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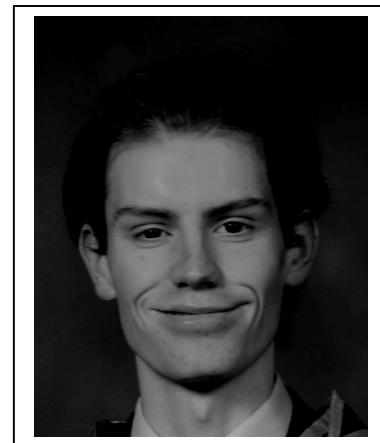
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VOLUME TWO :: ISSUE ONE
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Welcome to the first edition of Volume Two of the Informer. My name is John Kennedy, as I'm sure some of you know, and I am the new Editor of The Informer.

This edition will concentrate on the National Conference that was held in February in the Ramada Hotel, in Limerick Junction. A new National Executive has taken over since the conference, but of course there was more to the Conference than mere elections for most members.

Firstly, congratulations are due to Maurice Fitzgerald because he has been recently co-opted onto the National Executive for the new portfolio of (hang on while I get this right...)Branch Development Officer. Apparently this means he will be an officer in developing branches; particularly new branches. Best of luck, Maurice.

The Conference presented a number of intriguing elections and clash of styles. For myself, I have come to regard Conference as somewhat of a weird experience, being sort of involved in the National Executive proceedings and being sort of not involved at the same time. Indeed, a cynical observer has "welcomed" my upcoming election for the Dublin Panel for the Executive Council as "the first time John Kennedy will actually have to face an election." I think this is a bit exaggerated! The same observer also thinks that I don't have a chance, given the strong opposition. We can only see. (Incidentally, there is some background music as I write this: "Goodbye, my friend, it's hard to die; when all the birds are singing in the sky").

One reason that struck me as a reason to strike Fianna Fáil out of office is the fact that arguably the most incompetent Minister for Agriculture in Irish history, Mary Coughlan, has been placed in charge of the avian flu crisis here. The decision by the Taoiseach not to appoint an outside person, given the circumstances, to deal with the issue, must be akin to the turkeys voting for Christmas.

Garret Fitzgerald has recently celebrated his 80th birthday. Certainly, it is apt of Young Fine Gael to communicate our congratulations, given that he had a large role in founding our organisation. Trinity College, who have recently elected Trevor Breen Browne as Chair, recently had him out at a guest at one of their meetings in the college. Garret and I actually have something bizarre in common: we both unusually collected airline timetables as teenagers...

I am 23 years of age now; born in November 1982 when Garret led Fine Gael to 70 seats in the Dáil. Typically, this date is perceived as the last date where Fine Gael "won" an election. I hope now that we are at the start of an era where Fine Gael is constantly a presence in Government. I believe it is up to us; that the people want to vote for us if we can convince them and show confidence in ourselves. I really do believe it is up to us to win it or lose it.

The Andy Williams CD has moved on to "We've Only Just Begun", the next track is "Where Do I Begin" and then it's "The Way We Were". Just to state that it's actually background music and I'm not intentionally listening to it; honestly don't classify me as an Andy Williams fan. But we are showing signs of convincing the public that we belong in Government. We have only just begun to get back to the way we were. May the good work continue...

Regards,
John

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The Way We Were...

Three founder members of Young Fine Gael talk about their experiences....

Turning the clock back nearly thirty years is harder than I thought and a bit scary! It does not seem that long ago since I was lucky enough to be in on the ground floor of Young Fine Gael back at a time before today's members were born.

I got involved in YFG in Dublin South where I lived and in TCD. My family would always have been Fine Gael supporters and my mother was constituency secretary in Dublin South for a while, so I suppose I just grew into it in some ways. I was in Trinity from 1976 to 1980 and joined the Fine Gael branch when I started.

One of the perks of being in the FG branch in Trinity then was that a few years before (largely unknown to party HQ) it had affiliated to the German Liberal party's Foundation which heavily subsidised trips to conferences all over Europe. It took years before this link was dismantled – well after Fine Gael had joined the Christian Democrats in the European Parliament.

When Garret FitzGerald became leader in 1977 after the disastrous election that year, there was a huge buzz about reforming the party. The Fine Gael branch in TCD became a YFG branch and membership soared. Because YFG at that stage had strong support in the south Dublin constituencies and in UCD and Trinity, I had a better base than others to run for the first YFG Executive to be elected. In addition, having the first conference in Dublin meant it was possible to get the vote out!

When I ran for election, I was able to pull friends from the athletics club in TCD into Liberty Hall to vote for me (scrutiny of membership and ID was not as sophisticated then as it is now) and it may be the case that one or two people voted more than once!

"Once it is in your blood, it never really leaves."

It was an exciting time to be involved in politics and quite a few of the first YFG Executive are still involved at one level or another. Once it is in your blood, it never really leaves. I was lucky enough in the 1980s to work with Mary Flaherty and George Birmingham when they were junior Ministers and then Sean Barrett when he was Government Whip and Minister for Sport. Later on, from 1994 to 2001, I worked with John Bruton when he was Taoiseach and party leader.

It has never ceased to amaze me how many people there are in Ireland in their forties now (some in positions of considerable influence) who were members of YFG in those exciting days and still have happy memories. There's a sleeping FG army out there waiting to be mobilised!

Roy Dooney was the Chair of Young Fine Gael when it was initiated. He later served as an Advisor to John Bruton and also as Commissioner of the Eircom League. He is a member of Fine Gael in Dún Laoghaire.

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Recently I attended a meeting where I was impressed by the eloquence and energy of some of the YFG Executive members, particularly the new president Liz Munnelly, and it prompted a comparison between the founding days of YFG and the situation we find ourselves in today.

