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Election 2007

"The Greatest Nation On Earth"

The British Prime Minister said some years ago, when launching one of his five wars, that Britain has never made war except in a just cause. This must mean that Britain is the agent of divine Providence in this world.

When making his retirement speech a couple of weeks ago, this same Prime Minister confirmed that was his meaning. He said:

"...This country is a blessed nation.
The British are special. The world knows it. In our innermost thoughts, we know it.
This is the greatest nation on earth."

No Irish political party or newspaper uttered a note of dissent. To have done so would have been *'divisive'*.

It was not divisive on the part of the British Prime Minister to assert that Britain was the greatest state in the world—that it was a blessed state. But it would have been divisive for any representative figure in Ireland, speaking out of the Irish experience of English blessedness, to comment that Blair's statement was an expression of either extreme Jingoism or of megalomania. Such is the condition of the relationship between Ireland and Britain today.

The Taoiseach was invited to address the British Parliament to celebrate the joint achievement of London and Dublin in putting Northern Ireland back in the box, where it is to engage in a make-belief politics outside the political life of either of the states.

Taoiseach Bertie Ahern said to the assembled Westminster Houses in Westminster Hall:

"I had the honour last week to welcome the new First Minister of Northern Ireland, the Right Honourable Ian Paisley MP, to the site of the Battle of the Boyne. This was a battle for power in these islands and also part of a wider European conflict. Its outcome resounds through the centuries of Irish and British history to this very day. That time marked the beginning of an unbroken period of parliamentary democracy in this country."

Here we have unconditional surrender by the leader of Irish democracy to English history—or to the English Story.

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Remember 62

The result of the 2007 election was Fianna Fail 78, Fine Gael 51, Labour 20, Green 6, Sinn Fein 4, Progressive Democrats 2, Independents 5. The share of first preferences was 41.6%, 27.3%, 10.1%, 4.7%, 6.9%, 2.7% and 6.6% respectively.

Fianna Fail obtained the same percentage as the 2002 election but lost three seats (it had already lost two since 2002: Beverley Cooper Flynn and Charlie McCreevy). Nevertheless it can claim to be the big winner in this election. It has been in power for all but two and a half of the last 20 years and, after all the changes in that period both in Irish society and the world, it remains the dominant political party in the state.

Reflecting on his success, Ahern claimed on RTE that Fianna Fail had been the most successful political party in Europe. His success was all the more remarkable because it was achieved in the context of a vicious media campaign against him. On the Saturday after the election the Labour Party leader Pat Rabbitte compared Fianna Fail to a tribe in its loyalty to its chief and admitted that, if any other party leader had been subjected

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A Post-Election Coup?

As we go to press Justice Mahon and the *Irish Times*, aided by the *Daily Mail*, are trying to change the outcome of the General Election after the Election, by means of an intensified libel campaign against the Fianna Fail leader, who, by any reasonable standard, won the election.

Justice Mahon is a would-be tax cheat who had to disgorge £20,000 in 1992 and blames the late Fianna Fail TD, Liam Lawlor, for revealing this fact to the media. He launched an assault on the Taoiseach the first day of Tribunal business after the Election. He had nothing new—or nothing of substance—to do it with, but he knew that the assault would not be looked at

critically by the media. His problem is, that, after years have gone by and millions have been spent, he has come up with nothing on which charges can be based against anybody, and he is taking it personally and has resorted to dirty tricks. We will not speculate on whether this arises from political bias or sheer inadequacy.

In view of the happenings of the last couple of months, the Mahon Tribunal and the *Irish Times* must be regarded as a combination.

The Fine Gael leader has responded to the encouragement given to him by the spurious Tribunal and the Oath-bound British newspaper by refusing to concede that he lost the Election. He says he can form a rag-bag Coalition of bits and pieces,

even though it is obvious that, in order to do this, he must either join forces with Provisional Sinn Fein—or, if his Stickie partners balk at this, he must mend his fences with Lowry and pay a million and a half pounds to Beverley Cooper-Flynn so that she can clear her debts to RTE over the libel action. And this supposes that she and other Independents would be willing to make nonsense of themselves by supporting him.

