

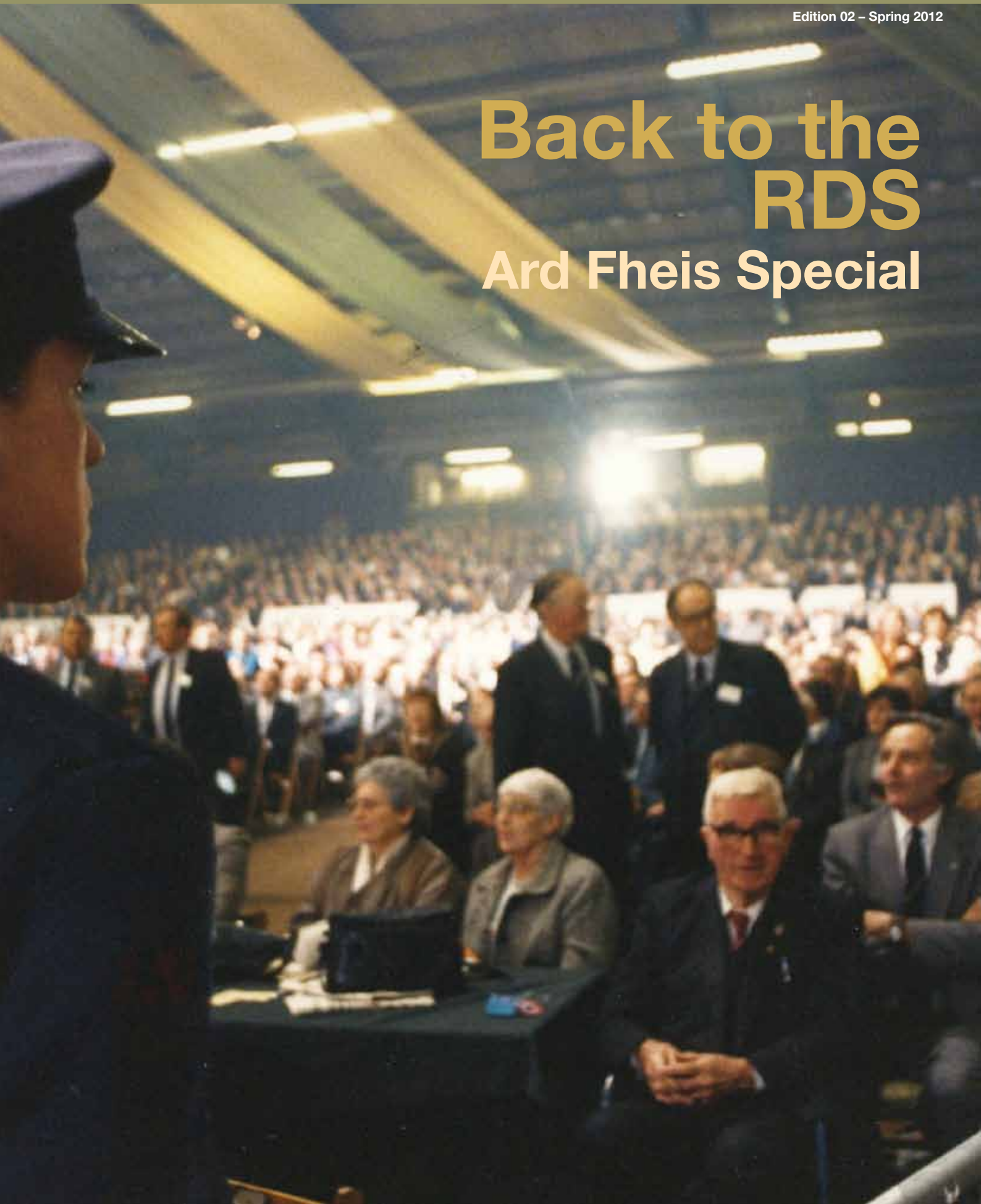
Cuisse

*The voice of
the members*

Edition 02 – Spring 2012

Back to the RDS

Ard Fheis Special



AN RDS ARD FHEIS ITINERARY

Friday 4pm: Members meet for a pint and chat before going to RDS and discuss the state of the party and how nobody listens to them.

Friday 6pm: Members enter RDS.

Friday 7pm: Members gather at bar to discuss what is happening later and how the crowd is great and what they are going to say from the floor in the workshops on Saturday.

Friday 9pm: Members head to a Ballsbridge hotel for function.

Friday 10pm: Members get harassed by candidates running for the Committee of 20.

Saturday 12am: Members discuss how they are going to give a piece of their mind to HQ staff and the TDs when they see them on Saturday morning.

Saturday 1.30am: Members discuss how they are going to shaft the chairperson of their cumann and promise every candidate going for the Committee of 20 their number 1 vote.

Saturday 10am: After a few hours rest members head to RDS nursing sore heads from the previous night's activities.

Saturday 11am: Members meet TDs and HQ staff and tell them what the others were saying about them, but they think they are great.

Saturday 12pm: Members meet at the bar to discuss policy and what is wrong in the party.

Saturday 1.30pm: Members find solutions to problems after consuming pints of Guinness.

Saturday 3pm: Members discuss what they are going to say in the workshops. Then after another pint they discuss how they couldn't be bothered going to the workshops and how they are a waste of time because nobody listens to them.

Saturday 4pm: Members leave RDS for a break and head to a nearby bar.

Saturday 12am: Members discuss how they are going to give a piece of their mind to HQ staff and the TDs when they see them on Saturday morning.

Saturday 7pm: Members head back to RDS after food and beverages and further discussions about problems in party but this time they have found the solutions.

Saturday 8pm: Members stand and applause the leader and sing the "Legion of the Rearguard", "Arise and follow Charlie" and "A nation once again".

Saturday 9pm: Members leave the RDS for local bars and discuss the weekend's events and how they are never listened too.

Saturday 11pm: Members discuss how all the problems are now solved and discuss how they are going to get out into their communities and work hard for the party in hail, rain or snow.

Sunday 1.30am: Members sing old favourites and discuss how their grandfathers were in the GPO in 1916.

Sun 9am – 12pm: Members head for home after a very productive weekend. When home they tell their family what they told the other members and how all the others agreed with them.

(Not to be taken seriously!)

Ciaran Bolger



HELP WANTED!

Have you a strong opinion on a Fianna Fáil related issue? Would like to see a particular current affairs or political matter covered? Have you some photos involving Fianna Fáil members or would like to highlight a recent membership event?

If so please get in touch with Cuisle. We are constantly looking for more people to write articles, more photos and most importantly your ideas. This is your magazine. So if you want to make a suggestion for how the magazine should be put together or you'd like to become a contributor please email us at cuisle@fiannafail.ie

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A special thanks to Seamus Helfarty and the archive staff in UCD for their help and patience.



Cover photo from the Fianna Fáil Archives in UCD.

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Editorial

Cuisle The voice of the members

Welcome to the Ard Fheis edition of Cuisle. It's hard to believe that it's over three years since the last Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis. So much has happened in that time. The party is out of Government, the parliamentary party has been decimated dropping from 77 TDs to only 19, party support has plummeted, we have a new party leader and even the venue has changed.

Despite this, talking to party members everyone seems to be looking forward to this Ard Fheis with a level of fervour rarely experienced before. Part of that might be because we haven't had the foremost party event for such a long period. People want to experience all that an Ard Fheis has to offer once more.

However there is also another element to it. This Ard Fheis is a landmark event for Fianna Fáil. It will mark a significant point in the future direction of the party. It is the first time in a very long time that the members as a group will get to voice their opinions on how the party operates. This is the members' chance to take back the party and many seem intent on making the most of this opportunity.

Central to that process will be the motions concerning one member, one vote. All democratic political parties need to make sure all their members have a voice. Anything else only sidelines members, resulting in alienation. If any party has experienced that problem in recent times it is Fianna Fáil.

The existing mechanism of putting forward delegates to vote at CCs, CDCs, selection conventions and other party events means that many members do not get the chance to express their opinions and have their voice heard. Let's be honest about it, the current scheme only helps keep power in the hands of those who already have it. Which is why the current system has survived for so long and why it played a major part in Fianna Fáil's recent fall.

Even at this year's Ard Fheis, many members attending won't be able to vote, simply because they are not the selected delegates. What kind of a system tolerates that nonsense?

The editorial committee of Cuisle believes that supporting one member one vote is vital for the future of the party. Without it many members will continue to be shut out of the party, paper cumainn all over the country will continue to flourish and we'll have other cumainn blocking genuinely interested people

from joining. People who want to vote for Fianna Fáil. Members should remember we only get one chance on this. We need to take action to fix the ills of the party.

As far as we're concerned a vote against one member one vote is a vote in favour of all the problems that have blighted this party in recent years. It is a vote against the renewal. A vote against returning this party to the people who really should be its driving force – the members.

WHAT PRICE COMMUNICATING?

Thank you for all the comments we have received about the first issue of Cuisle. The response we have received has been very positive. Please keep these suggestions coming – this is a magazine for the members and we need your input if we are to represent the views of the members in the future.

Unfortunately most members of the party will not receive this second issue of Cuisle. Fianna Fáil HQ will only allow 13,000 copies to be printed of our second issue.

While every person who holds an officer position in the party received a copy by post of the first issue (so everyone who holds a cumann, a CC, a CDC, an Ógra or an Ard Chomhairle position) only 5,000 will receive a copy in the post this time around. In addition each CDC will be sent a box of 100 copies of the magazine. About 3,000 copies will also be made available at the Ard Fheis.

There's no doubt that producing Cuisle is expensive.

The editorial team did try to help make this issue more affordable. We offered to cut the number of copies distributed and to try to get advertising. However you can't get ads when you don't know when you'll go to print, how many copies will be produced or how they will be distributed. If you're interested in advertising in future issues please let us know.

We believe that Cuisle is needed in the party. It provides a platform for members to voice their opinions and to help keep members informed. It's an important communication's tool.

Fianna Fáil has promised that future issues of Cuisle will be paid for as part of the membership fee if one member one vote comes in. It is disappointing that not all members will receive this issue but hopefully all people interested in receiving a copy of Cuisle will do in future.

If you have any comments, questions or suggestions please send them to cuisle@fiannafail.ie

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

ARD FHEISEANNA GONE BY

“Dochum glóire Dé agus onóra na hÉireann.”

This was the task that Eamon de Valera asked the 500 delegates, who attended the first Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis, to devote themselves to.

Most of those present in the Rotunda were battle-hardened veterans from the losing side in the Civil War.

Bob Briscoe wrote of these delegates, “Many a fond familiar face I saw among them, faces that once had the radiance of courage and the joy of fighting for ideals, and now looked grey and beaten. The wonderful thing was to see hope light them up again when the Chief began to speak.”

It was a sombre beginning tinged with cautious optimism for the future.

On 2nd and 3rd March, Fianna Fáil will hold its 73rd Ard Fheis.

Past Ard Fheiseanna have been colourful and have provided moments of intense political drama. There have been major policy announcements, bitter political battles, tragic news and great triumphs. Put simply, the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis is never boring.

That first Ard Fheis, held on 24th November 1926, set the tone. The date was carefully chosen to mark the fourth anniversary of the execution of Erskine Childers. The new party's revolutionary roots were very much on display.

In his first Ard Fheis address, de Valera refused to completely rule out force in the pursuit of national aims yet, he said Fianna Fáil would pursue a democratic path because “a nation within itself ought to be able to settle its polity so that all occasions of civil conflict between its members may be obviated.”

It was a pre-statement of the “slightly constitutional” stance which Lemass would ascribe to the party a few years later.

In March 1932, Fianna Fáil formed its first Government.

Less than a decade after the Civil War had ended, its victors ceded power following a free and fair election.



Members at a 1980s Ard Fheis.

This was a seminal moment in Irish democratic tradition and De Valera emphasised this at the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis in November 1932.

“We came into office determined to be fair to everybody. The army of our opponents loyally came in as the army of the state and are prepared to serve the state loyally. We took over the police force under similar conditions, and, while, here and there, there are complaints, still, to the credit of the men in the army, to the credit of the civic guards and the civil service, the civil services and the forces of the state are prepared to serve elected representatives of the people. That is a great achievement.”

In the De Valera era, the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis was often the stage for passionate debate.

In his first Ard Fheis address, De Valera refused to completely rule out force in the pursuit of national aims yet

At the 1933 Ard Fheis, De Valera was heckled by Eamonn Donnelly, a member of his own parliamentary party, on the issue of partition. According to John Bowman's study of De Valera, this interruption prompted the party leader to defend his northern record with “extraordinary enthusiasm”.

At the 1943 Ard Fheis, De Valera angrily cut loose at those who were critical of Oscar Traynor's stance in opening up the Irish army to sports other than gaelic games. De Valera had little time for the GAA's ban on foreign games. He claimed “the GAA were making a mistake....[and] what the Minister had done in the army should be supported by every right-thinking person.”

Dev's final Ard Fheis as party leader was in October 1958. This Ard Fheis was notable for Lemass using the occasion to announce that the Government would shortly publish a £220 million five year plan to “redefine the objectives of national economic policy”. This heralded in a new era of free trade and marked a decisive turning point in the country's economic fortunes.

Another key moment in Ireland's economic development was the decision to pursue membership of the EEC. The 1962 Ard Fheis unanimously endorsed a motion approving entry to the Common Market. Lemass told delegates that the alternative to joining would be that “Ireland would be an isolated unit on the fringe of a dynamic European confederation”.

The defining moment in Jack Lynch's leadership took place at the 1971 Ard Fheis. The scene was set for a very public showdown

At the 1965 Ard Fheis, Lemass broke the news that President de Valera would seek a second term in Aras an Uachtarain.

The defining moment in Jack Lynch's leadership took place at the 1971 Ard Fheis. The party was badly divided following the arms crisis and the scene was set for a very public showdown. Patrick Hillery's defiant statement in defence of Lynch's policy - “You can have Boland, but you can't have Fianna Fáil” – has passed into political folklore. It is undoubtedly the Ard Fheis moment which has received the most television air-time over the years.

In February 1981, Fianna Fáil's held its 50th Ard Fheis. Charles Haughey had intended to use his speech to signal an early election but, instead, the Ard Fheis adjourned as news emerged of the horrendous loss of life at the Stardust Ballroom. Bruce Arnold, Haughey's biographer, wrote :

“Although this event, tragic in its impact on so many lives, was of passing significance in Haughey's career, it denied him the platform to a General Election he would have won, thus transforming his own career and future. But that election was deferred, the Maze Hunger Strike followed and when he did go to the country, in the summer, he lost.”

Albert Reynolds was elected leader of Fianna Fáil in February 1992. An Ard Fheis took place the following month at which Brian Cowen very nearly raised the roof when he said of the PDs, “If in doubt, leave them out.”

At Reynolds' second Ard Fheis, in November

1993, Northern Ireland dominated debate. The Irish Times observed, “Mr Reynolds grounded his speech in the complex uncertainties of Northern Ireland... It was high risk stuff, especially in view of the nationalist fervour which had swept the conference some hours earlier when the Hume/Adams peace process was resoundingly supported and the mere mention of Mr. John Hume's name brought a round of applause. The emotional pitch generated by the question of modifying or dropping Articles 2 & 3 of the Constitution was defused only when the Minister for Justice, Mrs. Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, assured delegates that there would be no unilateral government action.”

At the 1997 Ard Fheis, Bertie Ahern touched on rumours then circulating about payments to Charles Haughey. Taking a side-swipe at the Workers' Party roots of some members of the Rainbow Government, Ahern told delegates that it was “just as unacceptable to seek a million or half a million pounds from the Soviet Communist Party as it is to seek it from Ben Dunne”.

In 2000, chaos was narrowly averted when protestors sought to disrupt proceedings. One protestor even made it onto the stage, getting within yards of the Taoiseach to the consternation of delegates. Philip Hannon, the party's then senior researcher recalls, “In a flash the guy was over the barrier and heading for Bertie. As he was a bit way from me, I just managed to ankle tap him but he held his stride and made it to the podium. I was relieved to see him bundled off pretty quickly by Martin Mackin [the then General Secretary] and some of the parliamentary party.”