Back in the late 70's there was high unemployment and open violence on the streets of Northern Ireland. Fine Gael had a new leader Dr Garret Fitzgerald and the party was reorganising. I was involved with the FG Branch in Emly, Co Tipperary and the word was out that a youth section of the party was to be formed at the next Ard Fheis. And it was. South Tipperary won the election of two representatives to the new ten person provisional executive of what was to be known as Young Fine Gael. Under the watchful eye of General Secretary, Peter Prendergast, the Youth Officer Dan Egan guided the new Executive toward it's main tasks of establishing branches throughout the country and holding the first Annual Conference at which Young Fine Gael would elect its own executive.

For a party in opposition, I was amazed at the response from the young people in the several towns I visited as branch after branch of the organisation emerged. The driving force which inspired those young people was the need for something better in our society: the mismanagement of our economy by a government which put private interests before the public good and the lack of investment in our future particularly in terms of education.

Following a very successful National Conference in 1979, I spent a year as National Chairperson – now prestigiously known as President - and hope I played a small part in the development of the organisation.

Years later my career path had led me in a different direction. As Principal of the local VEC school in Athy, I had been involved in a different type of politics. I had served three years as Chairperson of Athy Community Council followed by two years as President of Athy Chamber of Commerce and VEC representative on the local RAPID team. All of these roles were frustrated by the lack of response by the Government to the basic needs of a depressed community. The failure to address disadvantage in education, the lack of transport infrastructure, the slow rollout of broadband to an excluded



Richard Daly

homeownership was becoming so expensive that the family unit was paying an unacceptable price, all led me on a collision course with government policy. Local Elections 2004 provided the opportunity where I was fortunate to win an additional seat for FG on Athy Town Council and this year hold the chain as Cathaoirleach. Now my hat is in the ring to contest the selection convention for South Kildare. Once more we head into battle with a government which is squandering our prosperity and pandering to the vested interest.

The old colleague who visited my school as Minister for Tourism after I became Principal is now leader of the party and the same regeneration of the party which took place under Dr Fitzgerald has been taking place throughout the country. It's a great time to be in the front line and offering this country the opportunity of decent government.

Richard Daly was the first elected Chair at the first Young Fine Gael Conference.

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Pictured: The first elected National Executive. Richard Daly is encircled in green, Roy Dooney is encircled in red.

Leading the Charge for Change

By Charlie Flanagan

It's good to be back on the campaign trail again and great to be part of a team offering a clear alternative to the people at the forthcoming election. Candidate selection conventions have almost all taken place and soon the jigsaw will be complete. Policy positions are well advanced over a range of issues between Enda Kenny and Pat Rabbitte and the year ahead promises to be the most exciting for some time. A clear picture has emerged; FF/PD –v- FG/Lab. A new buzz is now palpable as more and more people look to Fine Gael for leadership and guidance. Enda Kenny is doing a great job as Captain of the Ship. YFG too is playing it's part in no small way with branches and positive activity underway in most constituencies up and down the country. Memories of the early 80s flood back when YFG was a vibrant, exciting and radical force in Irish politics that played a huge part in putting Garret FitzGerald in the Taoiseach's office. YFG can so the same for Enda Kenny in 2007.

Offering a real alternative may not appear attractive or easy as political parties worldwide occupy the centre ground with a 'catch-all' message from Bush, Blair and until recently, Schroeder in Germany. Healthy democracies deserve balanced debate and clear policy choice. By next year, FF will have been in power for 18 of the past 20 years. Over the past fifty years, FF has missed out on power on just two occasions. In 1973 in the aftermath of the Arms Trial, and with the security of the State under real threat, with a united FG/Lab team offering a programme for government in the form of a 14 point

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plan, FF was narrowly defeated. Almost a decade later, at the height of the titanic Haughey/FitzGerald struggles, with a whiff of sulphur in the air and FF suffering a large measure of internal strife, Garret FitzGerald was elected Taoiseach. Wrenching power from FF has always been a mammoth task and has only ever been achieved by a FG/Labour Alternative. So it will be in 2007. This is good for FG and good for the country.

The renewed Just Society leanings of FG and the “Fair Society Initiative” of Pat Rabbitte is a force for good in society. The conditions now exist for a broad Social Democratic alliance to change the Irish political landscape and have a lasting positive impact on our society. YFG thrived in the great social debate of the 1980’s. Young councillors blooded in the locals of 1979 led the charge and within two years, Fine Gael had power. YFG was radical, forceful; not afraid of taking risks. I vividly recall the YFG Conference of 1980 when a fierce attack was launched on the FG frontbench and when a series of very critical motions were passed and the senior party was put under real and sustained pressure. Senior frontbenchers were named and roasted from the floor. I was a delegate from YFG Laois/Offaly that day and ironically the guest Chairman was Enda Kenny TD, who delivered a stark message to the parliamentary party on the Tuesday following the conference and it didn’t make for an easy report.

Once in power, the relationship between YFG and the senior party improved and the views of YFG were never taken lightly or ignored by the FitzGerald government. The Divorce campaign in the mid-eighties proved exciting and delicate. I recall being in Portlaoise where I was guest speaker at a YFG pro-divorce meeting and my father was keynote speaker at an anti-divorce rally in the same hotel on the same night at the same time. As I was speaking to the assembled gathering of about 40 YFGers, we could clearly hear his thunderous voice passionately resonating through the thin hotel partition as he addressed 400 anti-divorce supporters on the evils of divorce and “the opening of the floodgates”. Downstairs in the bar afterwards, he goaded me to take him on in a £50.00 wager on the result of the referendum. Wisely, I declined! The rest is history.

