Europe that Fianna Fáil had not lost its bottle, that we are not afraid of failure, that we are back and we would have given this Presidential Election the greatest shot ever seen by a political party.

It brings into question the relevance of the Fianna Fáil party if we are not willing to contest elections and show a united front by putting up a candidate.

Fianna Fáil can and have started to come back from the political abyss and to continue to do that Fianna Fáil should have run a candidate in the Presidential Election, be that person Brian Crowley, Eamon Ó Cuív or Gay Byrne it didn't matter, what matters is that we are seen back out on the streets not afraid to show our faces. Not afraid to stare down Fine Gael, Labour and Sinn Féin and to show

this great country, this country where people died to save it, bled to give us a future and a vote, that Fianna Fáil fight the good fight for what we believe in and what we believe is necessary for Ireland, to be once again the best nation in the world.

The original thought of not running a Fianna Fáil presidential candidate frightened me because I was afraid of looking like a coward and coming across a hypocrite. I have been outright defending Fianna Fáil over the last number of years claiming that Fianna Fáil is a great party and a party for the people and yet we wouldn't run a presidential candidate. It looks wrong. It looks as if we were cowering away.

It brings into question the relevance of the Fianna Fáil party if we are not willing to contest elections and show a united front by putting up a candidate.

He or she might have failed but what did it matter? Surely we would have gained the respect of the people for coming back time and again. So I say we should have run a candidate and we should of ran it to hell and back and showed we were not afraid of showing our faces out in the public arena. That we wouldn't allow the media dictate what Fianna Fáil will do next or give the misperception that this party is finished because that is simply not true. Fianna Fáil people voted Fianna Fáil because they know what Fianna Fáil are about. The fact that we didn't run a candidate says that the Fianna Fáil people don't care and the fact is we do.

The party is in debt sure, but that was no reason not to run an election campaign, money does not win campaigns, people do and Fianna Fáil have the best group of individuals who have blended into a group, a family like no other.

Fianna Fáil had the capacity and charisma to be not too far away at the death or even have won this election. The fact we didn't run a candidate meant then we couldn't win under the Fianna Fáil brand.

If we look at the great successes of Councillor David Mc Guinness finishing second in the Dublin West Bye Election who fought for the

late Brian Lenihan's seat and done Brian and his family so proud. We can also take some joy in the fact Sean Gallagher did so well in the Presidential Election carrying the Fianna Fáil brand as an independent candidate. This all shows us that yes the public hammered us in February but they now know that Fine Gael lied to them pre election and have continued to lie post election.

The fact Fine Gael polled so badly in both elections suggests that Fianna Fáil would have beaten them in both elections, which would have been a major moral boosting win for us.

The fact Fine Gael polled so badly in both elections suggests that Fianna Fáil would have beaten them in both elections, which would have been a major moral boosting win for Fianna Fáil and officially we didn't take the full opportunity.

In the end we decided not to run a candidate and the results now show us that was a mistake. Sean Gallagher's 600,000+ votes also makes the argument that the Fianna Fáil brand may not be what is toxic, rather the people still around who were associated with the previous governments. Maybe we need to look at that more directly.

Mark Bates

The Presidential Election has shown what we think Fianna Fáil stands for. We are a collection of election addicts. Almost nothing else matters to the party as much as contesting the next election. The problems of the economy and society are important to us, but fighting elections is our raison d'être.

Let's not fool ourselves; the Presidential Election was just a personality contest. It was the X-Factor of Irish politics. The election manifested itself into a glorified reality TV production to appeal to the tabloid culture that we both love to crave and love to hate. TV presenters vied to produce the best show, to massage their own egos and to try win the crown of toppling the leading candidates.

This election had nothing to do with party politics. From the very beginning, long before the spotlight turned on Fianna Fáil pressuring us to make a decision to run a candidate or not, the election campaign had already been taken over by individuals. The likes of Mary Davis, David Norris and Sean Gallagher were already busy setting out their stalls before the parties entered the race.

Whoever we would have run, there is no doubt they would have been mauled and humiliated...