The fact that Lowry and Beverley Cooper-Flynn were poll-toppers shows how much credence the electorate places in the "corruption" indictments concocted by a few powerful people in Dublin for reasons which have nothing to do with good government. ■

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Carroll Professor Roy Foster was highly praised a couple of years ago for his book *The Irish Story*. What he meant by the title was that the Irish make up a Story of Ireland and present it as history, with little or no regard for historical fact. But, alas, the truth is that there is no longer an Irish Story, invented or researched, false or true. There is only a variation of the English Story for Ireland.

The *English Story*, both of England itself and of the English *contretemps* in Ireland has now comprehensively marginalised what there was of an Irish Story in less subservient times.

England does not welcome "revisionist" tampering with the story of itself, which it tells itself and others.

Three and a half centuries ago John Milton, Cromwell's Secretary of State, wrote: "Let England not forget her precedence of teaching the nations how to live". And, three and a half centuries later, the Prime Minister says that England is blessed among the nations and nobody guffaws in derision—even though this is the age of disbelief.

During these three centuries and a half, the Story has not been the same Story all the way through. The durability of the same story over three and a half centuries is not what impresses. At different points along the way England stood for drastically different things. But the Story is a story of constancy to one thing. "England has her constancy no less than Rome", Gladstone

said. But there has been nothing constant in English history except the fact of the English State and its pursuit of power. But the Story at any given moment always tells of constancy of another kind, and massages historical fact into compliance with it.

Or, if there has been a constant ideal which accompanied the unrelenting pursuit of power, it was an ideal which at a certain point it became unprofitable to speak of—anti-Catholicism.

Democracy is certainly what it was not.

Democracy was not inserted into the Story as the *constant ideal* until two centuries after the Battle of the Boyne.

The "unbroken period of parliamentary democracy" can hardly have begun until the Parliamentary franchise came reasonably close to including at least all adult males. And that did not happen until the early 20th century.

The war against France from 1793 to 1815—the first English war for which the Irish provided most of the cannonfodder—was a war *against* democracy, and for the restoration of authoritative monarchy in Europe and curbing the democratic forces stirred up by the French Revolution.

The French were defeated and the monarchy restored. But the French had torn up the roots of monarchy and it wouldn't replant—unlike the English, who having executed the King in 1649 begged his son eleven years later to come home

and govern them. It was the influence of the principles of the French Revolution, which survived the defeat of France, that led to the first, very small, extension of the Parliamentary franchise in Britain in 1832: **142 years after the Battle of the Boyne.**

What was at issue at the Battle of the Boyne was religious freedom. King James introduced it in the 1680s. The victory of King William led to its abolition for almost a century and a half—until 1829, when it was partially conceded in the face of mass rebellion in Ireland threatened by Daniel O'Connell.

Another immediate consequence of the Battle of the Boyne was the throwing of the slave trade open to private enterprise, which led to England becoming the main slave-trading nation in the world within twenty years.

A consequence which took a generation to work out was the reduction of the monarchy to a figurehead behind which the aristocracy and gentry ruled. But the disembowelling of the monarchy—which began with the Whig *coup d'etat* of 1715, introducing a German King who couldn't speak English—was not a measure which established popular government. What it established was the complete freedom of the aristocracy to do as it pleased with the people.

Popular rights require a framework of law maintained by a national state to which all classes are subject. That is not what the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (made secure at the Battle of the Boyne) established. That is what it abolished.

The national state, which existed in connection with the monarchy, was broken up and its place was taken by a system in which the local aristocrat was the State and the Law as far as the local populace was concerned. Parliament was a collective body of the aristocrats in which they did each other favours, such as passing Bills authorising the Enclosure of common lands.

If Irish history-writing had not been entirely subordinated to the English Story of the moment, it would be known that the substance of the movement of the United Irishmen was anti-aristocratic, not anti-monarchical. This was made explicit in scores of Resolutions adopted at Parish Meetings in the core United Irish area of Antrim and Down in the 1790s. The demand was essentially that the anarchic power of aristocrats should be brought under a system of law enforced by the state.

What the people of England got from the Williamite victory at the Boyne was freedom from the illusory threat of Papism, and the right to give free vent to the anti-Catholic bigotry which the aristocracy stimulated and manipulated for their own purposes.

What Ireland got was anarchic aristocracy *plus* the anti-Catholic bigotry.

It was not easy to reduce Ireland to the condition in which it lay at the time of the Famine. Only England could have done it.