Eamon de Valera's speech from the first Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis in 1926

In the run-up to the General Election in 2002, the mood at the Ard Fheis was of confidence and exuberance. Chris Glennon recorded that Ahern “got a huge cheer when he gave a signal that he was not backing away from the so-called Bertie Bowl, despite the rows over the aquatic and leisure centre”.

Micheál Martin TD has fond memories of the 2003 Ard Fheis in Killarney. Despite a well-funded campaign against the smoking ban, Fianna Fáil delegates provided a resounding vote of confidence in the measure. He noted, “It was Killarney that turned the tide on the smoking ban. The delegates spoke in overwhelming numbers in favour of the smoking ban. That impacted hugely on the parliamentary party and it had a huge impact on the momentum to take that measure through.”

The Ard Fheis returned to Killarney in 2005. Encouraged by this author and the then Attorney-General, Rory Brady, Bertie Ahern told delegates that the Government would reinstate the annual military parade to commemorate the Easter Rising.

At the most recent Ard Fheis in 2009, Brian Cowen, in his opening address, told delegates that Fianna Fáil intended to join the Liberal Group in the European Parliament.

Noel Dempsey made an impassioned defence of the party's integrity stating that “a small number of sophisticated money manipulators endangered the economic survival of our people. There's no parallel in history for the damage they have done to this nation - except perhaps Cromwell.”

In his well-received main address, Brian Cowen said “Ireland now needs a Meitheal mentality” to get through the economic crisis.

The 2012 Ard Fheis will be Micheál Martin's first as leader. If past events are anything to go by, delegates are in for an exciting few days.

Brian Murphy is completing a PhD in the School of History and Archives, University College Dublin.

A look at where renewal efforts are coming together

TOWARDS RENEWAL

After the General Election of February 2011 the Fianna Fáil party was left in total devastation. The reality was clear. We returned with 20 TDs and only one in Dublin. A loss of 58 seats.

When the dust settled a full appraisal of where Fianna Fáil stood both in an organisational sense and as a national political movement was undertaken. This meant that from the top down the whole organisation needed to take a detailed look at its structures and membership.

The biggest renewal of the party since the 1954 General Election was needed and set in motion.

As a result of being in power for the last 14 years many cumainn, CCs and CDCs existed as organisations for the sitting TDs and not for the party (so in reality you could have up to three different groupings within the one organisation). Therefore when the incumbent lost their seat or retired the organisation fell apart too. What remained were people who were not members of a cabal or fiefdom.

Traditionally one of Fianna Fáil's great strengths was that it could boast cumann in every village in the country. Sadly this is no longer the case.

The much discussed paper cumainn have put a gloss on the true picture of what is the reality of the strength of units throughout the country. Many cumainn were registered to hold on to the three delegate votes at conventions. So in fact what we actually had were voting cumainn that were not functioning.

The ordinary members of the party have become disconnected to a large extent and feel they have been forgotten about. They sometimes feel they were only needed when there was an election or leaflets to be dropped.

So where does Fianna Fáil go now? That was a question being asked by all political commentators and men and women in the streets, such is the fascination with the party that has governed Ireland for the majority of its existence.

The answer has come from the party's greatest asset - its membership. Up and down the country the grassroots membership has reacted to the position the party now finds itself in.

Members are no longer just going along to listen. They have a voice and want it to be heard.

Many if not all constituencies have restructured. Cumann, CCs and CDCs have held AGMS and elected new officer boards. Officers elected to these boards have been assigned defined roles. Blueprint documents have been drawn up as guidelines for running their units.

The renewal of the local organisation is very much an all inclusive journey with every member taking part. There is a real feeling of ownership.

Meetings are reporting improved attendances and also the conversations at the meetings have changed. The "top table" are now asking members to voice their opinions and debate policies and organisational matters. Members are no longer just going along to listen. They have a voice and want it to be heard.

In the Fianna Fáil of 2012 the grassroots are going to be a vital component of the party's renewal, the membership is the greatest asset and has to be reengaged.

In my own area of Meath West a rebuilding job was badly needed as we lost our two Dáil seats. Both my local Navan West CC and Meath West CDC held AGMs and elected new officer boards. It was decided by the Navan CC Chairman David Healy that the meetings would be held in all the cumann areas so as to give a Fianna Fáil presence. The hope is that renewed activity will encourage disenchanted members to rejoin and in turn sign up new members. CDC Chairman Eamon Martyn implemented a similar policy at CDC level.

This strategy has been replicated in many areas around the country. One such area is Kildare North.

Naas CC met for the first time in four years. The meeting was well attended with new members also attending. A renewal strategy was adopted where a dedicated renewal committee was set up to engage with every cumann on a one to one basis.

James Lawless is the secretary of that renewal group and says they have had a great response from cumainn who were delighted the party were going back to basics. "A lot of members had become detached over the previous year but with renewal on the horizon and the promise of power being vested back in the local organisation people were considering getting back involved. There was a sense that the worst was over, the past was done and it was time to dust ourselves down and make Fianna Fáil great again," explained James.

In Ennis, renewal initiatives have also been taken. "We take to doors on Monday night," according to Garrett Greene, Chairman of the Ennis Ciste Áitúil. "One estate is chosen in advance, the relevant pages of the register are copied to each team of two and we set off to check the register, provide contact details for our local reps and capture and disseminate issues in the locality that are fed back to us."

"The effect is that we visibly take an interest in voters at 'peace time'. They know we want to hear what they want to say and that we will act on their concerns. If a political party doesn't do that at community-level, you'd wonder what it's purpose is. The reception is positive and improves every week. We've even identified new members," Garrett added.

Other activity is also going on around the country. Many local units had organised summer BBQs as a way of reintroducing a social aspect back into the party. It was felt that this might be a way of recruiting new members in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Another aspect to the renewal effort in the local units has been to embrace social media. This can be used as a way of informing members of meetings and events. As many constituencies have lost offices this is an easy and inexpensive way of providing information.

Some cumainn have either a Twitter or Facebook account and this type of initiative is being encouraged nationwide. It serves as a valuable tool for informing the wider public of the work our councillors, TDs and Senators do on an ongoing basis.

Some surveys have shown a drop in the sales of newspapers and as such not everyone reads the local paper so the message could be getting lost. This is not to replace the door to door leaflet drop but it is another weapon in the armoury for the political communications war.

Units are setting up think tanks or policy groups such as the "Futures Group" in Meath East.

CDCs are setting targets for their officers with regular progress reports to ensure objectives are on schedule.

This type of activity is being encouraged by Fianna Fáil HQ. Indeed Micheál Martin TD has stated he wants every member to be a part of the renewal and to send any suggestions on policy or organisational matters to renewal@fiannafail.ie

In areas which have elected renewal committees the following are some examples of tasks being carried out that are already showing signs of success.

CDCs are setting targets for their officers with regular progress reports to ensure objectives are on schedule. Many units are holding "town hall" style meetings highlighting issues of local importance such as the proposed septic tank charge with guest speakers such as Éamon Ó Cuív TD.

A number of local organisations have arranged "canvass nights". These are taking the form of door to door canvasses with the local registers to build up a database and to re-engage with the voters outside of a General or Local Election. This was always a great strength of Fianna Fáil that we were constantly working on the ground and always had a presence. This type of activity seems to be reaping results once more.

In areas that lost their TDs, local clinics have been set up and are being run by cumainn and CCs. The ordinary members are assisting councillors and building up relationships within the local communities. The people in

these communities are starting to recognise party members who are active in their area.

A national renewal committee has also been set up under the stewardship of Dara Calleary TD.

Micheál Martin TD has undertaken a nationwide listening tour of all the constituencies. This has given members a renewed feeling that we are all in this together. At the two meetings I attended the leader engaged fully with everyone in the room.

The renewal of Fianna Fáil in regards to our structures and how we do business will make us a stronger organisation but until we renew our relationship with the people we want to represent all our efforts will be in vain. There are many reasons why we have lost support. Many voters don't know what Fianna Fáil stands for and feel that we do not represent them. We need to clearly define what Fianna Fáil in the 21st century means and represents.

The core values that are in our fibre and that were set down when the party was founded in 1926 still are relevant today. We are a party that stands up for the ordinary people and takes care of the most vulnerable.

We are a proud party and have a very diverse membership. We believe that education and healthcare are basic human rights. We protect the family and the elderly.

So as a major part of our renewal process we have to develop and promote a policy platform that represents Fianna Fáil and will make people put their faith in us once more. We can all be a part of making our party a party we can all be proud of.

We don't need a Fianna Fáil Nua - we just need the old Fianna Fáil back.

Mark Power

FIANNA FÁIL'S ONLINE PRESENCE

In recent months, Fianna Fáil has been actively developing its online presence and engaging with members by means of using social media networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Facebook includes a specific FF members' discussion page which is currently used by over 800 members.

A decision was taken to establish a Fianna Fáil membership forum, independent of social networking sites. The new forum is different as it will be controlled exclusively by the members and will serve as an information tool for those wanting to be kept informed of party events and it will enable members to deliver information to a wider audience.

The new forum, which was the brainchild of FF member Ciarán Bolger and developed by FF member Stephen Kearon, is targeted towards every member of Fianna Fáil, regardless of age and their ability to use online media and computers. It is hoped that Ógra Fianna Fáil will play an active role in assisting those who are not familiar with using computers and online forums by giving lessons to people in their local communities who may not be familiar with the basics of e-mail, Facebook or Twitter.

The new forum, which already consists of over 100 members, will encourage members, new and existing, to engage in debate with others and also with elected representatives regarding current affairs and topical issues. To date, the existing Facebook forum (which will be kept active in addition to the new forum, at the request of party members) has fostered friendships between members of the party who may not previously have known each other. It aims to create a sense of community within Fianna Fáil which it is hoped will benefit both members and the party. Bolger hopes to push the idea that members would be in a position to question elected representatives on policy, local and national issues, and also to have a direct link with our party leader.

The new forum is receiving feedback on an ongoing basis and the necessary changes are underway to make the forum as user-friendly as possible. There will be a stand at the Ard Fheis to create awareness about the use of social networking sites and Skype for members to communicate with each other, to stay informed about party events and also to communicate the message of what Fianna Fáil stands for to a greater audience.

The forum will be officially launched on Saturday morning, 3rd March by Uachtarán Fhianna Fáil, Micheál Martin TD, at the Ard Fheis.

Sinéad Lucey

INTERESTED IN ADVERTISING IN CUISLE?

For future issues Cuisle intends to include advertisements. If you'd be interested in taking an ad which will be seen by practically all the members of Fianna Fáil please contact us – cuisle@fiannafail.ie

ÓGRA FIANNA FÁIL NUA

Since last summer a series of reforms were developed by the National Youth Committee and approved by the Ard Chomhairle for the operation of Ógra Fianna Fáil. I was delighted to be asked to write for Cuisle on the reforms that have been introduced to the youth wing of our party.

The changes introduced at the last National Youth Conference in Cork in November provided for a radical overhaul at the top of Ógra. The National Youth Committee, renamed the Ógra central officer board, was more than halved in size from twenty-eight down to eleven. This provides for far more accountability as there is now only one regional organiser for each region instead of three and it makes decision making much more efficient. The democratic deficiency where some of the most important positions i.e. policy director, campaigns director etc. had been appointed, has now been removed and the officer board is much more function-based with a directly-

Úachtarán Ógra Fhianna Fáil. The Úachtarán chairs meetings and has overall responsibility for the management of the officer board.

The officer board decided after the National Youth Conference to appoint a secretary to minute meetings and provide other administrative assistance and split the only appointed position, communications officer, into two - a press officer and an internal communications officer. Ógra dropped its Ard Chomhairle representation from six to five, taking a lead in reducing the size of and reforming the overinflated body.

A new body has also been established to give accountability and oversight to the central officer board. The first Ógra National Council meeting was held on 28th of January. It has the power to remove officers, overturn decisions, direct actions and fill casual vacancies.

It consists of three delegates from each registered Ógra CDC and third level cumann. Approximately ninety members attended its first AGM. Officers are also required to give reports to council and take questions.

These changes have worked extremely

well in my opinion and I have no major criticisms. I think it is also important to note that the current officer board has operated so far without a national youth officer in Headquarters, a position which has been vacant since the National Youth Conference.

Chomhairle as the Ógra Constitution. We are preparing development resources like officer training and an officers' handbook. As well as campaigning against education cuts, against gender quotas, against the abolition of the Seanad, promoting suicide awareness and highlighting broken promises by this Government, we have launched our a costed pre-budget submission and will launch several policy documents and a comprehensive manifesto.

How does Ógra best serve the party and what should Fianna Fáil learn from it?

Ógra is very different from Fianna Fáil in that as well as attracting political junkies and loyal Fianna Fáilers, it attracts people who are not interested in politics and people who have no loyalty to Fianna Fáil. As such, independence from the party is crucial, particularly if we want to engage with our European partners in the Liberal Youth. Our founder Seamus Brennan always maintained that we should be much more radical.

The reason for low recruitment in Fianna Fáil and for the low transfer from Ógra to Fianna Fáil is that, as Micheál Martin TD says, it is difficult to join Fianna Fáil. Ógra hold regular meetings, activities and events. In many parts of the country, Fianna Fáil fails to do this. It can be hard to see the benefits from your membership. The proposals for one member one vote (OMOV), policy conferences and for CDC political activity plans are welcome, they give membership a purpose, even if the proposals are very long overdue. OMOV will abolish the fear that possessive elements within Fianna Fáil have of young people entering their cumainn.

The model Ógra has followed is one that I strongly believe Fianna Fáil should emulate: a national council representing each CDC holding a small function-based (15-20 person maximum) Ard Chomhairle to account.

I said during my election that Ógra must lead the renewal of Fianna Fáil. We have this opportunity to reform the whole party and it should be embraced. Who knows when the appetite for such a review will come again. We can never go back to the past.

Ger Fogarty

MOVING ON FROM BERTIE

Bertie Ahern leaves a strong legacy in many areas. But a healthy Fianna Fáil is not one of those things. Many may argue over what his direct influence was - but he has not left behind a political party built to take tough decisions. As our organisation struggles to rebuild in the toughest public environment we have ever faced, we need to accept where we have failed and what we need to change to win the confidence and support of the public.

There is no denying that Ahern deserves a unique place in Irish history for his efforts in the Northern Peace Process. More than any previous leader of Fianna Fáil, Ahern's approach brought results. Previous leaders, most notably Albert Reynolds, were able to achieve significant movement towards those results. But it was Bertie's strength as a deal maker that secured the results for which we all so desperately hoped.

Ahern was very definitely the right man at the right time for the North. A conciliator, a deal maker; someone capable of seeing the gap that needed closing and how that gap could be bridged. A deal was vital, and a do-able, sell-able deal was much more important than holding out for the 'perfect' solution.

These same deal-making skills sowed the seeds for the economic chaos now facing the country.

If Fianna Fáil is to successfully restructure and rebuild, an important first step is to accept the errors of our time in Government. And they were many. Perhaps the most important is an understanding of the relationship between our efforts and our rewards. This is as true in politics as it is in any other way of life. During the good years, our Government used burgeoning tax revenues to address any and all issues. While tax receipts continuously exceeded expenditures, the Government took the easy option and used increased spending as a panacea. Little care was given to value for money, a concept we all cry out for now.

For our party, this then meant elections fought on records of investment and tax cuts, with little regard to the sustainability of the economy which generated the underlying revenues.



Bertie Ahern - a man who brought positives and negatives to the party

If Fianna Fáil is to successfully restructure and rebuild, an important first step is to accept the errors of our time in Government.

As the economy and the exchequer continued to grow at pace, our ability to stand on principle was washed away. Organisations around the country weakened, and we stopped looking to our elected representatives for leadership, instead treating TDs and Ministers as distributors of the spoils of our burgeoning economy. A leisure centre here, an arts centre there, and a bypass up the road. And all with a Government TD turning the sod, and a Minister up for the official opening.

