



Sile de Valera, grand-daughter of the former leader, writes on . . .

Youth's inheritance

ANY POLITICAL movement, organisation or party must presuppose as basic criteria continuity, development and growth. If this were not so it would only become a mere transient phenomenon.

The very fundamentals which prompted the founding of Fianna Fáil had of necessity to rely on such criteria, for it was clear to its founders that some of its aims, aspirations and ideals would require time, perhaps even generation, before being brought to fruition.

Many of the aims and aspirations which were enshrined in the formulation of Fianna Fáil policy in 1926 have long since been achieved. Amongst these were the abolition of the Oath of Allegiance and the replacement of the Free State Constitution which had in the main, been dictated by the British in 1922. Fianna Fáil introduced the Constitution of 1937 which was accepted by the electorate.

This constitution enshrined the political, social, economic and cultural life of the Irish people. A further major step forward in the implementation of Fianna Fáil policy was that which arose out of the agreement with Britain

in 1938. This agreement was of the greatest importance and far-reaching in its consequences, for not alone did this agreement end the so-called "Economic War" and bring the question of land annuities to an end, but of greater importance, it secured the restoration of the Irish ports and the cancellation of other facilities accorded to the British by the terms of the 1922 Treaty.

The ending of the land annuities were far more than a mere payment of a sum of money to rid the country of this burden, but it was in political terms the final end of any British interest relating to land within this state.

The result of repossession of the ports and the cancellation of other military, air and naval facilities were of dynamic consequences, for as long as the British right to the ports and facilities remained, neutrality for this country in the ensuing War would have proved impossible. This is something which my generation often fail to realise. Do they, I wonder, reflect sufficiently upon what the preservation of neutrality has meant to them?

One brief reflection on the disaster which befell Belfast following air raids ought to be sufficient illustration as

to what undoubtedly would have happened in Dublin and particularly the towns and cities of south and south-east Munster.

Mercifully events proved otherwise and all credit for this can be claimed by the leaders of Fianna Fáil at the time. It is thanks to their vision, determination and political acumen that this country was spared the ravages of war. My generation should not lightly forget their efforts.

Notwithstanding the enormous strides towards total freedom during the 1930s, two major aims remained and, alas, still remain outstanding. These are of course that of the restoration of the Irish language and the ending of Partition.

True the founders were only too well aware that time and great effort would be required. It is here that the most fundamental aspects of continuity arise.

Many of the first generation of Fianna Fáil who put forward these aims are now dead or advanced in years. There is however ample evidence to show that there are many, especially in the younger generation of the party, who have the same dedication, the same enthusiasm and the same drive as had the founder members.

This will ensure that the hopes and aims of those who first formulated the party's policies will not die. If on the other hand there is a failure of continuity here then Fianna Fáil has lost its true identity and failed the very reasons for which it was founded.

As far as the Irish language is concerned, while progress is slow, and at times perhaps even disheartening, far more people have a knowledge of Irish, both within the ranks of Fianna Fáil and without, than was the case when the party was first founded.

If we compare Fianna Fáil with any other political party or group it can be truly claimed that this party is the direct successor of the ideals, aims and aspirations in terms of a United Ireland as were those of Tone, Emmet, the Young Irelanders, the Fenians, the participants in 1916 and the Republicans in the Civil War in 1922.

This is because Fianna Fáil is as much concerned with the unity and freedom of this island as were any of these past movements. There is therefore a continuity of interest.

Youth has always been in the vanguard of political movements and this has been particularly so in Irish history. Each successive move-

ment from the time of Wolfe Tone has had youth in the forefront. Fianna Fáil is no exception.

The majority of men and women who first joined Fianna Fáil were themselves young. The party has never failed to attract the youth and this remains true today. This can be amply proven by the youth conferences held by Fianna Fáil over the last few years which displayed such vitality, idealism and enthusiasm.

It is indeed well that there are such young people, for it is equally true to say that nowadays there appears to be a cult among some politicians, intellectuals, teachers and others who would wish to dilute, misrepresent or misinterpret events in Irish history over the last half century or so.

There are even those while calling themselves nationalists and Irishmen who question the wisdom of the rising of 1916. The sincere adherent to Fianna Fáil policies however rejects such views and remains staunch to the party's fundamental aims.

Even on a lower plane and at pure domestic level Fianna Fáil can be commended to those of my age group who may feel less committed in terms of national issues. The

party covers a wide social spectrum in that it is not affiliated to any particular social class. It has had far greater experience in government than any other party or group of parties since the foundation of the State.

This of course presupposes the underlying confidence of the people not alone in its policies but in their implementation. Because of this experience and length in government there is continuity.

Fianna Fáil is in a unique position but if it is, it has a grave responsibility and, being the biggest political party in the island of Ireland a duty lies hard upon it to strive for the fulfilment of its policies and to pass on to succeeding generations the ideals for which it was founded.

The greatest responsibility of all rests with the youth today, but they may take encouragement if they refer to the words of the party's founder, Eamon de Valera, when he said: "... The inestimable heritage of a great tradition has been handed down to you, but you, yourselves, must give it life by your own service and by your own devotion."