For next year, YFG must be as radical, focused and policy driven as its predecessor. FG and YFG must distance itself from the mean-spirited strait jacket of free market economics as espoused by Ahern and Harney. This must be made crystal clear. Neo-liberal economics fosters inequality and injustice and must be strenuously rejected. Being a ‘voice for the people’ is much more than low taxes and low interest rates. It is about justice, fair play and value for money and helping to shape a society with a strong social dimension of which we can be proud. Enda Kenny and Pat Rabbitte have much in common; particularly on the need for a fairer, values-based society and greater emphasis on a new social contract. This election campaign will be about how the fruits of our economic success can be managed for the whole of society and not just sectoral groups as favoured by FF/PD.

I very much regret that in recent times parties have negotiated power after the people have cast their votes. Governments are not elected by the people but negotiated in private afterwards. This practice, essentially ‘pig-in-a-poke politics’ is both unfair and dishonest as ultimately agreed programmes for government bear little resemblance to that placed before the people essentially removing the people from the entire process. This fosters cynicism and apathy. This must stop. To restore real democracy to the process of electing a government, alliances should be formed before the vote and endorsed directly by the people and not cobbled together in secrecy after the event. The Mullingar Accord guarantees balanced debate and real choice. Let’s lead the charge for change. Game on!.

Charlie Flanagan is a former Fine Gael frontbencher and founder member of YFG. He has been selected as a candidate for Laois/Offaly.

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Restoring Community Pride

Time for a new cross sport approach to collective growth in Ireland

Neale Richmond

When the next Olympics take place in Beijing, we will as ever be drawn to the medals table to see how the countries compare in terms of success. Since the collapse of Communism in Europe and the fall of the Soviet Empire, these tables have been consistently dominated by the athletes from the USA. This is not surprising given the vast amounts of money and facilities available to the USA's huge population. However taking into account population percentage and GDP, it is not the Americans that dominate this scenario; rather it is the Australians.

Australia has been regarded as the home of sports science for many years now, whilst the country's international standing in Rugby Union, Rugby League, Cricket and Tennis as well as Swimming and Athletics has been consistently one of the highest in the world. This summer will see the Australian football team, *the Socceroos*; participate in the World Cup for the first time after just failing to qualify for the Finals in 2002. But why does Australia have all this success and how can Ireland emulate this in the future? True, the climate in Australia lends itself much more to outdoor sport than that of Ireland, but surely that cannot be the real answer. Whilst like Ireland, Australia's most popular sport is a hybrid game of football not played to any major standard anywhere else in the world, so too we cannot roll out the excuse often given by the OCI, that most of our top athletes focus their talents on GAA.

The level of municipal and state funding given to sports clubs and schools in Australia is perhaps far higher too but there is one area where the Irish sporting fraternity could work together easily in the future.

2005 saw an historic decision taken by the GAA in which they agreed to rescind Rule 42 and open up Croke Park temporarily for international rugby and football fixtures whilst Lansdowne Road is being re-developed at last. This is indeed welcome, but perhaps the move does not go far enough.

The idea of municipal sports facilities have long been successful in continental Europe and most importantly in Australia where local rugby, football and hockey clubs all share one ground and one pavilion. Already we have seen this appear in certain University and corporate sports complexes in Ireland but not to the same extent as in Australia whereby there are communal cricket nets in parks and a wide variety of sporting facilities such as tennis courts and running tracks open to the public and located in communal venues. This is indeed true in much of continental Europe; within the Flemish region of Belgium the state provides large amounts of funding for municipal sports centres, that whilst are populated by individual clubs, are open to the community at large.

Prior to the 6 Nations Championship, Irish Times sports journalist John O'Sullivan highlighted how the shift in venue of matches from Lansdowne Road to Croke Park would further increase the net income of money to the city of Dublin. The GAA's decision to 'open up' Croke Park for Soccer and Rugby could prove to be of huge financial and social benefit to Dublin.

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Considering that Munster's Heineken Cup Quarter Final against Perpignan will also sell out Lansdowne Road, as did Leinster's match up with Leicester last year, whilst Thomand Park, the RDS and Donnybrook are nearly always sold out for in the Heineken Cup and increasingly often Celtic League games, perhaps the GAA should consider opening up the rest of the Gaelic stadiums across the land?

“Across the country, large and small scale sporting venues are not being used to their full potential, seeing many of these stadiums become under used and often under resourced.”



Such a point was mooted before in relation to Munster possibly playing in FitzGerald Park, yet the proposal was dismissed out of hand. There could also be the argument of being able to stage International Football and Rugby fixtures outside of Dublin. The redevelopment of Wembley stadium has afforded the FA the opportunity to effectively take International Football on a tour of England as international friendlies and World Cup qualification matches have taken place in ground as geographically diverse as St. Mary's stadium in Southampton to Villa Park in Birmingham and up to Old Trafford in Manchester. Within this model we could perhaps see some of the smaller international fixtures brought to Semple Stadium in Thurles. In light of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce's survey would it not also be wise for the GAA to review their position, if only to benefit the Local and National economy?

Across the country, large and small scale sporting venues are not being used to their full potential, seeing many of these stadiums become underused and often under-resourced. In an era where real estate has become increasingly valuable in Ireland, would it not be wise to combine efforts and structures in order to improve the overall standard and availability of sports facilities in Ireland. It is scientifically proven that exercise adds to the development of children in social, athletic and mental terms. Surely there is a case for further compromise in the varying sporting associations across Ireland in order to help promote a healthy population and a population more aware of the benefits of the participation in sports at a community level.

