

TRÁCHT NÁISIÚNTA

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THE FUTURE OF THE LEFT

In the wake of the 2024 general election, it is necessary to make a critical assessment regarding the future of the Irish Left.

OUTCOME FOR SINN FÉIN

The most significant aspect of the election's outcome for the Left was the blow suffered by Sinn Féin. This compares with the expectations about forming or leading a government that had arisen following the opinion polls of mid-2022, which had registered up to 36% support for it. But one now wonders how far that was a positive endorsement or a default protest against an underachieving administration.

However, by 2024 expectations had been modified by subsequent polls mapping SF's steady downward movement to the 19% that it actually received in the election. And this was also 6% less than in 2020 when it regretted that it had not put up enough candidates to get the benefit of its then 25% vote. This further meant in 2024 a net loss of one seat in real terms, taking account of not maintaining the same proportion of Dáil seats as in the preceding smaller assembly.

FORMER SF DEPUTIES

One should also observe that three Deputies in the new Dáil were previously members of Sinn Féin: namely Carol Nolan, Peadar



Tóibín and Brian Stanley. Why then are they no longer included in the SF parliamentary party?

In the cases of Nolan and Tóibín, it is because they did not support the party line on liberalising abortion. However, the wisdom of insisting on a party 'whip' in the matter, rather than allowing a position being taken according to conscience is very much open to question. Had they been permitted to adopt a stance adhering to their principles, the liberalisation would not have been obstructed in fact and the issue would now be history with the Deputies concerned possibly still within the fold.

As for Brian Stanley, the controversy here is not very clear because it was never fully resolved. However, one is aware that the complainant against Deputy Stanley admitted both to initially trying to extort money from him on the basis of a self-confessed lie about a non-existent photograph, and that the reference to the Gardaí never resulted in the finding of any offence on his part. Moreover, both parties themselves confirmed that there was no inappropriate physical behaviour involved. What then justified proceeding against him in a way that led to his leaving the party? Apart from all that, there is also the question of what was the business of SF

investigating a private matter which had nothing to do with party activity.

OTHER LEFT PARTIES

Moving on to the other parties of the Left, the Social Democrats and Labour are understandably very pleased with their increase in seats in the Dáil. But the reality is that they have just been quite lucky, given the vagaries in the Irish system of proportional representation and the extent to which transfers can lead to a parliamentary presence that is greater than percentage support in the country would point to, which for them has not changed over the average of prior opinion poll ratings.

The full range of Left of centre Deputies in the new Dáil is derived from Sinn Féin, Social Democrats, Labour, People before Profit, Greens, and four Independents who are identifiably in that category.¹ That adds up to 69, leaving 105 to Right of centre.² In other words the combined Left would need to get 18 more seats to achieve 87 and have at least a majority of 1, assuming a Ceann Comhairle could be induced to come from the Right. Percentage-wise in the election, Left wing parties got a total of 35% in the vote, apart from the four Left of centre Independents whose percentages cannot be interpreted across the State.

At the same time, it should be noted that the Right wing parties also got less than half the vote at a combined 47% (FF-FG 43%, I I³ 4%), Aontú at 4%, hovers between Right and Left (see footnote 2), depending on the issue. As for the Independents, most are also on the Right, to one degree or another.

¹ Catherine Connolly, Paul Gogarty, Séamus Healy, Brian Stanley.

² Aontú is a bit of a mix 'm gathering, with some social and economic policies being reasonably progressive, but its Catholicity on social issues leading us to place it on balance in the Right camp.

³ Independent Ireland

OTHER COMBINATIONS

But, what about other combinations? The largest Left party is Sinn Féin with 39 seats. If it could have coalesced with Fianna Fáil, the result would in fact have been 87, although in the role of junior partner, as Labour used to be in regard to Fine Gael. In the past, some noises from Sinn Féin indicated that it might not be averse to an arrangement with Fianna Fáil on an appropriate platform, albeit as the larger of the two parties. Yet, there was also a definite reluctance among others within Sinn Féin to having any dealings with Fianna Fáil on any basis.

However, that is all currently academic. It is often said that Irish politics now has a clear Left-Right divide. Among other things, what that also means is that the Right has consolidated. Civil war politics are indeed truly dead in that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Deputies have lost their antipathy to each other through working together for the past eight years and their voters likewise as is evident in the transfers between them. The 'verbal republicans' in Fianna Fáil are now quite content to cosy up with Fine Gael, which has a new, slightly green tinge to it. Moreover, FF has accepted that it has lost the majority of the working class and there is now no point in overly pandering to its republicanism or seeking to overly appease it with social concessions. The FF-FG main task is to shore up middle class support and be the safeguard against SF.