Under the leadership of Bertie Ahern, our party lost our ability to govern effectively, and our ability to operate as a meaningful political voice. Never was this clearer than in the 2007 election, which quickly boiled down to a series of rounds of promises for increased spending and reduced taxation. As a party member, I'll certainly take my share of the blame; there

are plenty of photos of me smiling beside Bertie as Taoiseach, and only limited instances where I objected at the time.

If Fianna Fáil is to return to a position of leadership, we need to earn that position by showing leadership. To exorcise the specter of Ahernism, we need to put aside point scoring and the sniping. We need to show both a strength of character and a principled opposition where required.

This will also mean a change in our approach to the current Government. When the Fine Gael and Labour Government propose flawed legislation, we should oppose it. But we also need to accept and support where genuine efforts are being made. In terms of public service reform, Fianna Fáil had both the time and the money to make the serious reform needed. The Ahern Governments failed, and in many cases left behind situations worse than when our party came to power. It is disingenuous then for Fianna Fáil to take a reflex position of opposition to all changes; the electorate already see it, the only ones who fail to see this are in our organisation.

This is not a call for a Tallaght Strategy, as the significant Government majority means such a policy is not needed. What we need at this point is to understand what went wrong during the Ahern years and what changes we need to make to ensure that Fianna Fáil becomes, and is seen to become, a force for positive improvement in Ireland once again.

Charlie Lynch



Members of the new Ógra officer board

elected policy & campaigns director, events director and membership and recruitment director.

Most importantly the positions of Cathaoirleach (which was a position appointed by Úachtarán Fhianna Fáil to a member of the parliamentary party) and Leas Cathaoirleach (the highest elected member of Ógra and de facto leader of Ógra) were merged into a new position of

well in my opinion and I have no major criticisms. I think it is also important to note that the current officer board has operated so far without a national youth officer in Headquarters, a position which has been vacant since the National Youth Conference.

What's next for Ógra? I am currently working on a new national youth scheme which I would like to see adopted by the Ard

BIRTH OF THE PARTY

The pace at which Fianna Fáil was conceived, born and delivered in the spring, summer and autumn of 1926 was extraordinary.

In late February 1926 De Valera, then president of what historians term the ‘third’ Sinn Féin, spoke for the first time publicly about how he himself would be prepared to enter the Free State Dáil if the Oath of Allegiance was removed. De Valera, like his fellow ‘republican’ deputies had maintained until then that their opposition to entry into the Free State’s institutions was a principled stand by the Republic declared at Easter 1916 which they maintained had been abandoned by the treaty signatories and illegitimately approved subsequently by Dáil Éireann.

A week after De Valera made these remarks a special Sinn Féin Ard Fheis had been arranged for the Rotunda in Dublin on the 9th March 1926 to debate the issue. At that event De Valera proposed a motion “that once the admission oath of the 26 county and the 6 county assemblies is removed, it becomes a question not of principle but of policy whether or not republican representatives should attend these assemblies.”

Narrowly defeated in the debate on that motion by only a handful of votes, De Valera led those supporting his stance out of the Ard Fheis. More than 85 years later there is still confusion as to whether De Valera actually wanted to win this issue within Sinn Féin or whether he had already his mind made up to leave. What we do know is that by the middle of the following week, De Valera had formally resigned as President of Sinn Féin and had had the first of many detailed discussions with Sean Lemass and others about setting up a new party.

In the following weeks a series of ad hoc meetings were held in quick succession to explore how the new party might be organised. The list of those attending these exploratory sessions, as well as De Valera and Lemass included names like O Kelly, Mac Entee, Rutledge, Ryan and Boland. These men, along with Frank Aiken would form the core of the new party’s senior management and indeed would form the core of Fianna Fáil Cabinets for the next half of a century.

By the 29th March, less than three weeks after

On the 16th April 1926 a notice was placed in An Poblachta announcing the establishment of Fianna Fáil - The Republican Party.

the famous Ard Fheis, those who supported De Valera’s policy had resigned their position from the Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle triggering an avalanche which saw resignations follow at all levels of Sinn Féin as the new party became definite.

A few days later at a lengthy planning meeting, held in Suffolk Street on Good Friday, key decisions were made including the party’s names, its initial policy offering and the timescales for its public launch. They also decided on a countrywide structure involving a unit, the cumann, in each catholic parish or half parish, supervised in rural constituencies by a local area committee the Ceann Comhairle and above that, and in the Dublin constituencies by a constituency or county committee, the Comhairle Dáil Cheantair.

Within a fortnight those planning the new party were ready to go public about their project. On the 16th April 1926 a notice was placed in An Poblachta announcing the establishment of Fianna Fáil - The Republican Party and inviting all Sinn Féin branch officers to make contact.

The next day De Valera himself gave an extensive interview to the news agency United Press in which he revealed the plans for the new movement and outlined in a general way what the aims of the new party would be. They included securing the independence of a united Ireland as a republic, the restoration of the Irish language and the development of a social system in which as far as possible equal opportunity will be afford to every citizen. The new party would also favour land redistribution and economic self-sufficiency.

A few days later Fianna Fáil’s provisional organising committee published a formal statement of these fundamental aims.

Within another month the organising effort had progressed to the extent that 500 people attended the party event at the La Scala Theatre in O’Connell Street (where Penny’s now stand). The venue had been chosen to emphasis continuity with the republican project sited as it was next door to the iconic birthplace of the Republic at the GPO. The gathering was presided over by Constance Markeivicz, who had fought in the 1916 rising and had gone on to be a Minister in the first Dáil. Markievicz had also fought on the anti treaty side during the Civil War and had taken De Valera’s side again at the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis the previous March. From the outset it was clear that she was set to play a prominent role in the new party and it is likely she would also have featured in future Fianna Fáil Governments had it not been for her early death from a sudden illness in July 1927.

From the platform in La Scala on the 16th May 1926 De Valera expanded on the party programme. His remarks that night and at a series of subsequent public meetings throughout the country were published as pamphlets by a small professional publicity unit. This information bureau, headed up by the future Irish Press Editor Francis Gallagher, had been established even before the public launch.

They began their work in late April from sparse offices upstairs on 35 Lower O’Connell Street in Dublin from where they co-ordinated the organising of about 400 chapel gate meetings throughout the country over the summer months. A panel of speakers was compiled, trained and briefed go forth countrywide “to explain policy and enlist supporters”. They were sent in carloads to county towns and villages and then one of them would be left behind to organise a Fianna Fáil cumann.

By the end of August 1926 a pamphlet on voter registration was circulated. A full check of the electoral register was in train by the middle of September.

The priority however was to have sufficient candidates, branches, and personnel on the ground to contest the next General Election, which was then seen as imminent. Senior politicians like Sean Lemass, Sean Mac Entee, Gerry Boland and the future General Secretary Tommie Mullins spent

every available hour on the road or on rail in this nationwide organisation activity. In most counties their focus was on targeting local IRA commanders or other prominent republican figures. They managed to persuade many of them who had never be involved in politics to become the party’s organisational leaders or Dáil candidates. This ‘key man’ strategy of targeting well-known republicans also had the advantage that their lieutenants almost always followed them into the new political activity. The approach was replicated right down to parish level when people were being recruited to staff cumainn officer boards.

By November 1926 more than 450 cumain had been established and more than 450 delegates from all over the country attended the party’s first Ard Fheis, again held in the Rotunda on the 24th November. As well as formalising the prominent figures of the provisional organising committee in their officer board roles on the Ard Comhairle, this first Ard Fheis also debated and adopted a policy programme which was remarkable at the time for its detail and radicalism.

These were extraordinarily intense months for those centrally involved. These men were used to living life at a frantic pace. All of them had been active in their teens or early twenties in the independence movement and then in the Civil War. Their hyperactivity in these early days of Fianna Fáil however was also born out of their restlessness. They had been frustrated within the depleted, demoralised and defeated ‘third’ Sinn Féin. That party had backed itself into a political cul de sac. It had been marooned because of its abstentionist policy.

Now De Valera was leading them on a new political path. It promised activity again. It opened the prospect of a new unity and purpose to the republican effort. It created the opportunity for many republican activists dormant since the Civil War to return to active service, this time in the political realm.

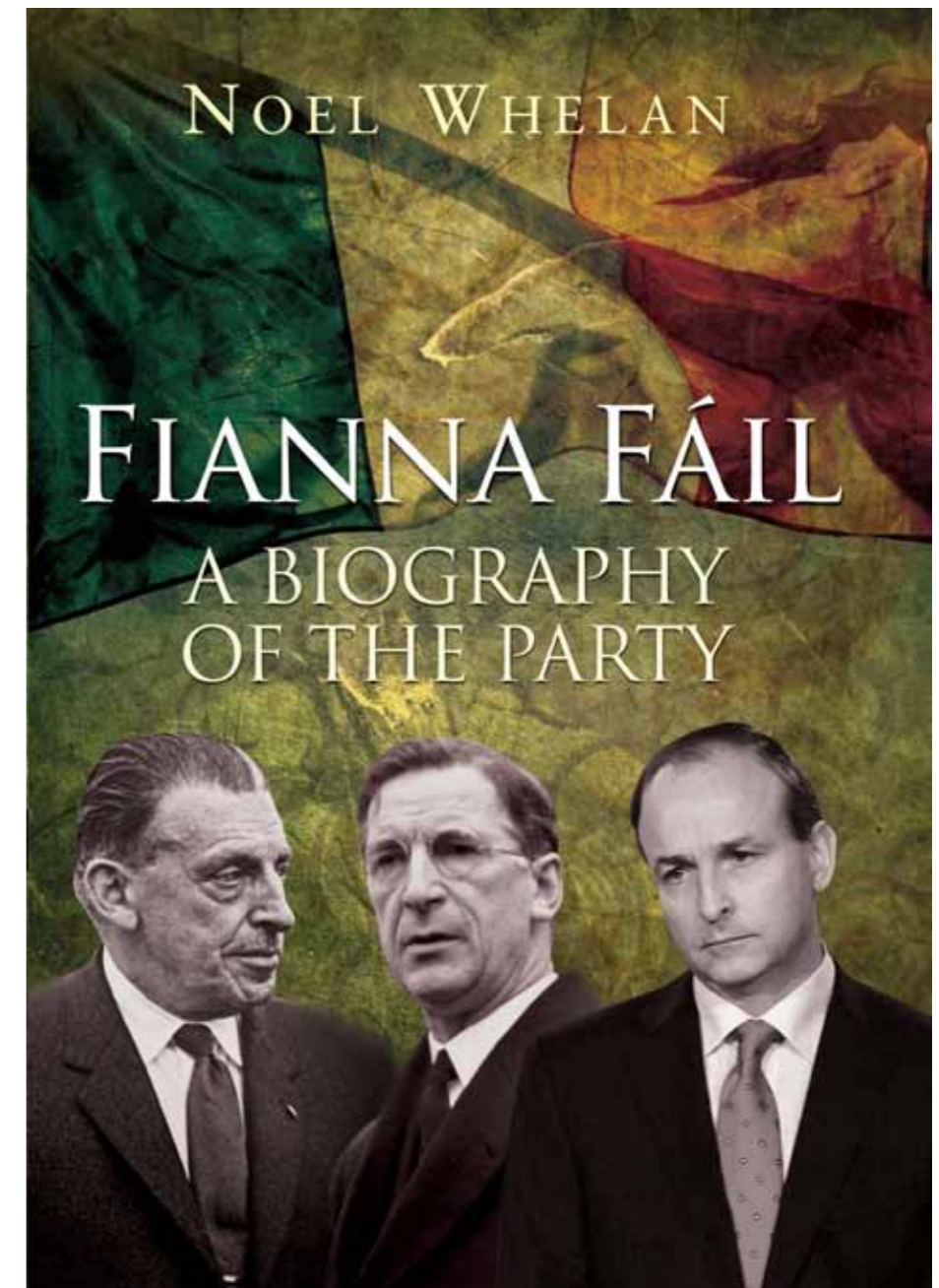
Four Dáil elections were held in the first seven years of Fianna Fáil’s existence. In its first election in 1923 Fianna Fáil managed to displace Sinn Féin and to hold the ‘republican’ share of the vote. In the second election held that year, by which time Fianna Fáil had entered the Dáil, the polarisation of politics saw Fianna Fáil along with Cumann na nGaedheal, benefit at the expense of smaller parties. By March 1932 Fianna Fáil was strong enough to gain power albeit as a minority Government. By January 1933 Fianna Fáil

was strong enough to win power on its own and begun the first of three unbroken 16 year terms in Government.

This rapid pace and energy of Fianna Fáil’s first months was one of the key factors which gave rise to this incredible electoral progress.

The party showed from the beginning that strong organisation mattered. It’s a lesson Fianna Fáil will now have to relearn.

Noel Whelan



Noel Whelan is the author of “Fianna Fáil, A Biography of the party” reviewed on page 28. He is a former member of staff in Fianna Fáil and currently works as a barrister and political commentator who writes a regular column for the Irish Times.

A TESTING TREATY

These are certainly testing times for Irish European relations, and judging by the Government's manoeuvring over whether we need a referendum to ratify our acceptance of the new fiscal stability union they could get a lot trickier.

It's a sad state of affairs when the Government is playing out in public its desperation to avoid a referendum and put the proposition of a stronger fiscal union to the people of Ireland.

As committed Europeans, it saddens me that rather than face up to their responsibility to debate Ireland's current and future position within the Union, the dodgers of democracy have negotiated with the bureaucrats in Europe a shady alternative.

In keeping with Fianna Fáil's consistent pro European policy stance Micheál Martin TD has called for a referendum on the proposed changes to European fiscal policy. His faith in the Irish people to understand the benefits of our membership of the EU and of tighter fiscal cooperation are born out of his experience during Lisbon II.

Against the odds, with an electorate increasingly hostile to the Fianna Fáil party and with little support from the opposition of the day, he put forward the arguments for ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in clear and reasonable terms and the Irish people voted yes.

Fianna Fáil's motivation for seeking a referendum for ratification of the treaty is not political gamesmanship. Since the 1950s senior party officials such as Lemass and Lynch have argued that Ireland's future lay in a more open and integrated Europe, that as a small island economy on the periphery of mainland Europe we had everything to gain through membership.

Since our membership of the EU, Irish businesses have had unhindered access to a market of over 490 million people, an estimated 700,000 jobs have been created in Ireland during the years of membership and trade has increased ninety fold. Foreign direct investment into Ireland has increased dramatically from just €16 million in 1972 to more than €30 billion now and Irish citizens have the right to move, work and reside freely within the territory of other member states.

Ireland received €17 billion in structural and cohesion funds during the first three decades of membership and it's estimated that some €3 billion in EU rural development and structural funding will be made available over the period 2007-2013. Between 1973 and 2008 Irish farmers received nearly €44 billion from the Common Agricultural Policy.

Since the first accession treaty in 1972 was passed with 83% of voters supporting membership, the majority of Irish people have voted in favour of continuing cooperation and increased EU integration. They have done so because they have been afforded the right under our Constitution to engage in the European debate at every stage of major change.

The electorate have come to expect the right to vote on these important changes to our membership and previous administrations have had the courage and the belief in the European project to put forward their case. Unlike this FG/ Labour Government which is showing a contempt for our democracy and unwilling to put forward a clear common policy position on Europe.

This type of political duplicity not only undermines Irish pro European sentiment but also undermines confidence in the democratic process. Yet again Fine Gael's promise of a new type of politics has been discarded. It also gives credibility to the rants of conspiracy theorists and anti European scaremongers who have predicted everything from conscription into a European army, an end to our neutrality and nuclear armourment as a consequence of ratifying previous treaties.

Now is the ideal time to maturely debate what Irish membership of the European Union means to us. What we have gained in the past and what the supports we are currently availing of do to help keep our economy stable. How they allow us to avail of a fund that keeps us from having to borrow on the international bond markets until we are in a better fiscal position.