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Message from the President

It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you the first edition of The Informer compiled since the 21st Young Fine Gael National Conference at Ballykisteen, Co. Tipperary took place over a month ago.

In the intervening number of weeks a new National Executive has taken up office and we have begun the preparatory work which will lead to what promises to be Young Fine Gael's largest ever General Election campaign. Central to that preparation will be the formulation of the YFG General Election manifesto. The next General Election will primarily be a battle of ideas, Fine Gael and Labour will have to transmit an alternative vision for the future of this country and YFG has a specific role in helping to convince the under 30 year old voter to give Fine Gael candidates their highest possible voting preference. YFG is in the business of representing Young Ireland at every level politically, and to that end we will publish in advance of the next General Election a policy platform that will comprehensively address the needs of Young Ireland. The drafting of such a manifesto is one of the immediate priorities for my term in office; if you feel you have something to offer in this regard, I want to hear from you. A policy platform that is not grounded in the foundations of our membership won't be worth the paper it's written on.

This time round, the personnel decisions couldn't be more crucial as we select our teams to lead the fight for the next election campaign. This process will culminate with the 73rd Fine Gael Ard Fheis which takes place in City West Hotel, Dublin on the weekend of the 4th, 5th and 6th of May. I would urge you to attend this year's Ard Fheis, it will be the last Ard Fheis before the next General Election and therefore will fire the first shots in Enda Kenny's bid to become the next Taoiseach of this country.

The focus of all our attentions needs to be on the election of a new Government and the ending of nine years of mis-rule by Fianna Fail and the "Progressive" Democrats. None of us can be under any illusions as to the enormity of the challenge that faces us in this regard. The stakes couldn't be any higher for Fine Gael; it has been over twenty years since a Fine Gael government has been returned to office after a General Election.

Over the past four years we have been on a roller coaster ride; the obituary writers were quick to record our imminent demise. Enda Kenny's first four years of leadership have been an unqualified success in proving the obituary writers wrong. The pundits claimed we would lose over 100 local authority seats; today Fine Gael is in power in over two thirds of council chambers across the country and our party holds for the first time in decades the mayoral chains of Dublin, Galway, Cork and Limerick all at the one time.

The pundits wrote off all our European Parliamentary seats one by one; we defended them all and gained one extra in return. Fine Gael defeated Fianna Fail in terms of seats won in a national election for the first time since the 1927 General Election. In Meath and in North Kildare, Fianna Fail were scattered like bowling pins by Fine Gael; Enda Kenny proving once more the winner that he is.

All of us have a chance to play our part in writing a new chapter in Irish political history. This is a once in a generation opportunity. My parting words to you on this occasion are to recall the theme of our recent National Conference:

"Seize the Day, Strive for Victory".

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National Conference:: Ramada Hotel :: February 2006 REVIEW

Following what must have been the most slender vote in YFG National Executive history, the Ramada Hotel was designated as the venue for the 21st National Conference.

Members descended on Limerick Junction; a battlefield, no doubt of compare in name with Vinegar Hill and Bosworth Field, for the eagerly anticipated Young Fine Gael National Executive elections.

Lizzie Munnelly, a Secondary School Teacher in Ashbourne, was looking to graduate from VP to President; her competitor was Communications Director and economics student, John Fitzpatrick. Both had been active with literature; John had described himself as the “Man with the Better Plan”, mainly attacking Lizzie’s proposed mandate idea to instigate a YFG Director of Elections in every Dáil constituency.

Meanwhile, Maurice Fitzgerald, Simon Harris and Barry Walsh were all seeking the position of Vice-President. Maurice was attacked by the unlikely alliance of Simon and Barry when he proposed free membership as a campaign idea.

In the Panel election, John Carroll, Keith Stephens, Liam Quinn, Paul O’Brien and Dave McDonagh were all hoping to secure a seat. Brian Dawson and Sean Conway were divided on the proposed idea to break up Leinster into North and South. It’s wasn’t quite the same as the American Civil War, despite the billing.

Catrina Burke, Sean Finan and John Kennedy were unopposed for the other regional positions.

The conference kicked off on Friday evening, with the annual branches debate, introduced by Nora Owen. During her introduction, Nora informed us that she is a Westlife fan.



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I must say that I was very aggrieved to be knocked out in the first round for the second year running. I thought my team had done alright, although I believe I might have frightened a few people with my speech. “What a loud voice you have, John” - “All the better to eat you with, my dear”. I was actually speaking relatively normally; it’s just that I was so close to the microphone. This contrasted with the apparently soft tones of six foot plus speakers Maurice Fitzgerald and John Fitzpatrick.

I wasn’t the only one to suffer from the judges early on. Peter “I don’t need the podium” Cosgrove was gone early (by *his* standards), as were Mid West Roscommon and UCD.

So, in the end, Trinity triumphed in the team debate and Cllr. Patrick O’Donovan was deemed best speaker.

But for most members, Friday night wasn’t about the debating and there was a lot of serious partying to get on with.

“Reeling in the Years” is a popular RTE programme amongst those who remember a day where the World was going to end by 1971 and Herman’s Hermits were in the charts. One reel I recall is that of a black and white woman extolling the virtues of a certain festival: “Ladies, get yourself down to Lisdoonvarna, sure you’d find yourself a man and be married in six months”, with an genuine exclamation that Irish men miss I suppose. The YFG National Conference isn’t quite Lisdoonvarna, but there are some similarities.

Early in the morning, the policy motions were debated amongst a drowsy audience; they reflected on the important and topical issues of the day. Mark Finan wasn’t too happy that UCC wanted to take away his cigarettes with a motion to ban the sale of tobacco.