And it was not easy to perform the mental lobotomy which abolished realistic historical awareness from Irish public life. The *Irish Times* could not have done it. Only Fianna Fail could have done it.

Editorial Digest

Albert Reynolds added to the pressure on Bertie Ahern by blaming him for the break-up of his Coalition Government with Dick Spring's Labour in November 1994 by allegedly failing to pass a crucial file on to him (IT 10.5.07).

Harry Whelehan, Albert Reynolds' Attorney General—who brought the X-Case and whose legal ambitions helped to sour relations within the Reynolds/Spring Government is currently working as a Barrister. Though repeatedly recommended for judicial promotion by the Judicial Appointments Board, he has never been promoted (SI 20.5.07).

"NI State": Peter Hain promoted the illusion that the NI Executive has real political control when he urged it *"to stop contemplating its navel and start facing the world with confidence"* (IN 5.5.07).

Ian Paisley jnr, while looking forward to cooperation with Dublin on the basis of *"mutual respect"*, declared that SF *"must accept the legitimacy of the state"* (IN, SF *Must Accept Northern State Says Paisley jnr*).

Martin McGuinness, now Deputy First Minister in NI, has said

"The only piece of legislation the Nationalist Party got passed in this building [Stormont] was the Wild Birds Act in all the time that they were here... Now I'm walking into an administration with five Sinn Féin ministers and an SDLP minister—well capable of putting in place all sorts of legislation and taking all sorts of very important decisions in the interests of not just republicans and nationalists but everyday within the community. So what was 800 years of British involvement in Ireland all about?" (IT 7.5.07).

BBC, NI: Jim Gibney, the former SF Press Officer, highlighted in his IN column how BBC interviewers were attempting to disrupt the new Power-Sharing Executive by questions and analysis *"locked into old battles and prejudices"*. He asked *"On whose behalf are these questions being asked?"* (3.5.07).

Irish Times Suppresses Debate

Cathal Brugha is not a regular writer of letters to the *Irish Times*. All the more significant therefore was the failure to publish his following short letter, sent in on 10th May, at a crucial point in the paprr's attempt to prevent Fianna Fail being re-elected. Incidentally, the *Irish Independent* failed to publish the letter as well.

The public have shown that they wish the election campaign to be about policies and programmes. The media have made it a personal attack on the Taoiseach, based on issues that have nothing to do with the last decade of government. The election has become dominated by two high-profile media figures, one a supporter of Fine Gael, the other of Labour, but who do not preface their interviews by publicly acknowledging their bias. Edmund Burke described the media as a Fourth Estate that was more important than all the other three "Estates" in Parliament. There is no doubt that the Fourth Estate plays an important role as guardians of democracy and defenders of the public interest. However, there is a danger when the Fourth Estate tries to alter the balance between itself and our democratic institutions, in order to make a play for a more dominating role in our society.

During an election campaign there are limits on expenditure by politicians so as to ensure that money is not a biasing factor. Maybe the Press Council should consider the introduction of guidelines to moderate the activities of some of its more partisan members, in order to protect democracy, at the only time when it is vulnerable to erosion, which is during an election.

Cathal Brugha has also sent the *Irish Political Review* the following observations about the way that the media obscured real issues by their continued focus on the Taoiseach:

The Fourth Estate

A Chara, The election outcome was a great disappointment to the media, whose relentless personal attacks on the Taoiseach moved the campaign onto matters that had nothing to do with the last decade of government, or with the next five years. Pushing discussion of issues off the agenda led to a FF/FG polarisation based to a great extent on whether one believed Bertie Ahern was fit for continuing in the role of Taoiseach. The unfortunate consequence is the loss of the most incisive, witty, honest and bright members of the Dáil, from Michael McDowell to Joe Higgins, people who made significant contributions to policy development. Their exclusion diminishes the quality of future debate in the incoming Dáil.

The public clearly wished that the election be about policies and programmes, and welcomed the Taoiseach's detailed discussion of the issues in the television debate with Enda Kenny. Up until then the media had flouted the wishes of the public to see the issues discussed in public. The media had their bias finally exposed when they declared the debate a draw despite the clear view amongst the public that Bertie Ahern had won. The irony for the media is that the public rallied behind the Taoiseach from that moment at least partly because they saw the unfairness of the media position.