Let us not forget the reason for these proposed changes to fiscal unity have been brought about by the near collapse of the European financial system. These amendments are necessary to prevent the greed of global financial institutions from destroying the economies of member nations.

Fine Gael do not want a referendum because they are afraid to go before the people for fear of a backlash against them for abandoning their pre election promises. A referendum campaign would highlight divisions within the Labour Party on European policy, who also fear losing ground to Sinn Féin, the leaders of the alliance of euro skeptics.

Micheál Martin TD has promised to provide a responsible opposition and his pledge to support the treaty in a referendum shows this. However the unwillingness of the Government to lead a referendum campaign requires Fianna Fáil to engage with the public in a debate about our commitment to the future of the European Union.

Jane Dignam

DUMPIN' DOUGHNUTS

Think back to the last Ard Fheis in February 2009. What do you remember? Was it the interesting speech by then Taoiseach Brian Cowen, speaking at his only Ard Fheis as party leader?

Was it the many interesting debates and discussions that took place? Was your main memory the social events around the Ard Fheis? Or was the stand out image the group of Fianna Fáil members standing behind David Davin Power and staring at the camera as he gave his live report from the Ard Fheis to the RTÉ 9pm news?

That became the most remarked upon moment at our last Ard Fheis. It received significant coverage in the national media and on the web. Even today if you Google "Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis 2009" it's still the most likely item to come up.

Now let's be clear, the members involved in this did nothing wrong. However these members were engaging in a practice that has become widespread in Fianna Fáil. That practice is known as doughnutting.

Doughnutting is when a well known politician or other personality is giving a television interview and they are surrounded by a group of people who have nothing to do with the piece – at least not directly. These people stand and stare into the camera, often talking amongst themselves or jostling for position.

While all this can be great fun for the people involved, it's not actually a helpful practice. Having a large group of people behind the interviewee can be distracting, taking the

viewer's attention away from what the person on camera is saying.

The people who manage to work their way into shot may get a great buzz out of all the recognition they get from their friends and family – "I saw you on the news next to TD X" but they are forgetting why that interview is taking place. When a Fianna Fáil figure is being interviewed the party is trying to get its message out. A message the party hopes will help the party by appealing to voters and members.

Watching the news however and listening to the various 15 – 20 second soundbite interviews with politicians, the casual viewer is easily distracted. So when they see a group behind the interviewee, that group usually draws the attention. Meaning what the interviewee is saying is lost on the viewer.

As a former Fianna Fáil press officer, I can tell you from first hand experience the practice of doughnutting has been rife in this party for some time. There might be a prominent party figure doing an interview and when the TV crew set up their camera a group of members would immediately surround the interviewee.

Realising how distracting these people can be, I would regularly try to come up of ways of keeping these people out of shot. I'd try to set the interview up in such a way that no one could get behind the person being interviewed. Sometimes this approach would work. Most of the time it didn't.

It's not just me who thinks this is a negative practice. Washington based Aisling Garvey who is from Dublin and has close ties to the party is Senior Vice President of Teneo Consulting, a multinational company which includes Bill Clinton and Tony Blair on its board. Aisling head's up Teneo's Washington



Members 'doughnutting' David Davin Power at the last FF Ard Fheis

DC office and is an expert on strategic and public relations consulting, having advised some of the top people in international companies like Coca Cola, Vodafone and many others ahead of big business television interviews with channels like MSNBC.

Here's what she thinks of the practice of doughnutting. "In my view it not only makes people look away from the TV but it also distracts people and takes much needed focus away from what is actually being reported. It also suggests that the audiences at the event are disinterested and along for the ride."

To be fair, Fianna Fáil is far from the only Irish political party or other organisation who suffers from doughnutting. It's a widespread phenomenon in this country. However at a time when this party is supposed to be looking at every aspect of itself, when we are all supposed to be coming up with ways to improve the party, here's my one small suggestion. Let's all dump the doughnut.

Jimmy Healy



Pictured outside the European Parliament were some members of the newly formed Patrick Hillery Cumann, Brussels - the first unit to be set up for party members based in the area. The cumann has over 60 members and its honorary presidents are Fianna Fáil MEPs Liam Aylward, Brian Crowley and Pat the Cope Gallagher.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TOURS Did you know that subsidised trips to the European Parliament are available? There are two trip options. The first involves a visit to the European Parliament in Strasbourg before travelling to the Black Forest in Germany. The second option includes a trip to the European Parliament in Brussels as well as visits to Amsterdam and Bruges. The visits are sponsored by Fianna Fáil MEPs Liam Aylward, Brian Crowley and Pat the Cope Gallagher. If you'd like further information contact Ciaran Bolger on euro.awareness@gmail.com or call 0032 474 691 200.

NEW PRINTING SERVICE FOR COUNCILLORS

The key to political success for councillors is not just constructive policy and good honest hard graft but the effective and sustained communication of such to the voters – getting that nice long vertical stroke (and lots of them) beside their name on the ballot paper being their just reward. If no stone is left unturned, then no voter should be left uninformed.

Anyway, the problem is that "effective communication" costs two things – time and money. Recognising that these costs can be a deterrent against getting the necessary promotional and informational material out there, Fianna Fáil has entered into a partnership with Custodian Print Management to provide a streamlined web-based design-and-print service which allows councillors to simply pick from a variety of promotional

materials (ie newsletters, canvass cards, calling cards, etc) with several alternative templates for each.

All the councillor has to do is pick the promotional material/template they want, provide the basic text (and a good quality photo of themselves) and Custodian will take care of the rest.

To further assist councillors, Fianna Fáil Headquarters will cover all design costs, and half of the printing costs. The benefit for the councillor is that he or she gets a decidedly professional finished product with Fianna Fáil branding that doesn't take long to prepare and for less than half of what such items would normally cost.

Micheál Martin TD firmly believes that such a service will play a vital role in getting the message out about the work Fianna Fáil and its representatives are doing on the ground in towns, villages, and communities across the country. "On my national tour, it became very clear very quickly that our councillor base is a major resource and we have not made the most of this resource over the years. The new design and print facility will allow councillors everywhere to produce informative and professional printed material to engage with their communities and further build the party's profile. I would encourage councillors everywhere to make the most of this new service."

DJ Moore

TACKLING SEPTIC TANKS

Recently one of the major policy issues concerning voters throughout rural Ireland has been the decision by the Government to introduce more regulation for septic tanks.

The Water Services (Amendment) Bill requires homeowners to pay for their septic tanks to be inspected and they may later have to have their tanks refurbished or replaced. Fianna Fáil has been at the forefront of battling against this legislation, laying out the issues both outside and inside the Oireachtas. According to Éamon Ó Cuív TD, “Fianna Fáil fully support ensuring that our water resources are kept clean and free from pollution.”

After sustained pressure from Fianna Fáil, the registration fee of €50 has been reduced to €5 provided householders register in the next three months. Many say that this is still unfair as the money spent on the construction, maintenance and upgrading of public wastewater treatment systems is in the billions. Meanwhile there has been no direct investment of public funding for private wastewater systems.

The anger expressed by people throughout rural Ireland is not because they don't want to keep the environment safe, they simply do not think it's fair to foot the bill.

The current bill says inspections are free unless a householder appeals a decision, they

would then cost €200 per inspection. Deputy Ó Cuív wants the appeal fee to be eliminated. According to the Regulatory Impact Analysis of the Department of Environment, a new system could cost up to €17,000.

In the past Fianna Fáil did not approach the issue in this universal way as they would have favoured a grant scheme. According to Deputy Ó Cuív, “We didn't approach it this way because the municipal water system was more of a pollutant than the rural wastewater systems. We put the money where the problem was.” Now Fianna Fáil want all mandatory upgrades and maintenance costs to be grant aided to a minimum of 85%.

For Fianna Fáil to support the bill, the issue of any additional work to septic tanks must be exempt from planning permission. Deputy Ó Cuív describes this as the next big issue as rural householders have been treated as “second class citizens.” What remains uncertain is what happens if improvements encroach onto neighbours land.

Fianna Fáil have pointed out that the state will invest €1.5 billion in water and wastewater services over the next five years. Deputy Ó Cuív asks, “Why is the Minister not willing to set 10% of this money aside for Rural Wastewater Services when billions have been spent on the construction, maintenance and upgrading of public sewerage systems in the last ten years?”

John Whelan

GOVERNMENT CUTS TO SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS A CHOICE NOT A NECESSITY

The present Government of Fine Gael and Labour flew into office on promises of no cuts to frontline services. Well that promise, along with dozens more have been broken quite cynically and comprehensively in their very first budget.

The systematic targeting of small rural schools through increases in staffing schedules, abolishing minor work grants and cuts in capitation must be one of the most cynical measures introduced by Minister Quinn since taking office. And he's had a few, remember the pledge.

In most rural areas the primary school is the centre of the community, and in most rural areas the primary school is the only frontline service that we have. It is clear that with these measures the Minister and his Government do not only want to cut our rural schools, they want to close them.

Here in West Kerry it is estimated that in the next two years alone over fourteen teachers will be lost from schools in the Gaeltacht. These are all schools that over the last ten years had finally received much needed

funding to improve facilities for children and teachers alike.

These are Gaeltacht schools where everything is taught through Irish. Here children learn not only to speak through Irish, but to think in Irish. In fact since 1999 these schools were given a special status as they were our Government's first line in the survival and growth of our language.

Bhí an cheart ag Pádraig Pearse nuair a dúirt sé “Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam,” agus bhí an cheart ag Micheál Martin TD agus Éamon Ó Cuív TD nuair a thug siad an stádas sin do mbunscoileanna istigh sa Ghaeltacht.

This status has now being removed which means that they face an even greater increase in pupil teacher ratios than outside the Gaeltacht. It seems that Fine Gael and Labour, having pulled back from a direct assault on the Irish language, are intent on doing it through cuts to the only service that many Gaeltacht areas have - our primary schools.

Remember all the hype and fanfare when Fine Gael and Labour came back from meetings

with the troika prior to the election? They told us that they had succeeded in getting a guarantee that once the overall budgetary figures were met the Irish Government would be the sole decision makers on where each and every cut would fall.

Just in case you forgot, this was repeated to opposition parties when they met the troika just after Christmas this year. So each and every Government attack on our small rural schools has been a choice of this Fine Gael and Labour Government and not a necessity.

Remember also that all rural Fine Gael and Labour TDs voted against the Fianna Fáil motion at the start of February “condemning the Government's covert attempt to force the closure of small schools in rural communities around the country”. So when these same TD's stand up in your community and say they are against these cuts and covert closures, remind them how they voted and ask them why they voted in favour of cutting and closing our small rural schools.

Breandán Fitzgerald

HELP WANTED

FIANNA FÁIL PHOTO ARCHIVE VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Over the course of putting this and our previous issue of Cuisle together, we have noticed that the party has a treasure trove of photos. These photos amount to thousands upon thousands and stretch all the way back to the formative years of the party.

These photos are invaluable, covering the vast history of the party and include many significant events and interesting moments. They should be a major resource to the party and its members.

However these photos can be difficult to get a hold of and are scattered in numerous different locations.

Cuisle would like to set up a Fianna Fáil Photo Archive on the web or through a cloud computing type system. However we'd need your help to make this happen.

If you'd be interested in sparing some time for this initiative and are based in or around the Dublin area, Cuisle would appreciate your help.

Please contact us on cuisle@fiannafail.ie

In our last issue, Cuisle got interesting views from two members on the question “What does Fianna Fáil mean to me?” At this key time for the party and with the first Ard Fheis in three years taking place, we spoke to some more members coming from different areas and aspects of the party and asked them the same question. Here's what they had to say.



Aidan O'Connor,
*Kevin Barry Cumman
UCD/ Wicklow
(4th generation
member)*

Growing up, Fianna Fáil played a big part of my life, hearing of stories about the men of the Rising to the peace

and prosperity brought by the Good Friday Agreement; I like to believe that every good aspect of Irish society today has a Fianna Fáil

man or woman behind it.

Born out of war, from an army bound to defend Ireland and to secure its sovereignty, Fianna Fáil is a brotherhood from each of the four green fields of Ireland. When thinking of what our republicanism is, I like to think of the classic French republicanism of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Liberty from interference and encouraging democracy to flourish. Equality given through equal opportunities to succeed, such as in education. Fraternity, a community based on values and teamwork pulling resources

for the greater good and looking after the weak in our communities. Our patriotism should be measured in our ability to put our preservation last and putting national interests first, it should also be measured by doing the right thing for every person on this island and in turn our ability to defend the essence of republicanism in our great society.

“From death springs life and from the graves of great patriots springs a great nation.”
Padraig H. Pearse



Senator Averil Power
Dublin North East

As a young person from a non-political family, I had no natural ties to any particular party. I joined Fianna Fáil

because its policies most appealed to me, as did its track record of delivering real progress.

emphasis on education as a vehicle of social opportunity spoke particularly to my own life experience.

And while others thrived on pitting different sections of Irish society against each other, Fianna Fáil had long moved beyond outdated notions of class politics. Their policies were influenced as much by the aspirations of those who wished to better themselves as they were by the fears of those who were struggling to survive. They also understood that the best way to tackle unemployment was to create a pro-enterprise environment.

Almost fifteen years later, I am proud to be a member of Fianna Fáil and honoured to have the opportunity to represent the party in Seanad Éireann.

For me, the key to Fianna Fáil's future lies in the strengths of our past:
- In having members who are active at every

- level in every community.
- in listening to our members and ensuring that your real experience on the ground shapes the party's policies at the national level.
- In an ongoing commitment to the Fianna Fáil brand of real republicanism.

Fianna Fáil republicanism is not just about securing the peaceful reunification of Ireland. It is also about a commitment to the republican principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. For me that means working to achieve real parity of esteem and of opportunity for every Irish person - be they male or female, gay or straight, black or white, rich or poor.

Our past is the key to our party's future and together we can help to make the future a better place for every person living on this island.



Deirdre Smith,
Meath East

To me, Fianna Fáil is a testament to the resilience of the Irish psyche. It demonstrates the strength of the Irish people and the obstacles that can be overcome

when enough people of a similar mind strive collectively toward a clear vision. This was true at the time of the foundation of the

party and is equally as valid today. This is important for us to remember, as we continue to face into significant economic and political challenges. Despite these challenges, Fianna Fáil still comprises a vast network of skilled individuals, determined to rebuild the party and the wider economy.

Fianna Fáil was founded on promoting and protecting its core republican values. These included strong family and community, cultural heritage and tradition, education, enterprise and opportunity. These values have been at the heart of all progressive Fianna Fáil policies and continue to provide the cornerstones of

the party's appeal across the generational spectrum. Over the years, some of these values have been forsaken for the appeal of governance and without adhering to its principles, the party's ideological stance has diminished. As it undergoes a process of renewal and a reformed ideology emerges, I believe that Fianna Fáil should position itself at the intersection of innovation and tradition; embracing modernity but preserving its core values.



Dara Calleary TD
Mayo

At this stage Fianna Fáil means so many things in my life, it is impossible to drill it down.

People ask why I got in to politics. My reply is that I want

to make a difference to my country and to my community. Fianna Fáil is my vehicle to make that difference. Throughout the years since 1926 our party has made a significant difference for the good to this country.

At the moment we are rightfully questioning the less positive aspects of our time in Government. We need to do this a lot more. We can no longer accept as we may once

have that we are always right on everything. We need to acknowledge mistakes made and damage done however unintentionally. But in acknowledging that, we should stand tall and be proud of our record in health, education, enterprise, welfare, justice, peace and so many other areas.

That record was founded on a republican ethos and as we now embark on renewal we need to renew that republican ethos for the 21st century and set ourselves a series of new policy challenges. Our founding members never shirked from challenging the country on policy, we must now do the same. We should challenge ourselves also on organisation. Structures that once were our bedrock may not be as relevant today. We need to think outside the box on that one.