When the Labour Party and Fine Gael did make their selections, it came and went very quietly. This wasn't about their parties, it was about their candidates. Pundits were only interested in weighing up who were the

leading personalities and testing each of them to see if they could go the distance to polling day. Party politics had nothing to do with the discussion.

The media did not care about what Fianna Fáil thought was the right thing for it to do: it was only interested in the individuals. Gay Byrne, Brian Crowley and even Micheál Ó Muircheartaigh had already been given summary public trials before Micheál Martin could get a handle on events.

Fianna Fáil were still reeling from the disastrous defeat in February. Were we ready for another national campaign? What message was it sending out to the electorate? If the party could not even get something so simple as a candidate selection right, what chance did it face going into a brutal and savage public execution that was the Irish Presidential Election? Also, why should the party commit itself to this campaign when it was essentially just about the individuals?

Whoever we would have run, there is no doubt they would have been mauled and humiliated – even much more so than we saw happen to Sean Gallagher. A relentless and savage attack on the candidate would have left members even more demoralised. The party renewal would have faced an even further set back.

That candidate would have become the punch bag for the economy, for emigration and for unemployment. The party couldn't handle this mountain of pressure in February, how could we expect one individual to?

Was Fianna Fáil right to not contest the election? Yes, I believe it was. Not just for the obvious reason above, but for many other practical reasons too. Money was a big issue. Campaigns are not run on fresh air.

Another reason not to contest the election was to save face. The party got a right good kicking in February 2011, and there was no evidence that it wouldn't suffer the same kicking again only 8 months later. While some of us might be brazen enough to campaign in the toughest of times, it goes without saying that the February election had a damaging effect on party morale and on

the membership. The party did not need two kickings in the same year.

Electorally, we would have struggled to win. With seven other candidates already in the field, the share of the vote would have been spread thinner. The electorate would have had too many other options than to trust a Fianna Fáil candidate so soon after the last election.

Nobody turned in their grave and a bolt of lightning didn't come down from the sky and strike the party down.

We have heard people say it is the party's duty to contest each election. They believe it is this generation's obligation to De Valera and the other founding fathers. The approach is that Fianna Fáil is a national movement and must, even in the face of huge opposition, still go out and fight elections to express itself.

That is all very admirable, but let's be honest with ourselves, nobody turned in their grave and a bolt of lightning didn't come down from the sky and strike the party down.

There are three things you need to win an election: a message, a candidate and a chance. Fianna Fáil did not have these this time around.

Fianna Fáil made the right choice on this occasion. It can now continue with the renewal of the party having not suffered the unnecessary wastefulness of this personality election.

Conor McGarry

CAIRDE FÁIL

PHOTOS FROM THE ANNUAL CAIRDE FÁIL DINNER,
1ST OCTOBER - BURLINGTON HOTEL, DUBLIN



All photographs provided by Tim Ralph Photography



Fianna Fáil is heavily in debt. The party is currently operating a deficit of approximately €2.2 million. This debt is not a new occurrence. The party has been carrying a large debt since the early 1980s, a figure that reached almost €6 million in today's terms in the early 1990s.

Fianna Fáil's finances are broken into two distinct categories – state funding which goes to the general running of the party on a day to day basis and then fundraising which goes towards the cost of campaigning and contesting elections.

State funding of political parties is based on the number of Oireachtas members each party has after the Dáil and Seanad elections, as well as the overall percentage of vote each party receives.

In 2010, Fianna Fáil received €5.2 million in state funding. For 2011, as a result of the General Election and Seanad Election results, state funding has fallen to €2.8 million, which has resulted in significant reductions in the staffing arrangements for Fianna Fáil (see article on page 9).

This €2.8 million goes towards funding all administrative overheads including the staff working directly for Fianna Fáil in party headquarters as well as in Leinster House (it does not go towards staff working for the individual TDs or Senators who have a separate allowance), as well as leasing Fianna Fáil Headquarters and other costs such as utilities, printing, website, stationery, Ard Fheiseanna, National Youth Conferences, party events, policy development costs and other general administration costs.

State funds may not be used for electoral costs. For that reason, the party keeps this funding distinctly separate.