LEFT ALLIANCE

Now that it is clear that SF will not have the option of forming a majority government in the foreseeable future or of ever leading an SF-FF one, the third alternative is the only one remaining to be strived for over five or ten years and that is an inter-party Left government. We have said before that example might be taken here from recent experience in France whereby a Left alliance called the New Popular Front has become the largest grouping in the National Assembly. Of

course, circumstances there are not the same. For example, we do not have to be seriously anxious in electoral terms about the far right. But we have our own reasons for looking at French tactics, such as not having competing Left candidates in constituencies and seeking to identify common policy themes. Moreover, we should look at the organisations of protest and concern in civil society and seek to engage them as well in a broad progressive formation.

The emergence of a senior and very experienced SF figure in 'southern' politics in the shape of Senator Conor Murphy should give a much needed boost to SF in terms both of its internal morale and public image, and significantly assist in promoting a sensible Left strategy.

The prudent thing to do over the coming years is for SF as the biggest Left party to take the lead in trying to put together an alliance of the Left. It will not be easy given a number of factors. Labour in particular is almost hostile to SF at present with its new Leader denying the Left label to the party. PBP's marxist purism might not leave a lot of room for collaboration. SD is something of an unknown quantity and it remains to be seen how it views itself as fitting into the general Left scene. A problem is that the Left is not only splintered, but often appears as a squabbling bunch that does not inspire confidence among the public as to their leadership qualities.

SF PROBLEMS

However, there is currently a problem with SF as a proposed leader of a Left alliance, because consistently it is itself poorly led. The situation before now has been addressed in

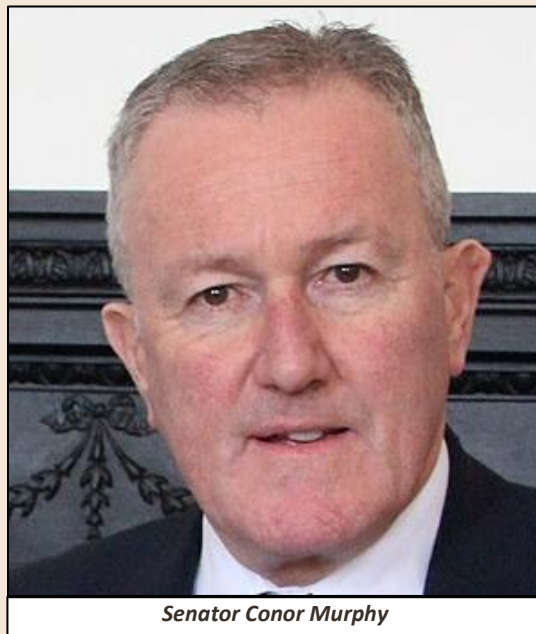
previous bulletins. Since the general election, the pattern continues.

To begin with, the nomination of Deputy McDonald for Taoiseach at the initial sitting of the new Dáil was a predictable own goal. It only gained the support of 5 votes beyond the party's 39; probably 3 Trotskyists and 2 others (indeterminately drawn from the GP ~ left-of-centre TD pool). The 22 SD/LP Deputies did not join the lineup. The episode emphasised that, of 174 Deputies, a sum total of only 44 could be garnered in support, leaving altogether 130 unsupportive. That advertisement of sharply diminished significance was all that was needed after the local election failure to get back to the high of 2014 and then the general election defeat.

Next, in its first post-election foray into policy formation, the advice to Cumainn on the immigration issue was to steer asylum centres away from working class areas, obviously implying they should be located in middle class ones. Clearly, that would hardly secure the votes in the latter neighbourhoods

that SF had previously been hoping for.

In 2024, expenditure on asylum seekers was over €1 billion, while 66% of asylum applications were found to be without foundation. The reasonable approach then would have been to indeed stress that deprived areas should not be burdened with such centres, along with demands for deportation, and speedily, of invalid asylum seekers. Given the relevant statistics, there would not then be the requirement for as many asylum seeker centres anywhere. As for just seeking increased resources in connection with this issue, these should of course be sought for deprived areas, irrespective of the



Senator Conor Murphy

asylum aspect. Also, where required, they should be demanded in regard to valid asylum seekers. Although we should only be expected to take our fair share of same in Europe. But there is no justification for spending taxpayers' money on invalid seekers.

Of course, that would have been denounced by pseudo-liberals in the media irresponsibly screaming 'racism', yet such, usually anti-republican, commentators have to be stood up to and exposed for the distortional bullies that they are.

QUESTION & PROSPECTS

However, given all the matters on various fronts to be addressed, one wonders when the SF leadership element(s) concerned, having excavated a hole, will stop digging.

Finally, it has to be bluntly asked: what is the alternative to a Left alliance? The fact is that if the Left does not get its act together, we could be in for quite a prolonged spell of Right wing government in the Republic - after the next election and beyond.