Andrew Colman, BBC NI Head of News and Current Affairs, replied in a letter on 9th May, claiming that the "duty of a free press" included "asking difficult questions.

Brian Feeney, in *The Writing Is On The Wall For 'Britishness'* (IN 2.5.07) suggested that, in accepting the new Executive, *"they have also voted for structures which emphasise their separatedness from Britain, that point them towards the rest of the people on the island they live on?"* He added, *"...Can it be long before unionists support SF's demand for representation in the Dail?"*

Messines: Martina Anderson is to travel to Belgium in June, as part of a cross-

community peace initiative, marking the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Messines, in which the 16th Irish and 36th Ulster Division fought together for the first time.

Political Policing: The PSNI rejected SF's charge that its prosecution of Brian Arthurs, a builder of Dungannon for money-laundering. Police said that it was part of a mortgages investment investigation (IT 24.5.07).

Le Monde journalists voted to oust the director of the paper. Unlike the *Irish Times*, which is controlled by an Oath-bound directory sworn to keep its proceedings secret, the journalists and other stakeholders in *Le Monde* have real power and operate in a transparent manner (IT 24.5.07). ■

Remember 62

continued

to what Ahern had been, such a leader would have looked behind him to find his troops had all gone. Fianna Fail is some tribe! And Ahern is some Chief!

The media campaign failed to break the morale of Fianna Fail. On the contrary it galvanised the rank and file and only made them more determined to succeed.

But the groundwork for Fianna Fail's electoral success was laid many years before. After the 2002 election it realised that the most significant threat to its position would come from Sinn Fein. It decided to reassert its republican values with the 1916 Celebration and indications that it would tackle "*historical revisionism*". It also consolidated its working class support by moving to the left despite the continued participation of the Progressive Democrats in government. Charlie McCreevy was dispatched to Brussels and the more left wing Brian Cowen replaced him as Minister for Finance.

It was very noticeable that Ahern portrayed himself as an ordinary working class guy in the debate with Enda Kenny. On the question of class sizes he admitted that he hadn't achieved his target of a student-teacher ratio of 20 in the general population, but that he had done it in the disadvantaged areas. He claimed that this was always his priority. His claim that the Fine Gael policy of not abolishing the PRSI ceiling meant that the latter's policy favoured the top 3% of the population was a masterstroke.

Fine Gael can be satisfied that it won 20 seats, but the claim that this achievement was "historic" is an overstatement. All it did was recover most of the 23 seats it had lost in its disastrous 2002 campaign. Its number of seats and share of the vote remains below that of the 1997 election and way below the dizzy heights it achieved in the November 1982 election (70 seats and 39.2% of first preferences).

More important, it is likely to remain in opposition for another 5 years, a serious setback for a party which needs the oxygen of power to sustain it. Nevertheless it was on a life support machine in 2002 and no one can claim that that is the case in 2007.

This was another bad election for the Labour Party. Labour has gone backwards under Pat Rabbitte. A loss of one seat in this election may not seem bad, but the Labour Party has been at a low ebb in

every election since the "Spring tide of 1992" when it won more than 30 seats. The amalgamation of Labour with Democratic Left has failed to revive its fortunes. The one consolation of the 2002 election was that Labour was only 10 seats behind Fine Gael. It could have challenged that party for the leadership of the opposition. But Rabbitte has only succeeded in giving new life to Fine Gael, which looked moribund 5 years ago. Apparently there is no challenge to the leadership of Rabbitte, which indicates a lack of ambition and life within the party. Given the age profile of its TDs and the paucity of successors, the prognosis for the party is not good.

In the post election analysis politicians from the smaller parties complained that they were squeezed by the presidential style of the campaign. The primary responsibility for this must rest with Rabbitte who enabled Kenny to appear as a plausible alternative Taoiseach. Labour de-politicised the campaign by its alliance with Fine Gael, which unlike under other Labour leaders was in place years before the election. It was not just an electoral alliance since it determined the framework of political conflict well before the election. It was clear to left wing voters that any Labour policy to the left of Fianna Fail would be neutralised by Fine Gael. The Fine Gael/Labour alternative was not offering political change but merely a change of personnel. The election became a contest between the competence and to a lesser extent the integrity of the outgoing Government as compared to the Fine Gael/Labour alternative.