All costs relating to fighting elections or campaigning must be paid for by the party's fundraising efforts. Over the years, this funding has included the National Super Draw, the National Collection, the President's Dinner, golf classics as well as corporate donations. This money goes towards paying for posters, advertising, literature, printing and design, research and other costs associated with campaigns.

Taking a look at some of the most recent elections and campaigns illustrates how expensive contesting an election can be.

In the 2002 General Election, Fianna Fáil spent €3 million on the General Election campaign. This was followed by spending of €4 million for the 2007 General Election. In February 2011, the party spent nearly €1 million.

Between 2007 and 2011 the party also contested two Lisbon Treaty Referenda campaigns, a Local and European Election campaign and several Bye Elections.

Today's debt position is more manageable to where the party found itself not so long ago. The party hit its highest level of debt in 1992 when, adjusted for inflation, the party owed €5.9 million.

While some of this debt was paid off over the subsequent years, the party would have had a significant debt millstone around its neck following the 2002 General Election only for the sale of its Mount Street Headquarters. This sale effectively paid for the 2002 General Election campaign and brought the debt down to €2.3 million. The party then moved into leased offices on Lower Mount Street.

Currently the main sources of fundraising are the National Draw and the National Collection. These are the main tentpoles of the party's fundraising efforts, with 90% of the party fundraising now consisting of contributions lower than €100.

Other fundraising activities, such as the Cáirde Fáil President's Dinner, contribute to the party coffers. However, the net revenue from these events has generally been in the range of €30,000 to €50,000 to the party, after costs have been covered.

The importance of the two main tentpoles of the party's fundraising was summed up by David Burke, Fianna Fáil's Director of Finance. "If we raised €500,000 in the Super Draw and €300,000 in the National Collection every year, given that we run in five year cycles, that would equate to €4 million over five years. That would allow us to clear our debt and put a campaign fund in place."

The National Draw is a very important fundraiser and the party is working to grow it. Praising the amount of funding raised by Cavan during the National Draw in 2010, Darragh McShea, Fianna Fáil's Fundraising Executive said, "If every CDC did what Cavan did last year, the party would raise over €1 million year."

"We're moving towards a model where the draw is the main fundraiser for the party. This will help local CDCs get good rebates back which will help them finance their campaigns and they will also get a rebate from the National Collection."

"So the party will be almost entirely financed by the National Draw and the National Collection. We are moving away from corporate donations entirely. Our focus is on smaller donations from individuals," Mr. McShea added.

"We need to build on the many individuals who are already giving the party donations of under €100 every year. If every Fianna Fáil member was able to sell one National Super Draw ticket each or a couple of draw tickets each, that would go far beyond clearing our debt," said Mr. McShea. "We are asking everyone to engage with the draw as this is the best, easiest and clearest way to reduce the debt."

"If the draw figures are maintained then it is expected by this time next year the party's debt will be reduced to circa €1 million. However we do need to clear the debt and we need to have money in the bank for future elections. We want to build up a fighting fund by the time of the next elections in 2014."

The party is open to new fundraising suggestions but prefers to concentrate on small donations.

As well as fundraising, the party puts a lot of time into ensuring it gets best value for money for all purchases. The recent General Election is a prime example. The party spent approximately €430,000 on 60,000 posters for last February's election. This represented a 10,000 increase in the number of posters erected on the previous General Election, even though the unit costs and erection costs were reduced by more than 50% from 2007.

According to David Burke, the party is also looking at a more effective ways of using their funding. "We're focusing on tendering; getting better value for money and making sure donations to the party go a long way. For the last General Election, all cost categories were tightly managed and kept within budget. That has to be the way we operate in the future. Because once we have the debt cleared we can't afford to let it build up again," he concluded.

Jimmy Healy

YOUR LETTERS

Every issue Cuisle will be publishing a selection of members' letters. Here is the first batch...

The Presidential Election is now over, I was against us not fielding a candidate but as I have seen how dirty the campaign turned out I do believe the correct move was made. Our objective now is the Local Elections in 2014 and to continue with the rebuilding process.

Oliver Golden

Over the past number of weeks I have been wondering about Fianna Fáil ideology. At the last General Election all I heard was Fianna Fáil was the exact same as Fine Gael. Whatever we may think of that, that seems to be what the electorate think.