Then the serious business began and the suits came out for the Candidate’s Debate, hosted by Richard Bruton TD. Clearly the highlight was John Carroll’s “you cannot be serious” John McEnroe moment with the time umpire.



A number of questions were posed to the candidates, most notably the attempt from James Lawless, to extract from the Presidential candidates the areas they felt where Fine Gael was weak. It was a noble enough question, and answered effectively and honestly. However, I cringed as I spotted what looked a TV camera focus in on the candidates as they gave their answers. It might make “Reeling in the Years” in times to come.

After the voting had taken place, a fine film was shown and then the party leader, Shane McEntee TD, Simon Coveney TD and Pa O’Driscoll were introduced over the booming voice of Gerry O’Connell. As this was a few hours after the violent “Love Ulster” parade, everybody cheered as a motion was announced to condemn the violence. Enda urged all delegates to vote for the motion. The delegates at motions on Sunday morning all did so.

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At the Saturday night banquet, Neale “Smashy” Richmond from Dublin South YFG. was presented with the “Member of the Year” award. It was the rewarding culmination for him of a good year of work within FG/YFG. His most notable event during the year was perhaps his organising of the Stillorgan Collins22 rally, where George Hook, Mary Banotti and Olivia Mitchell TD attended, together with a crowd of about 300.

So, on Sunday, most awoke from a hazy Saturday night to the proceedings of the count. In summary, Elizabeth Munnelly was elected the new President; Barry Walsh took a slender victory from Simon Harris for Vice-President; Dave McDonagh, Liam Quinn, John Carroll and Keith Stephens took the four panel seats; and finally, Brian Dawson became Leinster Organiser.

Elizabeth Munnelly

Elizabeth Munnelly from Ballina Co. Mayo is the new President of YFG. Lizzie is a 25 year old Dublin based Teacher and was Vice President in our last Executive. She was Director of Elections for Meath By-Election in 2005.

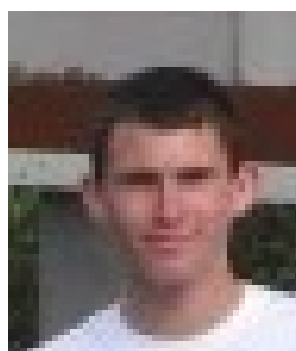
She can be contacted at eliz_mun@yahoo.com.

Catrina Burke

Catrina is the Munster Organiser on the National Executive. Catrina is a native of Cork on the banks of the Lee and is currently a 4th year student in UL, studying Public Administration.

Catrina has been involved in ULYFG with the past four years and has served on the committee there within the past three years in various positions.

The New National Executive: Profiles



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David McDonagh

David hails from Gurteen in Co. Sligo. A H-Dip in Education student in NUI Galway, David is currently the YFG National Secretary and is a former YFG Connacht/Ulster Regional Organiser. He also served as the Chairperson of the Connacht/Ulster Regional Council. David is also deeply involved in YFG and FG in his home constituency of Sligo/North Leitrim where he presently holds the position of Constituency Youth Officer. His hobbies include travelling, GAA, Macra, socialising and of course, Farming!

Maurice Fitzgerald

Maurice Fitzgerald hails from Cappawhite, Co. Tipperary and is currently in the final year of a BSc Finance degree. Interests include hurling, swimming and farming as well as current affairs and politics.

John Carroll

John is from Ratoath, Co. Meath and is a member of the Meath East YFG branch. He is a recent History graduate from Trinity and is working in the financial sector. He is an active participant in rugby and athletics. He is General Secretary of the YFG International Committee and the Editor of "The Vulcan".

Keith Stephens

Keith is 20 years old and studying Arts in NUIG. He comes from Ahascragh, Co. Galway, the biggest industrial town west of the Shannon!!!!!! Not from a major Fine Gael family more of a Nationalist one, so he is here by choice and divine intervention (ha ha). His parents were always major ABBA fans i.e. **Anything But Bertie Ahern** and he feels our party should promote our constitutional nationalism. Other interests aside from politics: He plays Hooker for his local rugby club Ballinasloe RFC and u-21 football for Caltra-Ahascragh GAA Club. He also works part time in Aras na nGael, a bar where everyone speaks Irish.

Liam Quinn

Liam comes from Rhode in Co. Offaly and is a Second Year student in UL. Liam has been involved in UL Young Fine Gael within the past two years and has served on the committee for this time in UL.

Sean Finan

Sean, who hails from Ballinlough in Co Roscommon, is a final Year Civil Engineer at NUI Galway. Sean is a former Chairman of the NUI Galway branch and the current Secretary of the North and West Roscommon branch. He is also the current Chairperson of the Young Fine Gael Agriculture and Rural Affairs policy committee. He has also been actively involved in the Connaught/Ulster Regional Council for the past few years having served as Vice Chairman and most recently as Chairman and is currently the Regional Organiser for Connacht/Ulster on the National Executive. He is involved in Fine Gael and has positions at branch, district and constituency level in the Roscommon/South Leitrim Constituency. Interests outside of Politics include GAA, Golf, Reading, and hobby farming.

Barry Walsh

Barry is a 21 year old Legal Eagle, hailing from Mitchelstown, Co. Cork – with adopted homes in Limerick and Clontarf. He has proud roots in Fine Gael and has been a member of the party for 5 years. A noted connoisseur of coffee and classical music, he is credited as the man who put Playboy TV back into Irish politics and has been mistaken for soul legend Barry White on more than one occasion. His interests include debating, rugby and golf. His dislikes include hip-hop "music" and biographical filler-pieces.

John Kennedy

Surely Bebo is the place for biography pieces...23 years old from Dublin, John used to like collecting airplane timetables and now prefers writing and talking about himself in the third person.