Over my time in Fianna Fáil I have met many great people who have left strong impressions

on me. Through Fianna Fáil I have met many of my best friends, it is responsible for many great nights out and is the reason that there isn't a corner of Ireland where I won't know someone. The advent of social media has made it much easier to link up with members and friends across the island on a more regular basis. But there's nothing to beat the physical presence of being in company and especially being on a door with a voter.

Renewing the party isn't all about structures and policies. It's about restoring pride and passion to our membership and about ensuring that we can continue (and will continue) to make that difference. Ar aghaidh linn!



Lesley Shannon
Longford

If you asked me this question five years ago, my opinion on the party would have been somewhat different to what it is today. I accredit the change in my opinion and change of heart

due to the current change in leadership of the Fianna Fáil. I do believe Micheál Martin TD's guidance and his willingness to listen is key to bringing forth positive changes that this country needs.

I also believe in the many new faces and opinions that have been unearthed in the last year. This new blood filtering through the veins of a river that is constantly referred to as "tainted" continues to insist that we move

forward with a new sense of belonging and hope and why shouldn't we? I don't want to stand idly by and criticize the past, I want to comment on today, the future and I have every confidence in myself because I believe the party has breathed new life into itself in the last year.

Currently I am rather despondant with the current administration, as I rather imagined I would be. So I rely on my fellow members of Fianna Fáil to be the voice of the people, the sounding box, whilst we are a nation that is ignored, accused and bewildered. What Fianna Fáil means to me today in 2012 is hope, forward thinking, belief and encouragement in what every town and city of this wonderful country are capable of and marketing those talents on a higher scale.

Currently the Taoiseach slanders the country for "spending like mad" and yet weeks ago told the nation "you are not blame". So whilst

there are others who don't know where they stand right now, I at least do. I have faith in myself and faith in what the party can achieve if given the chance under the guidance of Micheál Martin TD. If people are willing to cast aside the chains of the past and never again allow their vulnerabilities to be the targeted.

Knowing that the key to communication is by peaceful and courteous dialogue. Address your concerns to Fianna Fáil now. Take a step forward with your ideas and resolutions. This is what Fianna Fáil means to me now, hope and a more vocal voice of the people with a better and more intuned understanding of modern day concerns.



Dr. Sean O'Connor
Wicklow (3rd generation member)

For me the party is a source of unique Irish political energy. Being third generation Fianna Fáil, as a child I

was brought up on the exciting stories of the Easter Rising, the black and tans, Civil War, coupled with more personal stories of my grandfather been on the run. I was also fortunate as a child to have

met many of the heroes of this early era in the party's history. Indeed my earliest memory as a child was as a six year old watching in awe the 1966 Easter parade from Cleary's across the road from the GPO.

It was not till I joined Ógra that the party really became relevant to me in terms of policies and the development of a society that I wanted to live and work in. My Ógra days in the 80s were turbulent and exciting times in the party, particularly for a young person. I also made life long friends in that era and learnt a lot about politics and indeed life and the value of political energy in society.

Until I was asked to write this short piece I never reflected on what the party means to me. In essence it means a lot and I was deeply upset about what happened before and during the last election. I felt powerless to help, as I was just an ordinary member who could do nothing to change its direction and fate. I agree with the view that we are at a crossroads but I am upbeat about the future. We must make the big steps necessary to become part of Ireland's future as much as we have about the past. I want Fianna Fáil to make bold political initiatives like the party founders did at its foundation. Most of all I want to feel that raw political energy run through the party and society again.



Cllr. John Paul Feeley
Cavan

It is often suggested that we have lost our way, as a party we stand for nothing and have diluted our republican ethos.

Whilst I can see why that perception has arisen, as a Fianna Fáil public representative, I dispute that contention.

Over the years we have allowed ourselves become apologetic for what we are, moved too easily to meet the agenda of other political groups and commentators. We were seen, in most cases unfairly, as being beholden to certain interests. A small number of our

representatives failed to ground their actions in the core principles of our party. Our country and ultimately our party have paid a huge price for those failings.

The guiding ethos and principles upon which our party was founded in 1926 a broad republican philosophy, respect for values, determination to build on our nation's unique strengths, to promote our culture and the well being of the people of Ireland and confidently engage with our neighbours remain the touchstones of what I believe to be Fianna Fáil. Those principles can never change, the policies by which we implement them must always be revised to meet the challenge of the times.

We must refocus on those ideals, develop the practical solutions to the issues of today, keep away from 'Killinaskully' style politics and offer

real substance, decency and values to have a future.

We are, and must be proud to be, the party of the silent majority, the real 'ordinary working people' across Ireland. People who are not afraid to step up to the plate, who want to work, to build up their farms and businesses, to enhance their communities. People who expect us to fight for them, to be a voice for those who have none and face down the loudest demands while serving the common good.

Around the country, I and other public representatives endeavour to address the concerns of today, the struggles of our constituents through the prism of the principles and republican ethos of Fianna Fáil. To serve the communities we represent and serve the country we love.



Ola Ladenegan
Kildare

I never thought I'd join a political party anywhere in the world.

As an immigrant in Ireland, all I

wanted was peace, tranquillity and a home, not a house, for the whole of the family. A place where we could put down roots and flourish. But here I am, accepted within my community, my family's thriving. What do I contribute in return apart from the obvious, work?

Ireland is still evolving particularly with regards to multi-ethnicity. There must be something I could contribute to the debate? How?

I eventually came to the view that engaging in politics or joining a political party which

considers the views of its members, mine included, to form its policies for the common good would be a nice way to contribute to Irish society. Did Plato not say, "Societies aren't made of sticks and stones, but of men whose individual characters, by turning the scale one way or another, determine the direction of the whole." But which political party to join?

I discussed with many colleagues, friends and neighbours and I researched. At the end, I decided to join Fianna Fáil. The constitution of Fianna Fáil is a clincher. Its aspirations are noble – peace, equality, aspirations for the common good but respect for the individual, tolerance and application of laws in a humane, caring manner. These are the objectives within which I could work, contribute and throw all my energy into.

My experience within the party has been gratifying. I have mingled with ordinary members like myself, councillors and

parliamentary members. At all occasions, I have found the people pleasant, courteous and focussed.

At present, the party is reconstituting and rebuilding but one could see the determination, focus and quiet resolution amongst members to get the job done starting with Uachtarán Fhianna Fáil, Micheál Martin TD. This is one of the endearing qualities of the individual members and the party as a whole.

In the future, I would like to see a concerted drive to recruit more of immigrants, many of whom have taken up citizenship of the State and made Ireland their permanent home.



Michelle Hoban
Mayo

As a young, UCD undergraduate I first dipped my feet into the political world by joining the Kevin Barry Cumann. Fianna Fáil was the only party that appealed to

me, it was the party that was governing this nation and it was the party so instrumental in developing it into the country that it is today. I wanted to be part of all that and I wanted the opportunity for my voice to be heard. When I joined Fianna Fáil, the country was in a heightened sense of euphoria from the boom of the Celtic Tiger and it showed no sign in slowing down.

Why did I join Fianna Fáil? You could say that it was the party that chose me. Throughout the generations, from my grandfather's time to my father's time it was and is the party that has consistently strived to improve this country and the conditions for its people. For a country as small as ours I am incredibly proud of what has been achieved both on a national and international stage, owed in no small measure to Fianna Fáil.

This party has led on so many fronts from health and social welfare, to education and infrastructure.

Least we forget, this party maintained neutrality for the nation and it had a major role in successfully engineering the Northern Ireland peace process. Momentous occasions in our country's history.

During it's time in Government, Fianna Fáil had to make difficult choices in a period of utter economic chaos throughout the world. These choices were not taken too lightly and they have yet to be proven wrong. The present Government has embraced such changes and it has done little in the way of changing the strategy which was first embarked upon by Fianna Fáil.

The present administration has consistently reneged on its pre-election promises, making u-turn after u-turn and despairing hundreds of thousands of people. Fianna Fáil needs to make a return to power. The sooner the better it will be for our country.



Pat Carey
Dublin North West

For me Fianna Fáil has always been the party that has helped this country. Without Fianna Fáil and its policies people wouldn't have had access to free second level

education, to decent local authority housing or to a welfare system as good as any in Europe.

Fianna Fáil was and should continue to be the party of those who find it hard to support themselves. It is the party who strives to put in place good health and education systems. It is the party that like Lemass has the vision

to reboot the economy and build it when the need arises.

In more recent times that vision has allowed Fianna Fáil to guide the growth in the IT, technology and pharmaceutical sectors. That was based on the work of dynamic and visionary people who saw the value of the technology sector before it was established in this country and who realised all that could be gained by developing the IFSC. It is that vision that understands the need to support the betterment of the environment and why concepts like cloud computing can play such a major role in our economy.

Fianna Fáil is the party that recognises the contribution made by small businesses and large businesses, but should never be in the pocket of either. It is the party that should

continue to strive for a more equal society where the wealth is shared fairly throughout.

It is a party that is conscious and proud of Ireland's place in Europe and will continue to play a lead role in the development of a Europe for the people. Fianna Fáil will contribute to and learn from the best ideas wherever they come from, as long as they help improve Ireland as a nation.

Fianna Fáil is the party that promotes the talent and resources of Irish people for the benefit of the country as a whole. It believes that Ireland should always be an outward, confident nation which contributes to the world around us and will continue to work towards that outcome.



Timmy Dooley TD
Clare

Fianna Fáil has always been about people in my opinion. The people within the party and those all around the country who have benefitted in many different

ways by Fianna Fáil's contribution to Irish life. This is what makes Fianna Fáil not just a political party, but something more.

It used to be said that Fianna Fáil was a national movement, one of the pillars of Irish society. When you look at the party's many

fantastic members and supporters you can still see why that tag applied. Fianna Fáil members and supporters represent practically every aspect of Ireland, coming from all the diverse backgrounds and outlooks that go into making this country what it is.

This has always been the party's real strength. It is the members and supporters who made this party great. They were the ones from the grassroots upwards helping to guide party policy and the very direction of the state. They were the people who made sure that so many of the measures taken by Fianna Fáil when in Government, decade by decade, were for the benefit of the people as a whole.

Those were the people who were the real

representatives of the party, meeting with their friends and neighbours, talking to them about their day to day problems. That intelligence would then be passed up the chain to the party leaders and from that information solid decisions and broader policy was born.

That was the Fianna Fáil I saw all around me growing up in Clare and on my travels to other parts of the country. It is the Fianna Fáil I know that the renewal efforts are looking to recapture.

A party of the members, the supporters, the people. That's what Fianna Fáil is to me and that's what I hope the people of this country will soon realise is still what Fianna Fáil is all about.



Marian Quinlan
Dublin West

I was encouraged to join the party during the Local Election campaign in 1985.

Very shortly after joining Fianna Fáil I realised that the party in Dublin West had a vibrant social side to it so from the get go I was hooked. I quickly became secretary of Shelerin Cumann in Mulhuddart and held that position for a long number of years. We had a really good organisation and the regular CDC meetings addressed by both the late Brian

Lenihan (Snr) and the late Liam Lawlor.

I worked as personal secretary to Brian Lenihan from 1996 until he passed away last June. Brian was an old style party man who knew the corú off by heart and instilled a great respect for the party and its leader in all the members. We fought his Bye Election campaign and 4 subsequent General Elections and through each of these I learned more and more about how the party worked.

I have the utmost respect for the work carried out by headquarters' staff. Their contribution to campaigns is very often overlooked as the laurels go to the candidate. Most recently we had an example of what real hard work by

party HQ and our local members can achieve when we got 22% of the vote for David McGuinness in the Bye Election. In my view, it is this commitment, dedication and belief in the party that makes Fianna Fáil what it is.

Fianna Fáil to me was a way of life. Despite the pitfalls over that past 27 years since I joined, there is a bond among the membership that will ensure that one day we will celebrate when we return to our proper home at the other side of the chamber in Leinster House.

To quote the late, great Brian Lenihan "onwards and upwards".



Cllr. Sinead Dooley
Offaly

I grew up in a home where being Fianna Fáil came in ahead of religion and on a par with being Irish. Neighbours sharing 'our colour' were 'sound' and those

of the other persuasion were 'as blue as be damned'.

Elections, with our grandfather as director, were like Christmas and Easter all rolled into one and we spent weeks folding literature and helping with the electoral register - "I think he's nearly 18!" Trying to bring excitement to folding literature, we chanted as we worked "vote 1,2,3,4 and stop".

Outside of elections and national collections being Fianna Fáil meant being up to our necks in meeting the needs of the local community – from the GAA to the hall committee, from the youth group to the scout troop. Whatever the club, the local FF cumann was represented at its hub.

That empathy with the common person has served us well. With my granduncle Pat Boland among them, the first Fianna Fáil deputies took their seats in Dáil Éireann August 1927 to implement De Valera's words in La Scala Theatre 15 months earlier, "The Republican deputies would be able to take an effective part in improving the social and material conditions of the people and in building up the strength of the nation as a whole".

The Fianna Fáil I believe in, the one I have committed my life to, continued on that true republican path - representing the

small farmer over the landlord, the corner shopkeeper over the conglomerate as it became Europe's most successful political movement for generations. Unfortunately like numerous others in this country, Fianna Fáil lost its way during the Celtic Tiger era, the corporate became more important than the cumann and we have paid the price.

We must now reclaim our membership – those who continue to work for the people and with the people and who represent every sector of Irish society. Our party did a lot of very good work in every community in this country and we should not forget that nor should we apologise for being members of this great organisation. Let us reclaim our republicanism, based on a sense of justice and equality, liberty and the common good and let us work together with unity of purpose to rebuild our party. Ar aghaidh le Fianna Fáil.



Páidi Ó Sé
Kerry

I have been an active member of Fianna Fáil for the guts of 40 years. I often compare those 40 years with my involvement both as a player and manager

of the Kerry football team. Great, great days and great, great memories.

Since the 2011 General Election I have had plenty of times to fine comb Fianna Fáil, my party. I vividly recall the 2007 General Election campaign, halfway through that campaign we were on 30% popularity with the electorate and only for a very timely intervention by the then Minister for Finance, Brian Cowan

bringing our popularity up nearly 15% in ten days, Fianna Fáil would have been in opposition back then.

The 2007 incoming Government reminds me a lot of the Kerry football panel (post 86) all tried and trusted good performers who never let the side down. They always managed to perform on the day, but that team were never going to bring anything new or fresh to the table? We had done it too many times, we simply had nothing to prove. It is my personal opinion that it's actually here that it all went wrong for Fianna Fáil. No hungry deputies looking for promotion, no fresh ideas – in a nutshell through no fault of anybody a tired team had taken the field.

The Taoiseach had to deal with and tackle serious wide ranging issues on a daily basis, hostilities from literally all fabrics of society

and all the while as this was happening the electorate were calling for blood. No excuses!! Out, out, out. Then everybody ran for cover, Government Ministers left the sinking ship, they used old age, bad health, and domestic problems as excuses. But being brutally honest they didn't have the bottle or the balls to be in opposition for at least another 5 years.

This year's Ard Fheis will be the beginning of a new Fianna Fáil. For any young aspiring man or woman with a desire for a life in politics, our party right now is the place to be. I believe the richness and achievements of our parliamentary party since its foundation will stand steadfast, nobody can question it, nobody. The electric capsule which always ignites Fianna Fáil is awaiting. Come in and light it up.



AIDAN Ó GORMÁIN
Director of Organisation Development Fianna Fáil HQ/Offaly

Fianna Fáil to me has always been about people putting time into a cause they believe in. It's about

each person's individual effort contributing to the great influence for progression that Fianna Fáil has been to this nation. Membership of Fianna Fáil is an expression of a shared desire to influence local and national politics, to help make a better future for our families, friends and neighbours.

I was a party member long before I started

working in Fianna Fáil Headquarters. I wasn't born into the party. The work to bring about peace on this island and the leadership shown by party leaders such as Ray McSharry in the early 90s first attracted me to the party.

However it was meeting members though other voluntary activities that first persuaded me to join. Over the years working in Mount Street, I've had the pleasure of coming into contact with thousands of members. These people have reinforced my faith and belief in this party. There is a real sense of Mortás Cine within our membership. A real pride of place in our parishes, communities and pride in our country.