If you look at American politics for example, the Republicans and Democrats are poles apart in their ideology. When a person votes GOP they know they are going to get small government, budget cuts, tax cuts etc. When they vote Democrat they know they will get increased federal spending, stronger federal government etc.

Can we say the same in Ireland? In my opinion: no. While I understand that particular circumstances may deter us from always pursuing the course we may think to be perfect, I do believe that Fianna Fáil should adopt a "baseline" policy that we would always hope to pursue.

One of the reasons we are where we are is because we don't have any policy. I'm not saying for one minute that we should say we are a right- or left-wing party. I think we should ignore that element of things.

What I'm saying is we sit down and go through each topic one by one and formulate policies that we would hope to implement whenever we would be in government. And we stick to those policies through thick and thin!!

We shouldn't simply change them as it comes close to a General Election.

Michael Mahony

We are all trying to rebuild our party, a party we love. It sickens me to read reports in the papers where ex TDs come out with personal gripes.

The latest one was Noel O'Flynn having a go at Micheál Martin because his son didn't get a Seanad seat. People are fed up with family members thinking they have a right to a seat just because their father etc held a seat.

I think Noel has done his son Kenneth no favours with this strop. To be elected to represent the party be it as an officer of a cumann or as a public representative is a huge honour.

But with power comes responsibility and these people have a responsibility to the members who are working so hard up and down the country to rebuild the party and repair the image of Fianna Fáil.

Mark Power

Calling to a door in Dublin West during the week of the Bye Election I was greeted by a constituent asking if I had 'more political rubbish for her'. Until she noticed the leaflet publicising Cllr. David McGuinness and then her tone changed.

Although difficult tasks often seem impossible until it's done, the Dublin West Bye Election has shown that the positive steps which have been taken are affecting the voices on the doorstep, the change of tone on the street and most importantly translating into votes gained.

To echo the words expressed by Cllr. David McGuinness, I was 'heartened' by the substantial result achieved and, as significantly, by the energy, positivity and confidence in the way in which the campaign was run. It is a true reflection of the hard work of Cllr. David McGuinness and his campaign team that fellow members like myself have been provided with a strong and inspiring platform on which to build our next election.

Laura Reid

When studying the results of the Dublin West Bye Election we should have learned a lesson in politics.

Never say never and never give up. I sincerely hope people realise how significant the results of the Dublin West election are for Fianna Fáil and what message we should take from them.

The message that should be abstracted is that the Fianna Fáil brand is not toxic but that there are people who are a part of Fianna Fáil that are toxic.

Cllr. David McGuinness is not toxic and maybe if a better known name had ran who was part of the old regime we would have suffered at the hands of the electorate but the electorate have shown they are willing to forgive if we change the people that are giving the party toxicity.

We need to cleanse the party of the past we need to inject new people into the veins of Fianna Fáil because as I have said Fianna Fáil is not toxic but rather the people whom the electorate hold distain for are the cause of many of our problems.

We need to ensure that those who created or were part of the brown envelope period of our party's history are banished to the past. Because it is they who are toxic and not Fianna Fáil. A brand cannot create toxins. It is people who maliciously use that brand that create these toxic issues.

Dermot Ryan

Cuisle is a new and exciting departure, and I wish it every success. We in the Tramore E.A. of Co. Waterford are few on the ground now; we have no representation whatsoever in the Oireachtas. We have one town councillor and one county councillor. We are also finding it hard to attract new members. We need to keep this party alive here, include a more social aspect, have meetings that are relevant, but most of all I think we need to get back to working within the waves and weaves of our community. I would be delighted with any suggestions and any help. Many thanks.

Helen Young

THESE LETTERS REFLECT THE OPINIONS OF THE LETTER WRITERS CONCERNED. THEY DO NOT REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE FIANNA FÁIL PARTY LEADERSHIP, FIANNA FÁIL HEADQUARTERS OR CUISLE.