THE TRIPPLE LOCK & SEVILLE DECLARATION

Micheál Martin's decision to seek to abandon the Triple Lock on sending Irish soldiers to fight in foreign parts is motivated by the desire to send Irish soldiers to take part in EU-led and NATO-led military operations that do not have a UN mandate.

Past examples of such would be the 2003 Iraq war and the 2011 Syrian War. A current example would be the war in Ukraine.

This step would be effectively a repudiation of the Seville Declaration which induced Irish voters to vote Yes to the ratification of the EU's Nice Treaty by referendum in 2002, having rejected that treaty by referendum the year before.

Spelling out the Triple Lock in the 2002 Seville Declaration was the key factor used to persuade the Irish people to change their vote on the Nice Treaty.

At the Seville European Council in June 2002 the other EU governments accepted Ireland's National Declaration spelling out the Triple Lock as follows: "Ireland reiterates that the participation of contingents of the Irish Defence Forces in overseas operations, including those carried out under the

European security and defence policy, requires (a) the authorisation of the operation by the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations, (b) the agreement of the Irish Government and (c) the approval of Dáil Éireann in accordance with Irish law."

In return, the European Council of Member State Governments made the following Declaration: "The European Council takes cognizance of the National Declaration of Ireland presented at its meeting in Seville on 21–22 June 2002. It notes that Ireland intends to associate its National Declaration with its act of ratification of the Treaty of Nice, should the people of Ireland in a referendum decide to accept the Treaty of Nice."

The people did then vote to accept Nice.

Negating the Seville Declaration in the way now proposed would be an insult to the Irish people who voted in those referendums. It would be a betrayal of the commitments of previous Irish Governments regarding the Nice Treaty.

It would enable Irish participation in military operations by the European Union and its

American/NATO overlord in the new Cold War between “the West” and Russia/China that increasingly threatens world peace. Ireland’s recent commitment to participate in a 2000 strong German-led EU battlegroup is preparation for all this. Without the Triple Lock the Government could send Irish troops without limit to take part in the Ukrainian war.

To prevent this utterly foolish step and save what is left of a meaningful Irish neutrality policy, citizens should lobby their TDs and Senators in the days and weeks ahead to stand by the Triple Lock peace safeguard adopted when they voted to ratify the Nice Treaty.

Thoughtful and patriotic voters should refuse to vote for Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael or the Green Party in the next general election if they should push through this dangerous and shameful proposal - a repudiation of past promises and commitments by these parties to Irish voters.

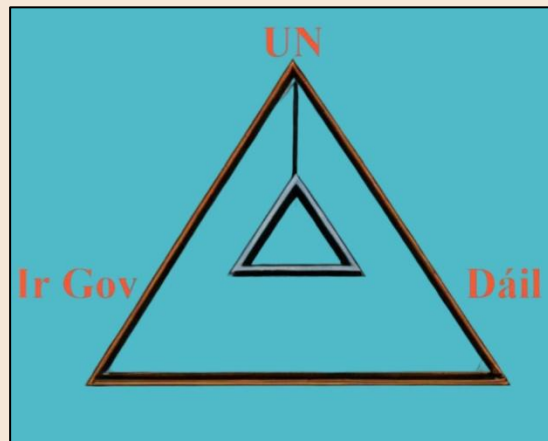
It is widely thought that Mr Martin’s zeal to abandon the Triple Lock stems from his desire to be selected as an EU Commissioner in due course. Although the EU Treaties provide that each EU Member State may nominate its own Commissioner, the practice has grown up of Member States submitting two names, one a woman, to encourage gender balance on the Commission. Does Mr Martin feel that he has to be especially passionate in his Europhilia to ensure that he is the one chosen out of the putative two?

Elements in Fine Gael have wanted to end the Triple Lock for years. Micheál Martin now proposes to oblige them. Has the leader of the once great Fianna Fáil party of Éamon de Valera, who in his day gave Ireland a

genuinely independent neutrality policy, really sunk to this?

Deeply cynical is the editorial endorsement by the *Irish Times* of the abandonment of the Triple Lock as a “vindication of Irish sovereignty” (23 Nov 2023). Everyone knows that that paper has welcomed every surrender of the powers of the Irish State to the supranational EU over decades, every abandonment of the accompanying national vetoes, and that this proposal is but another step in enabling Ireland to subsume its defence forces in EU/NATO military operations.

Others are making similar demagogic claims regarding their zeal for Irish sovereignty in order to fool people as to what this is really all about.



In the 2001 Nice Treaty referendum the National Platform EU Research and Information Centre, of which the undersigned is spokesman, was stated to be a body providing information critical of the treaty in the information booklet which the statutory Referendum

Commission, then chaired by former Chief Justice T A Finlay, sent to all Irish households. The European Movement (Ireland), whose then secretary was Mr Alan Dukes, was stated in the same booklet to be a body providing information in support of the Treaty.

ANTHONY COUGHLAN

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