Yes, our members strive and toll at elections, at referendums and on the many other occasions that make up life in Fianna Fáil. They don't do this for themselves. They do it

for the benefit of the people all around them. They devote their time and energy to making a difference. Real Fianna Fáil people don't put the party, or any individual candidate first. They know that what's good for their community is also good for Fianna Fáil.

I read a lot of local newspapers as part of my work. Every week I see our members active in community groups, charity work, community development, arts and sporting endeavour. To me Fianna Fáil is the vehicle to harness this spirit and put it to work for the continued development of our nation. While we may sometimes take a misstep we will never lose sight of the greater goal as long as we have such members in our party.

That's what Fianna Fáil means to me. It's really all about its members. Always has been and always should be.

GERRY HICKEY 1944-2012

I always thought the extraordinary thing about Gerry Hickey was his sense of calm. I worked with him for close to a decade and I don't think I ever saw him panic. As a speechwriter, I greatly appreciated Gerry's level-headedness and his cool manner especially in the frantic moments when a last minute change had to be made to a script.

As well as being a man who was invariably calm, Gerry was wise and he was decent. He had been round the political block and he had very solid judgement. He served as Bertie Ahern's programme manager in the Department of Finance from 1991 to 1994. He showed a huge commitment to Fianna Fáil when he went to work for the party during our last period in opposition. He had a vast array of policy interests and expertise.

He played a major role in producing the 'People Before Politics' manifesto which was central to Fianna Fáil's election victory in 1997. From June 1997 to May 2008, Gerry Hickey was the Taoiseach's programme manager. In this role, he was respected by all the staff, not just for his immense abilities but



for his modesty and his generosity.

He was very involved in Northern Ireland in the period leading up to the St. Andrews Agreement. But I believe his finest achievement was the master-class he gave in coalition management. Previous coalitions involving Fianna Fáil had ended in acrimony. In 1997 when Fianna Fáil returned to Government many critics claimed the arrangement with the PDs and independents wouldn't last a wet week.

Yet that Government turned out to be the longest serving peace-time administration in

the history of the State. And it was returned to office in the 2002 General Election. Certainly the dynamic between Bertie Ahern and Mary Harney was instrumental to the longevity of that Government. But the role of Gerry Hickey was also central. He had a huge appetite for work, he had no ego and he was a problem-solver.

He and Katherine Bulbulia, the PD programme manager, worked very well together. Gerry had strong respect for Katherine's political astuteness, her vast experience and her warm personality. Thousands of issues that might have festered into disputes in other administrations were amicably and sensibly dealt with by the two programme managers.

Gerry was also always busy liaising with the independents, who supported the Government, keeping them briefed on upcoming legislation. If things were going particularly well in work, there was nothing Gerry liked more than a cup of tea and a Crunchie at his desk. He was a man of simple pleasures. Away from the office, he was a great man to enjoy a pint with. He loved sport, he loved Fianna Fáil and, most of all, he loved his family.

Gerry passed away on 9th February after putting up a tremendous fight with illness. He will be hugely missed. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a ainm dhilis.

Brian Murphy.

COISTE NA GAEILGE

Coiste na Gaeilge is a Fianna Fáil committee committed to the promotion of the Irish language. It was established in November 2002 under the auspices of Dun Laoghaire CDC. Its objectives were to promote the use of the Irish language in the Fianna Fáil organisation, particularly in Dun Laoghaire, as well as to the general public.

One of the first initiatives of the committee was the preparation and publication of a booklet of useful terms and phrases in the Irish language to assist units of the organisation in conducting the business of their meetings through Irish. This booklet, "Leabhrán de Théarmaí agus Leaganacha Cainte" was published with the help of Foras na Gaeilge and was widely distributed to members of the party at the 2004 Ard Fheis.

Eagraíodh srath léachtaí faoi ghnéithe éagsúla den chultúr agus den pholaitíocht i gCultúrlann na hÉireann, Baile na Manach i 2003 agus i 2004. Thug an tIar-Aire Éamon Ó Cuív an chéad léacht den tsraith agus ba é Éamon De Valera a bhí mar ábhar aige don léacht. Ba é an tIar-Thánaiste, John Wilson (Beannacht Dé leis) a thug an dara léacht dar teideal "Macalla ó Laochra Gael – A life of service to the nation: politics, GAA, education and academia".

Ceathrar 'Máire' – Mary Hanafin, Máire Hoctor, Mary O'Rourke agus Mary White a bhí mar aoí-chainteoirí nuair a deineadh plé ar an ábhar "Rol na mBan i gcúrsaí polaitíochta na linne seo" i mí na Bealtaine 2004. Tugadh na léachtaí sin trí Ghaeilge agus trí Bhéarla agus tugadh deis don lucht éisteachta ceisteanna a chur agus a smaointe féin a nochtadh. Bhí go leor daoine i láthair ag na hócáidí

úd – ní hamháin lucht leanúna Fhianna Fáil ach daoine a raibh spéis acu sa Ghaeilge chomh maith.

The committee was in touch with Fianna Fáil Headquarters on a regular basis on ways of promoting the use of the language within the organisation. Meetings in this regard were held with Ard Runáí Seán Dorgan and following discussions with the former national organiser Seán Sherwin greater use of Irish was made during the annual Easter Commemoration at Arbour Hill. Motions in Irish were also submitted to successive Ard Fheiseanna.

Scríobh Rúnaí an Choiste cuid mhaith altanna i nGaeilge a foilsíodh in Iris Oifigiúil an Pháirtí, "The Nation" i 2006 agus 2007. Bhain na haltanna seo le téarmaí éagsúla agus bhí aithe eile faoin obair a bhí déanta ag Coiste na Gaeilge ó 2002 go dtí 2006.

Cúis áthais do na bailí go bhfuil Michéal Martin chun bualadh leo go han luath chun beartais agus seasamh an choiste a phlé. Dheimhnhigh Michéal go mbeidh an Ghaeilge mar chuid lárnach d'athnuachan an pháirtí sna blianta atá romhainn.

Má tá spéis ag daoine cuirfidh Cuisle daoine i dteagmháil le Coiste na Gaeilge – cuisle@fiannafail.ie

Breandán Ó Cróinín

Those interested in Irish should also be aware that Seachtaine na Gaeilge is also running in March, promoting the use of the Irish language in every aspect - www.snag.ie. Rith 2012 is a relay run around Ireland that promotes the Irish language and it kicks off on the 8th March, going until 17th March. www.rith.ie

Fianna Fáil's finance policy

RESPONSIBLE OPPOSITION, INNOVATIVE IDEAS

Financial policy continues to dominate the political policy agenda. Since the beginning of the downturn this has been a difficult political football for Fianna Fáil. However recently the party has begun to make inroads on financial policy, with finance spokesperson Michael McGrath TD highlighting a number of issues with Government policies. Cuisle's James Lawless spoke to Deputy McGrath to get an understanding of the party's current financial policy stance.

"Overall, my view is that the party in opposition has to adopt a responsible line on the public finances. In Government, we started the process of correcting the public finances in 2008. It is essential that the deficit continues to be reduced over the years ahead. At the same time, we have to vigorously hold the Government to account on their handling of the economy and the extravagant promises they made during last year's election."

"The National Recovery Plan published by the late Brian Lenihan in November 2010 set out an overall plan to close the deficit in the public finances over a number of years. The FG / Labour Government have added an extra year to the deficit reduction programme and now plan to bring the deficit to within 3% of GDP by 2015. Many commentators now believe this target will be missed. The truth is that much depends on the level of economic growth that can be achieved over the next few years. Last December, the Government came forward with its first budget. In doing so, they have postponed tougher decisions into the future. In many respects, their first budget could well end up being one of their easiest."

"We would be concerned that the Government lack the political will to really drive change and may attempt further short term fudges at the expense of longer term real recovery. For example, their growth figures which premised their first Budget represent more wishful thinking than prospective reality."

"Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery of course and we have seen how the coalition were happy to have the heavy lifting done for them by recent Fianna Fáil budgets while they shouted and screamed from the sidelines but silently pocketed the savings as soon as



Michael McGrath TD talks to James Lawless.

they took over themselves. Michael Noonan's budget attempted a cheap card trick, penny pinching some, pandering to others, yet failed to deliver any coherent vision or long term strategy for reducing the deficit or boosting the economy. The Government's promise not to increase income tax and not to cut basic social welfare rates (though they sneaked some of these into the budget) will come under intense pressure in the next couple of years. The few remaining unbroken promises may well perish when confronted with the harsh economic reality."

"The measures in December's budget were not progressive, were socially retrograde and were internally inconsistent. For instance the VAT hike will cost an average family several hundred euro per year and will hit poorer households hardest. We believe this is a huge risk at a time when retail sales and consumer confidence are so fragile and the Government risks a severe contraction in demand. The VAT returns over the coming months will reveal whether the Government's gamble has worked."

"This Government has aggressively cut capital spending, deflecting a measure that could have produced both short term growth and long term assets. Fianna Fáil believes the Strategic Investment Fund announced by the Government last September should be used to channel investment by Irish pension funds into necessary infrastructural projects, on a strictly commercial basis. We have proposed a €5.6 billion investment package over a four year period. The funds could be invested in a wide range of infrastructure projects on a commercial basis such as the Cork – Limerick motorway which the Government recently postponed. The Strategic Investment Fund could also be opened to small, regular savers in a manner similar to the National Solidarity Bond. This would help create jobs in a focused manner whilst avoiding the negative impact on people's pension savings that the Fine Gael levy has had. We also believe

the raid on private sector pension schemes should be ended."

"The economic downturn has disproportionately affected young people. In Ireland, the unemployment rate of 26% among 20-24 olds is one of the most worrying statistics. We believe consideration should be given to abolishing employer PRSI for staff earning up to €356 per week for new employees between the age of 17 and 24 for a period of two years. This will help young people get a foothold in the labour market and could also be extended to benefit the long term unemployed. To help people back to the workforce, we also advocate an increase of up to 20,000 in the number of places across local employment schemes. This can cover a wide range of ventures including community centres, child care, the warmer homes scheme, community enterprise, city, town and village maintenance and renewal. Despite much aplomb, the Government "jobs initiative", whilst credited with good intentions, has simply failed to deliver so far."

"It is essential that recovery is measured not in troika tick-boxes but in real jobs for real people."

"Fianna Fáil wants transparency restored to the banking sector. The ongoing lack of credit for small and medium sized enterprises simply has to be tackled. Whilst the banks are in public ownership and it is in all our interests that they return to profitability, Fianna Fáil policy would be to ensure success is achieved through new, diversified growth opportunities and partnership with indigenous enterprise, rather than simply squeezing already burdened mortgage holders as they have been allowed free reign to do on the FG / Labour watch. We want the Financial Services Ombudsman to have the power to 'name and shame' financial institutions that flout the rules."

"On mortgages, we have come forward with a range of policy proposals to assist people in difficulty. This is an area of real policy priority for the party. We introduced to the house the Family Home Bill to allow families remain in their home, avoiding the appalling vista of repossession, except in cases of absolute last resort. We published the Regulation of Debt Management Advisors Bill and last October the Dáil debated our bill to reform Ireland's personal insolvency bill."

"2012 will be a year of further exciting policy development for Fianna Fáil on the finance and economic front."

James Lawless

POLITICAL REFORM

Fianna Fáil have proposed a new bill to reform the way in which political lobbying is dealt with in Ireland. The bill if passed would create a register of lobbyists in Ireland. It is intended to bring transparency and regulation to the world of political lobbying.

The bill is being championed by the party's spokesperson on Environment, Community and Local Government, Niall Collins TD. In explaining the proposed legislation, Deputy Collins, spoke about the need to balance access to public representatives with the need for fairness in the democratic process.

"While free and open access for all stakeholders to Government is an integral part of the democratic process, well publicised abuses of this process have created genuine public concern and had the effect of fundamentally undermining confidence in the political system," he said.

The bill comes in the wake of the Moriarty Report into improper payments to public representatives. The Moriarty Report (Part 2, Chapter 3) detailed some bizarre behaviour in the handling of political contributions and interactions with lobbyists by the Fine Gael party in the mid-1990s.

Significantly, the report concluded that while a Fine Gael Minister, Deputy Michael Lowry had interfered improperly in securing the second mobile phone operators licence for Esat Digifone.

The current Government appear to be set to press ahead with the stripping of state assets through sale and privatisation. The management of this process places a great responsibility on the shoulders of the current Cabinet and they must be not only above reproach, but clearly and objectively be seen to handle the removal of these assets in an honest and transparent manner.

"In our view it is essential that before there is any movement in this area, the Government needs to introduce greater openness and transparency to the practice of lobbying," warns Niall Collins, "If this Government is determined to sell off valuable state assets, the ultimate owners of those assets, the Irish people, should be able to have full confidence in how the sales are being managed."

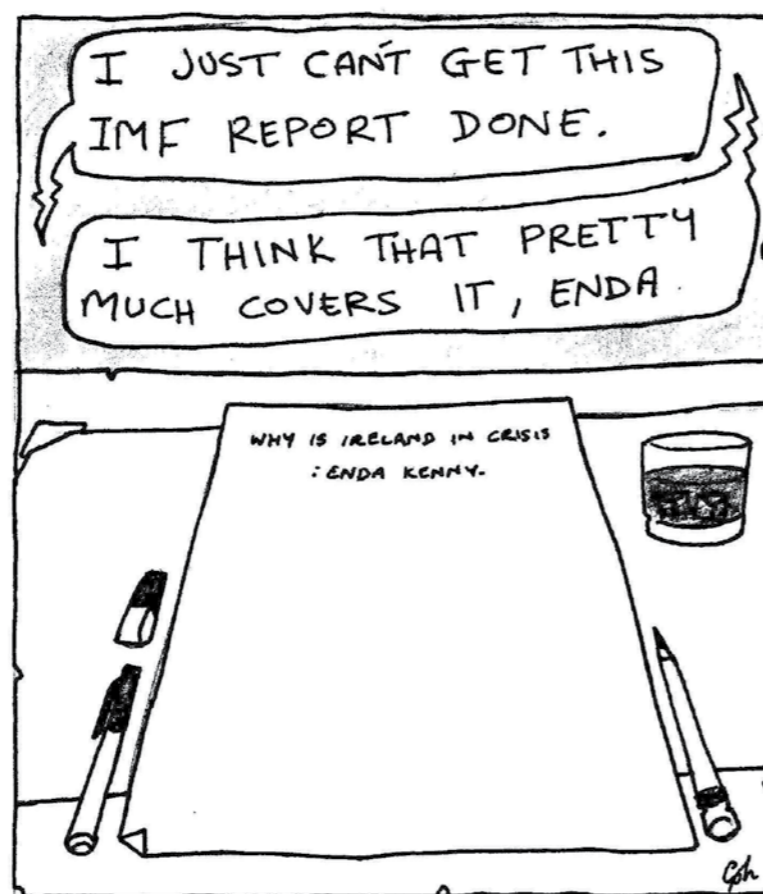
In the wake of the findings against Deputy Lowry, it is crucial that political lobbying is regulated in advance of the Government's planned 'sell off' of the state's assets. This is particularly important when one considers that more than one-third of the current Ministers were at cabinet with Lowry during the granting of the Esat licence. While one would not question the integrity of those six Ministers, it would lead one to question their judgement.

The bill represents a major step in reforming the business of politics in the state. Fine Gael and Labour spoke at length about the need for political reform prior to the formation of this Government; yet not for the first time in the life of this Government, Fianna Fáil has led the way from the opposition benches. We can only hope that the governing parties will acknowledge the wisdom and integrity in this legislation and support its passage through the Oireachtas. Failure on the Government's behalf to support this important political reform would represent unnecessary partisan behaviour and leave them exposed to questions about their desire to truly reform politics in Ireland.

Arthur Griffin



Kay Caball, Chairperson Limerick City CDC and Christy Mc Inerney, Secretary Limerick City CC at the combined CC/CDC meeting recently.