WRITE TO CUISLE: Cuisle would like to hear your views. If you have any thoughts on Fianna Fáil, politics in general or any of the issues raised in this issue please write to us. Letters can be emailed to cuisle@fiannafail.ie (please use the subject line 'Letters') or posted to Cuisle PO Box, c/o Fianna Fáil Headquarters, 65/ 66 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

HOW CAN MEMBERS HELP FIANNA FÁIL GET FAIRER TREATMENT IN THE MEDIA?



Fianna Fáil's Twitter home page

One issue that continues to come up in all discussions about the renewal of the party is what many members feel is an unfairly aggressive approach taken by some in the media. Many members feel frustrated that the party is unfairly blamed for every ill in the country while many within the media seem unwilling to even listen to any argument that points to the enormous good that our party has been responsible for over the years.

This is one area where an engaged and active membership can make serious inroads. While there is no doubt that there is a lot of public anger towards the party, the effect of this in the media is amplified by the efforts of our political opponents who are responsible for coordinated and sustained campaigns of texting and calling radio and TV shows, writing to the local and national newspapers, tweeting and populating Facebook with anti-FF messages and complaining when they do not get a fair hearing.

Now is the time for Fianna Fáil members to make our voices heard in a similar way. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are increasingly important forums for public discourse on all issues, from the very local and personal to the larger social and political matters. Engaging online, while not possible for everyone, can be an instant way of having your voice heard on issues you feel strongly about and starting to address the anti-FF imbalance that we regularly see and hear. If you are not online, the letter to the newspaper or the call to the radio station is every bit as important.

This is about equality and fairness for Fianna Fáil members. Fianna Fáil has an increasingly strong and active membership which deserves to have its voice heard and its views represented in the media. All of us can play a crucial role in reminding people that Fianna Fáil is the leading opposition party and that Fianna Fáil members have as much of a right as anyone else to have their views represented.

Sometimes members make the point that while they would like to do more in addressing media imbalance, they are not sure what the party's view is on different issues. One way to address this is to register on Twitter.com and follow the party (search for @fiannafailparty). Already, the party has almost 7,000 followers. Doing this allows you to get news and views from the party as soon as any statements are released. If we had just a fraction of our members engaging daily on Twitter and promoting the party's agenda it would make a difference. If you are not on Twitter, keep an eye on the news section of the party website where all new press releases are added.

Another area where we could do more as members is speaking out when we feel that the media have broken their requirement to be impartial and fair to all interests when discussing news and current affairs. Each of the broadcasters have a complaints procedure that you should follow if you feel that they are not treating an issue fairly or if they are allowing a personal opinion to colour their treatment of a subject. If you are unhappy with the response you get from the broadcaster after complaining, you can appeal to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

Further information on how to play your part in spreading Fianna Fáil's message and on how to make responsible complaints is available at www.fiannafail.ie/mediabalance

What is Twitter? Twitter is an online social networking website that enables users to send and read short messages. It was launched in July 2011 and now has 200 million users worldwide. Twitter has been described as text messaging for the internet. Posts, known as tweets, can only be up to 140 characters long. Users can log on and follow other users to see what they are up to or how they feel about a particular issue. Your posts, or tweets, are visible to all those who you accept as your followers. Programmes like Tonight with Vincent Browne and the Frontline regularly monitor and read out what is being said about the programme on Twitter. See www.fiannafail.ie/mediabalance for an instructional video on how social media works.

Word on the Tweet. Fianna Fáil on Twitter.com has almost 7,000 followers (@fiannafailparty). Can you help bring it up to 10,000?

Did you know? All TV and radio stations operate under the Broadcasting Act 2009. This law states that in broadcasting current affairs, the station must be fair to all interests, present material in an objective and impartial manner and without any expression of the presenter's personal views.

Letters to the Editor
While social media is a growing area, it isn't for everyone and there are still many more people buying and reading local and national newspapers than using Facebook and Twitter. A well written, well argued letter to the editor is still a very important tool in addressing unfair commentary and getting some balance into the press.

One small step towards Renewal every day
Imagine the difference we could make if every member did one small thing every day to address media imbalance – write a letter to your local newspaper, text a radio programme, retweet a Fianna Fáil statement, introduce another friend to Fianna Fáil on Facebook or formally complain if you think a broadcaster is being unfair.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE 5 POINT PLAN?