John Carroll On Youth Participation

With the election approaching, we can be guaranteed that over the coming twelve months we will be subjected to a few patronising and clichéd articles on young people's supposed disinterest in politics, voting and implicitly in decision-making in society. Whilst there is obviously plenty of truth in this, the condescension offered in these articles will rarely offer any meaningful analysis, never mind possible solutions to the commonly believed problem.

As a youth political party, YFG has a particular duty to work in this area, not just to garner extra votes for Fine Gael, but also for the broader and far more important duty to involve as many citizens as possible in the democratic process as possible. In the past, we have mainly looked at this from the perspective of getting people registered and voting, which is probably the most important aspect of this process.

But we must not confine our vision to this, and in tandem must take a much broader view and work towards getting young people involved at all levels of decision making that affects their lives. This in my view is what true democratic participation is all about, and it is an area in which YFG can, must and should offer leadership.

One particular area, which is of direct relevance to every young person at some stage in their life, is in the education system. Secondary school should not just be used to educate young people about the process, but to actively involve them in the decision making that affects their lives on a daily basis.

In 1998, the Education Act dealt tentatively with the issue of student councils in second level schools. While this was a welcome initiative and has provided a basis for progress in the area of student participation in their schools, the Education Act need radical updating and YFG should take the lead in this area.

Principally we should be looking to reform the manner in which student councils are created, elected, what they do, how they do it, and what their role is.

For too long a charade of student participation has been allowed to exist, whereby student councils have existed with relatively little powers beyond imagination of some of their more egomaniac members. As long as the impact, function and powers of these bodies are entirely at the discretion of the teaching staff, these student councils are worthless, whether they be elected or selected. Only by empowering student councils with a real role in the education process can these bodies be given a value by students.

By amending the Education Act in four principal ways, students can be actively involved in decision making in their schools at second level, and get an important education in the value, power and role of politics in their lives: The Education Act should be amended to make student councils compulsory in all second-level schools.

- That all student councils should be directly and democratically elected by all their students.
- That student councils be given a defined role in the day to day running of their schools; for example, by being given by the direction of the Minister of Education, at least one place on the board of management of all publicly funded post-primary schools.
- That the Vocational Education Act be amended so that each Vocational Education Committee include two student members, elected on an annual basis by the student councils within the area to represent the interests of students on the VEC.

These reforms will help radically change the education system, making it more responsive and reflective of the needs of the young people within the system. But they will also help educate young people in politics that directly impacts on their lives, and show the value of engagement within the democratic system. By pushing for genuine student involvement in the decision making process, we will help create a generation of people who have real knowledge

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and experience of the possibilities of politics, and will be in a greater position to contribute to society as a result.

The education system is just one area, albeit a hugely important one, where democratic participation can be radically increased and democracy as a result strengthened and enhanced for citizens. Other areas of public life can be similarly reformed and helped to strengthen Irish life against the traps of popular apathy, political isolation and extremism. YFG can offer radical leadership in this area, and through this help radically improve the standard of Irish democracy. A definite challenge presents itself to us. Will we accept it?

*Young Fine Gael is drawing together a policy document on Youth Participation in Irish Democracy – If people are interested in this subject and would like to get involved email John Carroll at john.joe.carroll@gmail.com

Dear fellow members of YFG,

I am writing in this article my views on politicians under the topic of “Are they too greedy?” I understand I will be taking a quite bold approach to this.

I believe politicians in Ireland ARE in fact too greedy. Our state has seen taxes rise to higher than ever before and I blame it on poor handling of finances in past governments. However, I feel this current government of ours has gone and taken advantage of the fact that they can raise taxes freely. Bertie Ahern has given himself 5 pay raises in 6 months to put his yearly income to over €250,000. When asked did the TDs want €20,000 cars or €60,000 cars, what was the answer? €60,000 cars of course. Now I can think back to Michael Collins and see that this man once rented a car for canvassing purposes, and when the bill was due to be paid he wrote a letter to his solicitor asking for not all of the cost of the rental car to be paid with campaign expenses, but with his own money as he used it for his personal use as well.

We will hardly find such politicians these days who believe they shouldn't be given cars for personal use, despite the fact that it is at the expense of the hard working tax payers of our country.

The politicians who founded this state were all honest men who wanted what was best for their country. Why do we have very few like that today? We have seen so much go on, from Fianna Fail raising taxes to higher than ever before to Sinn Fein being watched by British spies. The ideology of the State was built around the ideas of Michael Collins, but if he looked at the State today, would he be proud? I don't think so. Free cars? Free holidays? Free almost everything? This is not what Michael Collins stood for. I believe we need to make a change. Why should TDs earn €60000+ a year and still have free items on top? Will it not cut down on a lot of taxes if we lowered these wage packages to a lower rate? The average wage in Ireland is €22,500; why do TDs earn at least 3 times this? And why does Bertie Ahern earn over 11 times that amount? Does Bertie use 11 times as much necessities as these people?

I feel TDs are being too greedy and something should be done. Would the politicians that founded this State have earned as much money from the tax payers? No; the answer is as simple as that. We were founded on the ideas of Michael Collins and that should not change. Politicians should be treated equally by the public; they are no different. Do they need free cars with the wages they receive? NO! They do not. I encourage Fine Gael to tackle this system.

Darren Murphy
Kilkenny YFG

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Connacht/Ulster Regional Report Sean Finan

I am delighted to compile this report for The Informer as the new Regional Organiser for the Connacht/Ulster Region. Since our National Conference at Limerick Junction in February, a number of events have taken place in Connacht/Ulster Young Fine Gael. Back in late February a new branch of South Galway Young Fine Gael was established in Loughrea in the Galway East constituency. The new Chairperson is the ever capable P.J. Murphy and I wish all the new members the best of luck.