Cartoon By Grant O'Hara

ARD CHOMHAIRLE REVIEW ANNOUNCED

Renewal, reform and rejuvenation are 'buzz words' that have echoed throughout Fianna Fáil in recent times. The latest party body to be put under the microscope is the Ard Chomhairle. Members were recently invited to submit their thoughts on the functions of the Ard Chomhairle, its make up and its role going forward, as part of a review process.

Deputy Dara Calleary has been charged with the task of chairing the internal renewal committee of Fianna Fáil.

"Following the Ard Fheis, the next natural step in the renewal process will be reform of the Ard Chomhairle. If something is not working, we should not be afraid to say it."

During the initial analysis of submissions from members one theme consistently raised was the level of disconnect between the party's national executive and cumainn members.

"The national executive must be reflective of the voice of the membership and must be responsible to members. Its members need to act as a medium between the cumainn structure and the Ard Chomhairle of the party," Deputy Calleary added.

The Ard Chomhairle would have to present its work and reports to a national council.



Members take part in the Limerick City Ógra AGM

We must look at the models of governance in bodies such as the GAA, FAI and IRFU.

Any reform of the Ard Chomhairle is moot unless substantial changes are made, and according to Deputy Calleary, Micheál Martin TD, is steadfast in his support of implementing the necessary changes.

"We all have to step back and look at the reality of where we are. There can be no sacred cows in the organisation, and that includes the parliamentary party and the Ard Chomhairle."

The present national executive has 96 members, consisting of party officers, constituency delegates, representatives from Ógra Fianna Fáil and a group of members that form the 'Committee of Twenty'.

Rather than working as an effective body, Deputy Calleary believes it is significant that subordinate committees within the Ard Chomhairle have become so important and relevant.

"It is evident that these committees have an important function but when they become more powerful than the body to which they report, one must ask if we need to re-evaluate how they operate."

In his committee's review of the Ard Chomhairle, Deputy Calleary has not been working in a vacuum and believes a lot could be learned from examining how other national organisations operate their business.

"We must look at the models of governance in bodies such as the GAA, FAI and IRFU. The GAA in particular has a central council, whose work complements the operation of the GAA Ard Chomhairle which meets regularly and is efficient in its work."

Deputy Calleary is conscious that the GAA governance-model offers structures, which are similar to those recently adopted by Ógra Fianna Fáil.

If such a model were adapted for Fianna Fáil, the Ard Chomhairle could be cut to a third of the size it presently is and yet may retain a majority membership that would be elected from within its membership at the Ard Fheis. The Ard Chomhairle would have to present its work and reports to a national council, which would be the supreme decision making body between Ard Fheiseanna.

It may be a number of months before concrete proposals are presented for discussion but Deputy Calleary has clearly marked reform of the Ard Chomhairle as a priority for his committee.

Brendan Hayes



Cartoon By Grant O'Hara

NATIONAL DRAW TAKES CHUNK OUT OF PARTY DEBT

Over €520,000 was raised for the party through the National Draw last December. This marked an increase of over €51,000 on the 2010 figures when €467,800 was raised. Party members managed to sell over 10,000 individual tickets.

Roscommon CDC were responsible for generating the strongest return, selling almost €32,000 worth of tickets, following on from sales of over €21,500 in 2010. A huge part of the Roscommon performance was attributed to Cllr. Martin Connaughton who managed to sell over €15,000 worth of tickets and was rightly praised for his contribution at the National Draw event in Dublin.

At the other end of the scale the bottom five CDCs – Carlow, Dublin South West, Dublin North West, Limerick City and Dublin North Central – only managed to raise just over €13,500 worth of tickets between them. Of particular concern was the performance of Carlow CDC who finished bottom of the table for the second year running, raising €1,250 in 2011 and €1,550 in 2010.

However the strong overall performance of the members, despite the reduced size of the parliamentary party is encouraging for future fundraising efforts. According to Darragh McShea, Fianna Fáil's Fundraising Executive, a target of €700,000 has now been set for 2012. He praised those who put strong work into this year's draw and believes the increased target is achievable saying, "If everyone sold a few more tickets we'd reach that mark without much difficulty. There was a phenomenal effort by many members this year, now we just need to keep building on that."

The funding raised has already been put to use, with a substantial sum being paid off the party debt. In the last issue of Cuisle we revealed that the party was €2.2 million in debt. Since the draw was completed that figure has been reduced by approximately €500,000 and currently stands at €1.7 million.

The next party fundraising activity is the National Collection coming up in May. The National Collection is an extremely important

fundraiser for the party locally and nationally, but it's also extremely important that Fianna Fáil has a presence in every community.

Back in 2010 the National Collection raised as much as 320,000 for the party coffers, however this dropped to €185,000 last year. The intention is to encourage more members to participate this year and aim for a target of €300,000 once more.

Roscommon CDC were responsible for generating the strongest return

NATIONAL DRAW 2011					
No.	CONSTITUENCY	RETURN			
1	ROSCOMMON	31,750	26	DONEGAL SW	8,450
2	CLARE	27,150	27	TIPPERARY SOUTH	8,350
3	CORK SC	24,150	28	DUBLIN NORTH	7,900
4	WEXFORD	23,450	29	LEITRIM	7,800
5	LOUTH	21,550	30	KILDARE SOUTH	7,100
6	LIMERICK COUNTY	20,150	31	DUN LAOGHAIRE	6,850
7	CAVAN	19,050	32	KERRY SOUTH	6,800
8	GALWAY EAST	18,100	33	TIPPERARY NORTH	6,650
9	CORK NW	17,350	34	DUBLIN SC	6,550
10	GALWAY WEST	16,100	35	MONAGHAN	6,400
11	MAYO	15,750	36	LAOIS	6,150
12	DONEGAL NE	15,350	37	KILDARE NORTH	6,150
13	OFFALY	13,650	38	DUBLIN MIDWEST	6,050
14	MEATH EAST	12,450	39	DUBLIN WEST	5,800
15	WESTMEATH	12,300	40	LONGFORD	5,550
16	KERRY NORTH	12,250	41	WATERFORD	4,550
17	CORK SW	12,200	42	DUBLIN NE	4,300
18	DUBLIN SE	11,250	43	DUBLIN CENTRAL	4,200
19	SLIGO	10,600	44	DUBLIN NC	3,900
20	CORK EAST	9,900	45	LIMERICK CITY	3,650
21	KILKENNY	9,650	46	DUBLIN NW	2,750
22	MEATH WEST	9,200	47	DUBLIN SW	2,000
23	DUBLIN SOUTH	9,100	48	CARLOW	1,250
24	WICKLOW	8,750		Total by CDC	518,950
25	CORK NC	8,600		N/A	2,550
OVERALL TOTALS					521,500



THE BIG DEBATE

Should Fianna Fáil implement gender quotas?

Yes

No

I believe that Fianna Fáil should implement gender quotas.

I am fully aware that this is not a popular view within the party, particularly amongst Ógra, and not least among a considerable group of influential women in the party. But the popular view is not always the right one and I have written this piece in order to encourage members to keep an open mind about the bill itself.

The arguments against gender quotas are many. They are not bad arguments and all have the best interests of this party at heart. I too, believe that candidates should be chosen on the basis of their own merit. I agree that we need quality candidates in the next elections - people with a passion for the party, a deep interest in its renewal and both national and local vision going forward. It is my own view, however, that gender quotas will neither exclude nor divert the party from this goal. Rather, that they will act as a tool to enrich its growth going forward.

The popular view is not always the right one and I encourage members to keep an open mind about the bill itself.

One of the main arguments against the introduction of such quotas is that the current under-representation of women in Irish politics is a cultural problem, as opposed to an electoral one. I do not deny this and I accept that the implementation of gender quotas will not rectify what is a historical problem overnight. What they would act as, however, is as a catalyst for change and means to an end in redressing this imbalance.

If the current bill is passed this will mean that the party must put forward 30% (rising to 40%) female candidates in General Elections in order to avoid a loss of state funding. This means that in order to fulfil these gender quotas, the party will urgently need to encourage more women to run for election. It will need to investigate the causes for the reluctance of women to seek mandates as public representatives, address confidence issues or other difficulties identified and ultimately identify and encourage inspirational women who can represent both the party and the electorate at a national level. This measure then provides us with the female role models necessary to change the underlying-culture.

A second argument against the quotas in question is that they represent 'tokenism' and a patronising insult to the women in our party. I understand this argument but I would urge both male and female members to think practically and unsentimentally about this bill. In the ideal political playground all individuals would put themselves forward in every case without hesitation because they are willing and firmly believe that they are capable of doing the job. The fact of the matter, however, is that despite protestations of our members in the past that gender quotas were neither a necessary nor wanted addition to political life, the gender imbalance in representation has not redressed itself naturally.

While it is true that in countries like Sweden, roughly half of MPs are women and that other countries have high percentages of women occupying decision-making positions without the need for quotas, the fact is that this is not the case at home. Although 50% of Ireland's population is female, it remains that less than 14% of Dáil representatives are currently women. To put this in perspective, this places us at 22 out of 27 EU member states in terms of rankings.

I argue that the figures are there, they are disappointing and that they are undeniable. The reality is that the situation is not improving on its own. We need to implement change in our democracy and we should not let the certain stigma attached to the gender quota ensure that we ultimately leave the system as it is. In the next election it will be every Fianna

Fáil candidate's responsibility to work hard and to earn each vote once they are given the nomination. But we need forward thinking to put these people on the ticket in the first place.

During this process of renewal, we as members of the party, have prided ourselves on being able to take a realistic, unsentimental view of what is working within and outside the

We are then, above all other parties, in a unique position to rethink our entire approach to politics and ultimately to facilitate cultural change.

party and what changes we can make in order to ensure a better future for both the party and for the country. We are then, above all other parties, in a unique position to rethink our entire approach to politics and ultimately to facilitate cultural change.

We should not see this quota as a barrier to interested candidates but as an opportunity for the party to expand its base and to focus on reaching out both to female members and voters. I believe that through the implementation of gender quotas we, as a party, can take a major step forward in redressing the gender imbalance in Irish politics.

Louise O'Farrell

As a young Irish woman I strongly object to gender quotas, for a wide range of reasons.

First and foremost, I believe most strongly that the Irish people deserve the best of candidates when they go to the ballot boxes. In these difficult economic times we need the best possible people working in both the Dáil and Seanad, finding solutions to our collective problems. In general political terms, I feel that gender quotas restrict all parties in their candidate selection processes which should only be based on the abilities of the individuals and gender should never be a deciding factor.

Right now Fianna Fáil is best placed to get more women involved in politics, as we continue along the road of rebuilding our party. We are making changes to how our party is organised and reconnecting the leadership to the grassroots, thanks to the efforts of Micheál Martin TD and all our TDs and Senators. We, as a party, will only regain the trust and faith of the Irish people by giving them the best candidates available and by offering them positive and constructive solutions to the problems we face. We have many women in our party, both at grassroots level and as elected officials who have done great service to our nation. They did not need gender quotas to make their contributions to this country.

As a republican party we should consider the concept of democracy to be at the heart of everything we stand for. I feel gender quotas conflict directly with the democratic process by insisting that candidates for election are chosen based on gender, and not on ability or achievements within the community they wish to represent.

Gender quotas are a fine policy on paper but they do not address the reasons why women don't participate in elections in equal numbers with their male counterparts. Instead of insisting that political parties ensure a set number of women are put forward as candidates - we need to take a good, hard

We will only regain the trust and faith of the Irish people by giving them the best candidates available

look at how we approach professional politics in this country. We need to ask women why they don't run for elected positions, and come up with solutions to the barriers that stand in their way.

In some instances where women who do wish to contest elections, they have less support from their political parties structures, but from my experience as a relatively new member of Fianna Fáil there is great support for women on every level. But still women are hesitant in going to the polls. What will the party do if we are unable to find candidates to meet the quota? Force women to run in order to make the numbers? Shot-gun electioneering? I don't think so.

Gender quotas have other draw backs. A worry many people have with gender quotas is that in order to make numbers a female candidate will be run in a constituency alongside a strong male candidate where the party can only expect to win a single seat. This could potentially create a two-tier internal party system which won't give the same support to each candidate and the stronger candidate will get the majority of the local support in order to guarantee a seat. In all future elections the party must give equal support to all candidates if we are to regain a strong position in national politics.

To encourage more women into politics we need to ensure that they have supports available to help them reach a balance between family life and the duties of an elected representative. This way can we ensure that the very best individuals are encouraged to run for election.

Perhaps instead of quotas, parties should be obliged to give practical support to those (of either gender) who are considering putting themselves forward as candidates, such as mentorships from retired TDs and Senators; training in a range of areas such as leadership skills, IT and management skills; childcare arrangements. Longer term ideas could also be considered: greater involvement by local members on issues that don't necessarily require the attention of a TD or Senator directly; a review of what local issues fall under the jurisdiction of the TDs and councillors; reorganisation of Dáil sessions to work longer hours over less days to allow all elected representatives spend more time at home. If the party gave more practical-based support to potential candidates, male or female, the pool from which we would be choosing our candidates would be greatly increased and the range of skills available to us would be enriched.

My biggest fear, however, is that the introduction of gender quotas will mean the end of the discussion on why women are a minority in politics, when really we have much more talking to do. We should use this time of renewal to examine WHY women are not more involved, find solutions to the problems they face, and not use gender quotas as a quick fix.

They won't solve the core problems which discourage women to run. We need some real changes in how the party chooses candidates, and supports them. Political families have always had it easier because they know the system and have the supports at home. The party needs to make sure it's supporting the educated and intelligent people who can bring real skills to the Dáil, regardless of gender.

Only when we have the best candidates to offer the people will we, once again, be the leading voice in Ireland's political chorus.

Emmy Maher

BOOK REVIEWS



Fianna Fáil: A biography of the party

By Noel Whelan

For the student of Irish politics, Noel Whelan's biography sets out to tell the narrative of Fianna Fáil and in doing so saves us all the tedious work of

wading through many other books, written by authors of authoritative political ability on specific periods and personalities of this history while, at the same time, applying his own legal and incisive expertise in analysing the significance of the many twists and turns along the way.

In reality the Fianna Fáil organisation is still the largest political organisation in the country and will, in due course, with resolute leadership and policies, bring Fianna Fáil's parliamentary party representation to satisfactory levels. However, this recovery may take the period of at least two General Elections to do.

The traumatic events of the 1969/1970 period, often referred to as 'The Arms Trial', are dealt

with in great detail. I was elected in a Bye-Election in March 1970 and almost immediately, my world of politics was thrown into turmoil. In reality and in fact: no arms were ever imported into Ireland. The trials produced evidence that the then Minister for Defence was understood by the jury to have authorised assistance to the nationalist population, in planning for a doomsday situation. The defendants were found not guilty of any conspiracy to illegally import arms.

After the trial, Kevin Boland knew that he could not support the Government's motion of confidence in Jim Gibbons. Rather than abstain, which would have been interpreted as a vote against, Kevin Boland resigned from the Dáil in absolute conformity with his candidate pledge.

The Charlie Haughey years as leader of Fianna Fáil are well described and Noel's use of secondary sources make the read so informative and rewarding.

The Fr. Brendan Smyth case and the Harry Whelahan appointment to the Presidency of the High Court were the undoing of the coalition with Dick Spring's Labour Party. Taoiseach Albert Reynolds displayed a stubbornness to maintain his promise to Mr Harry Whelehan.

The review of the Bertie years is fascinating reading and Noel's account brings the reader almost into where the action was taking place. The completion of the Good Friday peace process with all the participants feeling that something great had occurred was a testament to the determination of many but especially Bertie Ahern.

The three strands in this agreement, East-West (the two Governments); North- South (the setting up of North /South bodies); Northern Ireland (sharing Government by all) were all vital and important. Bertie Ahern was asked at a meeting of the Ard Chomhairle which one of these strands would have caused him to contemplate pulling out of the peace process. He did not hesitate in answering that if the North/ South strand were lost, he would have walked away.