I t'd be hard to forget Fine Gael's 5 point plan, those five simple points that were going to change the country, fix the health service, and bring a new era to Irish politics. For about two months before the General Election Enda Kenny talked about little else, even if sometimes he seemed to struggle to remember them.

Nine months on from the General Election and there is little if any mention of it. Perhaps it's not surprising that the 5 point plan has disappeared from sight when you take a look back at the promises made to the Irish people and see how they were discarded the day after the election.

Fine Gael promised a jobs' strategy which was subsequently downgraded to an initiative. They promised to create 20,000 jobs a year, instead unemployment figures have continued to rise throughout 2011 as high as 14.4% in August. When it was announced that jobless' figures had declined in September you had to check the small print to see that it was by a mere 0.1%.

Fine Gael promised to reform the political system in Ireland. Yet when it came to their first real opportunity, a reduction in the number of junior ministers to 12 as promised, they reneged and appointed 15. They promised to abolish the Seanad. It's still sitting.

They promised to cap pay to political advisors and yet two of the Taoiseach's own staff are being paid in excess of €160,000 each, despite this contravening the Department of Public Expenditure's own guidelines. It has since emerged that Labour Minister Brendan Howlin has approved 14 separate exceptions to the pay cap. Then, there is the small matter of both Fine Gael and Labour appointing their supporters as judges to the High Court.

How many u-turns and broken promises can the Fine Gael and Labour coalition stand over? In the last few years Enda Kenny and Eamon Gilmore have gained political advantage over their allegations of cronyism and jobs for the boys, well they can no longer.



Enda Kenny promising no downgrade of services in Roscommon Hospital, another promise that didn't last long.

How many u-turns and broken promises can Fine Gael stand over?

The promised health service reforms have failed to materialise with the once ever present Dr. James Reilly almost harder to find now than the Tánaiste. We have seen work stoppages by nurses over the lack of resources in A & E departments and the proposed closures of a number of other A & E departments throughout the country.

Fine Gael claimed they were going to fix the economy, yet whenever Minister Noonan stands before a microphone to take credit for the fact that Ireland's recovery is on track, he neglects to mention that the plan being implemented is the one devised by Fianna Fáil.

According to a recent newspaper article when Ajai Chopra, head of the IMF was asked at a conference in Kenmare what impact the Fine Gael and Labour administration had on the status of the rescue package he said "it didn't change much it changed at the margins".

While Labour's members of the Cabinet have all but disappeared from view, perhaps hoping to go unnoticed, the Fine Gael financial experts of Noonan and Varadkar are out front and centre upping the ante on how much money can be taken out of the economy and the pockets of the working classes before it grinds to a halt completely.

The most recent and perhaps the most blatant betrayal of those that voted for them is their complete u-turn on 'burning the bondholders'. In the run up to the General Election Fine Gael and Labour promised to pursue policies they couldn't deliver on to achieve electoral gains, ignoring the trust placed in them by the electorate. Time and time again Micheál Martin challenged the now Government for making these false promises during the campaign.

In light of all these u-turns and flip flopping by the Government it is vital that Fianna Fáil acts as a watchdog on the decisions and policies of this Fine Gael and Labour Government. It seems that the media have given the Government a free hall pass for the foreseeable future, which makes it all the more important that Fianna Fáil holds them to account.

It would clearly suit the Government if Fianna Fáil were to pack up and go home because it would leave them with a straight run at goal. The other tenants of the opposition benches being Sinn Féin, the party that says 'No' to just about everything, as well as the Independents and the Technical Group who by virtue of their individual mandates find it difficult to present a consistent and cohesive opposition.

Fianna Fáil must stop reacting to the barbs of the front benches about the past and put the focus and the agenda where it should be - on the actions of the Government.

Clearly Fianna Fáil has a great deal of work to do in rebuilding the party and in reaching out to the public. I would argue that the most important job of our national representatives is to do just that, to represent the interests of us the ordinary members, by providing consistent and fair alternatives to the policies being pursued by Fine Gael and Labour.

Jane Dignam