The next event to take place was the A.G.M. of Castlebar Young Fine Gael where Brian Flannery was re-elected as Chairman. The branch's new Vice-Chairman is none other than G.M.I.T Chairman and party animal extraordinaire Mr. Micheál Larkin. Other members include John Lohan, our former National Secretary and Young Fine Gael stalwart Conor Cresham and Henry Kenny to name but a few.

A.G.M. season continued in Letterkenny recently with stalwarts Ms. Katie O'Connor and Master Graham Dullaghan handing over the reigns of power to Donegal's brightest, James Dawson. I hope the new committee do have a very successful term in office.

Connacht Ulster Young Fine Gael took a new direction (far west) recently with the establishment of Letterfrack Y.F.G. located in the wilderness of Connemara. After a hotly contested election for the inaugural Chair of the branch, Roscommon/South Leitrim gained another young politician in the form of Ballinamore man Mr. Alan Kennedy. The new branch is also in plenty of safe hands with the new committee including Westmeath star and former County Councillor?!, Andrew Scally, the lovely lady from Loughrea Ms Elaine Mc Mahon, Kerry Maid Ms Joanne Murphy and P.J. Murphy, the new P.R.O, to name but a few. With nearly one third of the college population blueshirts and the peace and serenity of their location, I'm sure there will be plenty of time for putting up posters of their new events and no shortage of volunteers!!

There hasn't been a dull moment recently in the life of N.U.I. Galway's Young Fine Gael branch. Following on from its phenomenal success in electing three of its members onto the National Executive, the branch has been very active in recent weeks with plenty of public meetings. Esteemed guest speakers included many Oireachtas members, among them Senator and M.E.P. Jim Higgins, Senator Brian Hayes, Deputy Denis Naughten, Sligo Councillor Michael Fleming and Fine Gael Vice President Gerry O'Connell. Topics included Ireland in Europe, the legislative importance of Seanad Éireann, the future of rural Ireland, the undocumented Irish in America and the legacy of Michael Collins in Fine Gael.

And to top all this off, the party leader Enda Kenny received a rapturous reception in N.U.I.G. with over 160 students to hear his address. The A.G.M. rounded off a wonderful year for the branch under the leadership of one of Roscommon's finest Mr. Paul Hickey. In attendance at the A.G.M. were President Lizzie Munnelly, Youth Officer Susie O'Connor, Galway County Councillors and the up and coming stars of Galway West Fidelma Healy-Eames and Seán Kyne. Fine Gael Executive Council

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was also well represented at the meeting with Cllr. Lorraine Munnelly and potential future Cavan Monaghan T.D. for Fine Gael Cllr. Seán Mc Kiernan Jnr. in attendance. The highest esteem of N.U.I.G. Young Fine Gaelers was shown in the form of honorary life memberships to a great amount of tireless N.U.I.G. foot soldiers of the last four years and plenty of presentations were made, too many to mention.

The new committee headed by Ferghal Ryan have a great mix of energy and experience and I wish them the very best of luck for the coming year.

The Mid Roscommon branch A.G.M took place recently with Mr. Keith Hoare one of Young Fine Gaels youngest members elected chairman. Keith took over from the hardworking and up and coming star in UCD Young Fine Gael, Mr. David Jones, who took on the important role of Secretary.

The next event on the calendar is the launch of the Western Development policy document. The Árd Fheis takes place on May 5th where I wish our two Young Fine Gael members seeking re-election from Connacht/Ulster Sean Mc Kiernan and Lorraine Munnelly all the best in their quest to get re-elected to the Executive Council.

Leinster Regional Report Brian Dawson

Since the last edition of The Informer, there have been many events in YFG; most notably the National Conference last February. It's a great honour for me to have been elected to the National Executive to serve as Leinster Regional Organiser.

Since the end of February I have sent out emails on events taking place within YFG.

AGM's took place throughout Leinster. Congratulations to Ciara Delaney who was elected Chairperson at the Laois YFG AGM. I also want to congratulate the branch on its activities over the year. Also congratulations to Mel Farrell who was re-elected as Chairperson of NUI Maynooth YFG.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the New Ross and Wexford branches on the success of their debating competitions amongst schools. The hard work and time that went into making the debates a success paid off. The success clearly shows the amount of planning that went into the event and well done to all those involved. The Enniscorthy/Gorey District Final takes place on Thursday 4th May in the Riverside Park Hotel, Enniscorthy.

Munster Regional Report Catrina Burke

Munster is the place to be at the moment, with a very successful National Conference in Tipperary in the end of February. This was a conference that will go down as one

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of the best ever and thanks to all in Tipperary who played a huge role in organising the conference and not to mention the very professional steering committee.

The last few weeks have seen an influx of AGMs right across Munster, the first one being in UCC with a large crowd in attendance and Dave Bennett being elected as the new Chair. Staying in Cork, CIT held their political awareness day to raise the awareness of politics in CIT and to also raise their profile. In addition to this, they also had their AGM recently. The Waterford Institute of Technology and Kerry North also had their AGMs last month and all were very successful. The Cork North Central and South Central AGM's were on in Cork on Saturday evening, 8th April, in conjunction with the Munster Regional Council AGM. Some good ideas came from the MRC; one has been put into action straight away. It was proposed that Munster take one constituency a month to canvass between now and this time next year. For further information please contact Catrina on 0879956221 or catrinaburke@gmail.com.