It was not possible to cover the very recent Brian Cowen period of leadership but time and clarity of fact from fiction will allow Noel the opportunity to publish a new edition of his worthwhile book.

Sean Sherwin



WINDOW AND MIRROR – RTÉ television: 1961 – 2011

By John Bowman

John Bowman's Window and Mirror by his own admission does not follow 'conventional rules'. This is

obvious as he attempts to chart the history of RTÉ television in its first fifty years. He manoeuvres his way through the highs and lows of the fledgling station and its early battles with politicians, the church and other forces in Irish society. Bowman has gotten his hands on unseen archive photographs, letters and documents that would delight even the most casually interested historian, however his portrayal of Fianna Fáil and its relationship with the state broadcaster is less than delightful.

Bowman succeeds in providing a fun and interesting walk down memory lane for observers of the internal machinations of RTÉ. The book provides an account of the

national broadcaster and the key players who helped craft the station into what it has become today. It also succeeds in being a good conversation starter for those who have memories of these events and is an interesting reminder of days and people gone by and the part they played in shaping key events in Ireland's political, cultural and sporting history.

Fans of Bowman expecting objectivity in relation to political events will be somewhat disappointed. Bowman appears determined to channel the current zeitgeist, by portraying Fianna Fáil as a sinister force that attempted to stunt or block the development of the fledgling broadcaster at every opportunity. Disproportionate attention is given to specific events involving Fianna Fáil, examples include the pages and pages devoted to the turbulent relationship between Ray Burke and RTÉ during his time as Minister for Communications and his proposals to cap RTÉ's advertising revenues, with almost nothing written about the relationship between the state broadcaster and Fine Gael or Labour.

Somewhat ironically, Bowman quotes historian Joe Lee as commenting that the relations between the then Government and RTÉ and their clashes on specific issues have

“been largely nine day wonders lashed into a frenzy of almost auto-erotic excitement by a narcissistic media”. Bowman may have been advised to bear this quote in mind in his analysis of the nature of Fianna Fáil's relationship with RTÉ. However, it would be misguided of Fianna Fáil not to pay due attention to some of the crude mistakes that have been made repeatedly over the years in our dealings with the national broadcaster and to learn from them.

As a narrative on the history of RTÉ over the last 50 years, Bowman succeeds with a memory provoking book littered with names and faces of the people at the coal-face of both the history of RTÉ and indeed, the history of Ireland over the past 50 years. Unfortunately those in search of an unbiased account of the relationship between RTÉ and Fianna Fáil will be left disappointed.

Sarah Ryan



Dynasties; Irish Political Families

By Johnny Fallon

In this finely written and well researched book, Johnny Fallon takes an informative look at some of the most notorious names in Irish politics. In all, ten dynasties are analysed in detail, each allotted

their own chapter, with an additional chapter detailing the positions held by members of the many other families whose names have become synonymous with public life in Ireland.

Fittingly, the book's two opening chapters deal with the Cosgrave and De Valera dynasties respectively. In doing so, Fallon describes the events of the War of Independence and Civil

War from a political point of view. His detailed account of the period enables the reader to gain a much greater understanding of the set of circumstances and events which paved the way for the key personalities of the time to emerge. In these early pages, Fallon manages to tell the story of the birth of the Free State as well as, if not better than, most history books on the subject have managed.

Though the author is a well known member of Fianna Fail, *Dynasties* remains an unbiased piece of work. While Fallon writes somewhat sycophantically of the Lenihan dynasty, one gets the sense that this can be attributed to an admiration of the individual personalities rather than being down to any party political reasons. Indeed, the author gives W.T. Cosgrave a far more positive report card than many commentators have cared to. No punches are pulled when analysing Bertie Ahern's tenure in office, yet credit is given without reservation wherever and to

whomever it is due. However, Fallon does tend to over exaggerate the ideological connection between the Fianna Fáil grassroots and the Labour Party.

Fallon speaks pointedly on the major political decisions that have contributed to the country's economic ruin in recent years, but also readily praises those who are willing to stand before the electorate. For students of politics or history, this book is a must. The political lives of some of the most influential politicians since the foundation of the state are accounted for in forensic detail. In all, the careers of eight Taoisigh are covered directly, while each of the other five Taoisigh appear in the text with regularity. A well thought out, logically developed and entertaining book, *Dynasties; Irish Political Families* is a welcome addition to the literature and sits well alongside Fallon's previous two works on Irish politics.

Pádraig Martin



THE OATH IS DEAD AND GONE

By Jim Maher

Jim Maher, a native of Kilkenny is the author of three historical treatises. His most recent publication *The Oath is Dead and Gone* was published by Londubh Books in 2011. The book

is well edited and exceptionally readable. Amongst his acknowledgements, the author mentions the late Brian Lenihan TD and the minutes of the Fianna Fáil organisation in the UCD Archives.

The author narrates the history of the oath from the time of Tudor's Henry VIII to its abolition in 1933. The oath as specified in Article 4 of the Articles of Agreement in December 1921 stated allegiance to the Irish Free State but also faithfulness to the British

monarch. He shows that the mention of faith not only split Sinn Féin but also the Irish people. He goes on to show that De Valera could not bring all of Sinn Féin with him on the oath issue and that the Civil War was not necessarily avoidable.

The reservations of Michael Collins towards an oath and yet his support for the Treaty can be looked in conjunction with De Valera's suggestion of alternative wording of such an oath.

The reaction of Sinn Féin members Fr. Michael O'Flanagan and Mary MacSwiney to the oath shows the insurmountable problem De Valera faced in asking Sinn Féin to accept such an “empty formula”.

The author acknowledges the invaluable support from the Labour Party during the 1920s and 30s culminating in the legislation abolishing the oath in 1933. He also acknowledges the contribution of Kevin O'Higgins at the Imperial Conference of 1926

and the subsequent Statute of Westminster.

Much of the book focused on De Valera and Fianna Fáil and his evolution as leader of Sinn Féin and then his founding and leading of Fianna Fáil in 1926. The inclusiveness of Fianna Fáil from its foundation played an important part in its successful election of 1927, when it won 44 seats and its electoral success of 1932, when it first attained power.

It then went on, with the support of the Labour Party to abolish the oath and the British Government recognised its abolition, when the Irish people passed the 1937 Constitution. The oath was dead and gone.

Joe Neville

YOUR LETTERS

I understand the feelings expressed in the article in Cuisle ["Whatever happened to the 5 point plan?" - Issue 01] about the abandonment by Fine Gael of the NewEra policy document. Now if you were to do some research into policies to not use after a property bubble crash the NewEra policy would be one of them.

I pointed this out to the then finance spokesperson for Fine Gael, Richard Bruton. I pointed out to Mr. Bruton that his NewEra stimulus policy had been tried three times by various Japanese governments post the 1990 property crash there and all three had failed. Thus creating the term "the Japanese disease".

I got back a letter ignoring the point I made but praising the NewEra policy document from which the 5 point plan was derived. The issue for me about Kenny's 5 point plan is not that it was abandoned, which it cynically was, but why campaign on policy that a little research would have proven would fail in its intentions. Or conversely was it just intended to deliberately to deceive the people?

John Dooley

We are a party in the mist of renewal and there are many things that need change but for me one of those changes should be to embrace our true republican heritage.

We are a republican party and a party that supports the European ideal of liberty, equality and fraternity.

I believe that through that ideal we need to answer the passionate call of our fellow Irishmen in the North and bring them into our the fold in a meaningful way and establish a 32 country Irish republican party.

"All history is mans' efforts to realise ideals" Eamon de Valera

Robert Kellaghan

In recent years, quite a number of members have found ourselves living in London. The idea of forming a London cumann of the party was mooted and has since garnered great support from all levels of the organisation. This proposed cumann would serve as a way for members to stay connected and also allow for networking between members as well as providing a social outlet. Further, there is scope for the cumann to help new emigrants settle into their new surroundings. My message to the members would be that if you or family/friends are in London and interested in getting involved, we would be delighted to hear from you. Feel free to email me at eoioniallain@gmail.com for further information.

Eoin Ó Nialláin

I am writing in response to the ongoing members' debate regarding the party's communications strategy and the suggestion that Fianna Fáil is being drowned out in the national media conversation. The truth about

media focus and attention is that whoever shouts loudest, is heard best.

Our public representatives should not be the only ones carrying the mantle of communicating the party message. All party members have a role to play in presenting our message to the public.

As a party we are lucky in that we still have a large body of members and an existing organisational structure from which to draw. Each CDC, CC and cumann has a PRO whose responsibility it is to communicate the Fianna Fáil message to a wider local and regional audience. I believe that each PRO should have access to a team of individuals that can be effectively mobilised to offer media support to public representatives when required.

There is little use in our public representatives conducting interviews and gaining airtime if all social media channels and text-lines are clogged with messages of anti Fianna Fáil sentiment. Instead, PROs should be asking members to send supportive texts, tweets, e-mails or letters to relevant radio and television programmes in relation to their candidates.

While this activity may not change peoples' attitudes toward Fianna Fáil, it will show them that the party is not dead or irrelevant.

Deirdre Smith

THE BATTERED CANVASSER

The election had come; the troops were called to arms, Leaflets at the ready; pens in the hand. We stuck pins to our jackets, put our green caps on. For today we canvass for Fianna Fáil...God help us all.

To the train stations in the morning we're greeted with a sigh. 'What's this?' 'Oh it's you!' 'Give me a reason why?' We're greeted with suspicion most places we go, Politicians! Politicians! Have you no where else to go.

The electorate are angry, they want their pound of flesh, Taxes and bailouts! And just about everything else. Children are leaving, futures are on hold. It's not just the politics that has the reception so cold.

Door bells ring, mailboxes chatter, But lets be honest none of it really matters. The people are fed up, they want a new approach, Rhetoric and promises will get you no more votes.

I am a Fianna Fáil'er, for that I am proud to be. I believe in liberty, equality and the building of a better country. Equality of opportunity and better futures for all, A society where we come together instead of trying to have it all.

The old ways are gone, the people expect better. The new way forward now is to be honest and deliver, The party needs to change and go back to its original purpose, No more silly promises just a commitment to the future.

For those of us who were on your doorsteps, We heard you loud and clear, No more tricks or illusions, The truth will do, thank you.

The pins have returned to their boxes, And the green caps and jackets too, The next time we hope to meet you, We hope you will have us back to serve you.

James McCann

FINDING OUR PLACE IN THE NEW POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

A year on and what have we learned? We have done a lot of soul searching and taken a long look at ourselves and what we let ourselves become. This Ard Fheis is by far the most important in the history of the party and possibly a turning point in the political history of the state. The decisions made will decide whether we wither and disappear as a force in Irish politics or rise like a phoenix from the ashes.

However there is one point of contention I have with that metaphor, namely the ashes piece. For us to rise again, the embers of the fire we lit which burned us must be extinguished once and for all. In my view the only way to do that is to accept our past, all of it and recant. Only then can we look to the future.

For a year now I've seen debates in the Dáil, the media and socially where members have been silenced with any vague reference to the economy. This must end. For the grieving process to end we must move pass the last stage of the Kubler-Ross model: acceptance. Yes the previous Fianna Fáil Government made mistakes, horrendous ones, but mistakes we as a party have learned from. No more should we baulk at discussing economic policy. No more should we be silenced with glib remarks.

The current Government should not be allowed get away with selling out the people with simple throw away references to the near past. They should be reminded that they did indeed win the 2011 General Election and

Why then is the government currently making all the same mistakes they so readily ridiculed?

that there is no need to keep fighting it. The decisions are now theirs to make.

Why then are they currently making all the same mistakes they so readily ridiculed? Not just that but they have done much worse, they are the ones who are bending over backwards to appease any and all at Europe's beck and call.

Paying unguaranteed bond holders and trying every which way to avoid letting the people have their say on the fiscal treaty. Taoiseach Kenny has let himself become Merkozy's lap dog yet he and his Government plus their supporters have the audacity to accuse ordinary Fianna Fáilers of somehow being involved in treachery?

Yes the mistakes of the past should not be forgotten, that is why it is up to us to remind this Government of exactly what it was they promised the electorate they would do. A new economic approach to Europe; meaningful political reform; tacking public sector waste, these are but a few of the pedestals on which they stood for office however all they seem capable of doing since is dither... and when someone questions them, blame Fianna Fáil for their inability to act on their promises.

Fianna Fáil as a party received a message loud and clear on the door steps February last. "Change yours ways, modernise and

become the party you were originally founded to be." "Bring back the Lemass-style and you'll get my vote," I was told elsewhere. This Ard Fheis should see us complete our restructuring in some places and set new policy agendas in others.

From this point on we should remind the Government at every turn what it is we have learned on our journey to our new beginning. When they cut from the vulnerable, remind them that their K-Club pals have plenty in the coffers and can give more to the national purse. When they avoid their commitment on public sector waste, remind them of the fact that their buddies leading various unions aren't holding up their end of the bargain. When they decree that they can't hire any new front line staff, remind them that their old college buddy consultants are still making a killing from seeing private patients in public hospitals. Something needs to change. Promises need to be kept.

Yes the road ahead is a tricky one but let us not forget it is a road we find ourselves on through nobody's fault but ours. We apologise to the country for the mistakes made but also, stand up and fill the gap in the political landscape here in Ireland. We need to stand up, as true European republicans, with our brethren in the European Parliament and pursue the policies that will bring prosperity back to this land.

It is our job to point out to the Government the mistakes they make. In future though, when they point to our record of the recent past, don't cow down. Find your voice and with it proclaim, "Yes we heard the voice of the people. Yes we now know the errors of our former ways and now we're here to teach you exactly what we learned whilst we were away." Now more than ever, be proud to be Fianna Fáil.

Eoin Ó Nialláin

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Renewing our party means empowering our members

ONE MEMBER ONE VOTE

The great generation who founded and built our party created an organisation built on the fundamental principle that we should always be closely in touch with the people. What always set Fianna Fáil apart from other parties is that we drew our strength from communities while they were always led by an elite.

The many achievements of leaders such as Eamon de Valera and Seán Lemass came from the fact that they had behind them an active organisation which represented all streams in Irish life.

The biggest single message which I have heard from meeting thousands of members throughout the country is that Fianna Fáil must again be a party which values its members.

If Fianna Fáil is to be renewed, then it must change the way it operates – it must empower its members to take a greater role within the party and in their communities.

Many achievements of leaders such as Eamon de Valera and Seán Lemass came from the fact that they had behind them an active organisation which represented all streams in Irish life.

We cannot keep things as they are and expect that everything will just turn out fine in the end.

That's why I circulated reform proposals last year and launched the first full consultation with members in the history of our party.

I want to thank the thousands of members who made a contribution. The proposals to be voted on Saturday 3rd March reflect their input in every element. The original proposals have been amended and extra reforms have been added.

The proposals maintain what's best in our organisation and add a vital new dimension – opening up key decisions to all members.

Throughout the democratic world parties have extended the voting rights of individual members and we must do so as well.

The one member one vote proposal is a balanced one which allows strong organisations to maintain their preferred structures, but implements changes which will make Fianna Fáil more focused on working with the communities we serve.

In response to the feedback of members, the proposals include measures to make the parliamentary party, Ard Comhairle and headquarters more responsive and more accountable than ever before.

I share the view of members that everyone who represents Fianna Fáil has a duty to uphold the highest ethical standards. Proposals have been added to ensure that Fianna Fáil has the strongest ethics rules of any party.

In addition, once we get the new system bedded-down, members will be given a role in the election of the party leader and decisions about joining coalition

The one member one vote proposal is a balanced one which allows strong organisations to maintain their preferred structures

governments. The proposals will ensure that all parts of the party are involved in drawing-up these extra reforms.

After last year's heavy defeat, it was right to take the time to consult with members about the future.

It's now time to move from talk to action.

These reforms are an essential step for renewing our party and moving it forward.

Fianna Fáil has a major and positive role to play in Irish public life and to do this it must start with valuing its members.

I strongly urge your support for these reform proposals.

Micheál Martin TD