Dublin Regional Report John Kennedy

Dublin has seen three new branches launching, these are: Dublin North Central YFG, with Colm Lauder as Chair; Dublin West YFG, with James O'Brien as Chair and Dublin Mid-West YFG, with Robert Fitzgerald as Chair. Hopefully these branches can help Fine Gael win seats in their respective areas and the new members integrate with the existing membership. The Dublin Mid-West launch was covered by the Lucan Gazette.

In TCD, Trevor Breen-Browne was elected Chair at their AGM. TCD recently had a very good event where Dr. Garret Fitzgerald was the guest speaker. In UCD, Rachel Gow was elected Chair at their AGM. She took over from James Geoghegan, who did an excellent job as Chair; the highlight of his year in charge was the interview conducted between George Hook and Enda Kenny TD.

The DRC arranged a hustings for the National Conference, of which most candidates, eager to secure Dublin support, were in attendance. As an example, there was some robust debating between Simon Harris and John Carroll reminiscent of Haughey vs. Fitzgerald on Today Tonight.

With exams approaching, I would like to wish all students the best of luck. There are a number of plans approaching for the summer; another DART/LUAS campaign, possibly on Housing, is on the way.

COLLEGES REPORT Keith Stephens

Well, hello again! I may not have had the opportunity to thank each and every member who voted for me, but your support was much appreciated.

It's a daunting task trying to organise the colleges for the next 20 months and having them as active as possible in the run up to a general election, but I intend to do so. It

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was the job I always wanted within YFG and I am grateful that I got the opportunity. One of my goals as Colleges Organiser is to travel to each campus throughout the country as much as possible. I am unsure whether a Colleges Organiser has achieved that before. In my opinion, it is extremely important that branch members know each and every member of the Executive. The college branches are the bedrock of our organisation, where most of our members originated from. At present we do not have an active YFG branch in:

- Dundalk IT
- Athlone IT
- Carlow IT

So if you have any friends in these colleges who you think may be interested in YFG don't hesitate to contact me as it would be much appreciated. It is critical that we get a YFG branch up and running in the above ITs, so that YFG's voice is heard in every college in Ireland.

As regards the internal organisation of the college branch, I intend to give **2 hardback books** to each college branch if they haven't got one already; one for recording minutes and the other as an attendance record. This prevents minutes and attendances being written on a sheet, which can be lost easily and cannot be used as an accurate judge of overall active membership.

I intend to hold a **voter registration day** in each college in the near future. As YFG is a youth organisation we could benefit by having more young people registered to vote and politically aware.

I would encourage college branches to participate in as many **leaflet drops** etc. for the local Fine Gael candidates in the run up to the general election. This will be of great benefit to Fine Gael and it will also highlight YFG's presence in an area.

One way I feel YFG can appeal to a wider audience within Colleges is by inviting guest speakers in to address the meeting from outside the party on a **controversial issue**. This, I feel, will bring in a wider audience and hopefully increase YFG's profile and active membership e.g Mary Lou v Simon Coveney debate in UL. As we all know, there will be no National Conference during the next College year; therefore, colleges will need another key event to fill the void left. I plan to work with the college branches to organise an event for the colleges. Last year, UL and UCC went on a trip to Brussels; an event like this would in my opinion be a fantastic substitute for the National Conference. So, it's now time to get on to your local MEP to try and organise a trip.

Since my election, I have already attended the UCC AGM, a very well organised political awareness day in CIT and the very successful Letterfrack YFG AGM which is the newest College branch in YFG. On top of that, I also attended the NUIG AGM and presented the branch with the two books. So if I have not met any of you yet, I'll definitely bump into you over the summer or on Societies Day.

Don't ever hesitate to contact me at anytime:

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Mobile 087-7615842

Email: keithstephens1@gmail.com

Go n-éirí an bother libh agus tá siúl agam go mbeidh post Oifeachach na Gaeilge sna colaistí nuair a táim críochnaithe.

Good luck to everyone sitting college exams.

WEXFORD YFG SPEAKING COMPETITION

On Wednesday the 22nd of April, the New Ross branch of Young Fine Gael held a public speaking competition for secondary schools in the area. The Brandon House Hotel in New Ross resembled a glorious battle field where some of the most controversial topics amongst young people today were ironed out and in a pure display of utmost clarity. Ten young men and woman, from transition year and fifth year, showed standards of public speaking that would indeed put some professionals to shame. The contest saw Ramsgrange Community School and Colaiste Abbain progress to the second round of the YFG Wexford public speaking contest whilst Good Counsel College received the best speaker award.

The contest, which began at 8pm, was chaired by Councillor Raymond Lawlor. Mr Larry Doyle, who is Chairman of the Wexford Y.F.G, acted as time keeper for the night. The adjudicators' panel consisted of our very own Lizzie Munnelly, along with Oisín Collins, who is the auditor of the UL debating society, and the managing director of the Brandon House Hotel, Grace McPhillips. A big well done to New Ross YFG, and a big thank you to everyone who made this such a success. The Wexford and Enniscorthy districts have their competitions coming up soon so keep an eye on the website for all the details. Finally a word of thanks to the other schools who participated, Our Lady of Lourdes, Good Counsel College and Saint Marys.

~Sarah Moore

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This issue of the Informer, the official ezine of the

Young Fine Gael National Executive, was edited by John

Kennedy. It's founding editor was Stephen O'Shea; it's

second editor was John Fitzpatrick. Future submissions

can be sent to John Kennedy at johnfgkennedy@gmail.com

Brian Dawson has resigned as Leinster Organiser of Young Fine Gael. The National Executive would like to express our thanks to Brian for the work he has undertaken in this role and also more prominently as Colleges Organiser in the previous Executive.