The de-politicisation of the campaign marginalised the smaller parties and independents. Sinn Fein was further isolated by the refusal of the two main political blocs to countenance Sinn Fein participation in government. But Sinn Fein also fought a poor campaign. Gerry Adams appeared completely out of touch with society in the south. The four Sinn Fein TDs who retained their seats did so by their own efforts. Despite its success in the North it lost one seat in this election and does not appear to have made any progress since 2002. Its most likely prospect of gaining seats is in the Border County of Donegal rather than the urban working class areas of the Republic. Its political influence is not unlike that of Sinn Fein the Workers Party in the early 1980s with the significant difference that Sinn Fein has made a political breakthrough in the North. But in this election Sinn Fein failed to obtain any electoral benefit from its success in the North and it is not clear that this will change in the future.

The Greens came back with the same

number of seats as they went out with, but are entering an interesting phase in their political development and may have the option to participate in government. The Green Party, unlike other small parties in the history of the state is unlikely to go away. It may be in a strong pivotal position in the formation of governments for many years to come as have its counterparts in continental Europe.

The big losers were the Progressive Democrats. That party's political origins arose from the split within Fianna Fail in the late 1980s. But it has become a receptacle for disenfranchised Fine Gael voters. Accordingly it has waxed and waned in the opposite direction to the fortunes of Fine Gael. It lost six seats and the two seats it retained, Mary Harney and Noel Grealish (Bobby Molloy's old seat), have their origins in Fianna Fail.

This magazine is no friend of Mary Harney, but although she only barely scraped in she must have noted with some satisfaction that many of the "hospital" candidates had lost their seats along with Fine Gael's health spokesman Liam Twomey. If the health service is in crisis the voters had no confidence in the alternative on offer.

Although the Progressive Democrats Party has recovered from electoral setbacks before (in 1997 it was down to 4 seats), it is difficult to see how it can continue after this election. Its problem is that its political ground has been on a too narrow basis. It has been dependent on winning Fine Gael first preferences and Fianna Fail transfers. Fine Gael's revival and McDowell's disastrous leadership undermined even this narrow base. His obeisance to the media on the subject of Ahern's finances and then his hasty change of mind sealed his fate. On the last count in Dublin South East he obtained only 43% of the Fianna Fail candidate's transfers despite there being no other Fianna Fail candidate in the field.

The role of the media and in particular *The Irish Times* has been examined elsewhere in this magazine. *The Irish Times* and indeed any other newspaper is perfectly entitled to declare its political allegiance in an open and honest way, but that is not what it did during this election campaign. It attempted to set the agenda around the question of Ahern's finances. All of this had been dealt with last October. But *The Irish Times* devoted acres of newsprint to this question during the election, even though nothing new emerged and it had been requested by the Mahon Tribunal to desist from using leaked documents which were supplied by Ahern on a confidential basis.

Not a shred of evidence has been produced to indicate political corruption. But as Brian Lenihan Senior remarked after his unsuccessful bid for the presidency:

"Honesty and integrity don't count for anything anymore, what matters now is 'credibility' and 'credibility' is what the media choose to believe at any given point in time".

A second feature of *The Irish Times's* campaign was to pretend that Fianna Fail was in disarray. It completely ignored the evidence of its own opinion polls that this was not the case and indeed that Fianna Fail had increased its support during the campaign. An example of the bizarre coverage of that newspaper was a one-page news feature by Kathy Sheridan on the Saturday before polling day when it was clear that the opposition had been put on the back foot.

The headline in the article was: "*High drama at party HQ, sour mood on the doorsteps*". The first two paragraphs of the article show a complete misreading of the debate between Ahern and Kenny:

"To some of us out in RTE on Thursday night, it was the post debate scene that told the story. As Bertie rushed away to steady the troops back at Fianna Fail election headquarters at Treasury Buildings, a spectral PJ Mara hovered, telling anyone in earshot that his boss had won 'by a country mile. Of course'. People nodded politely, but no one was clamouring to hear more. Il Duce's right hand man, lyricist of the smash, 'Showtime!', looked like a man who had lost his mojo."

Classic *Irish Times*! After more than 20 years Mara is not allowed forget his jocose fascist reference. But meanwhile...

"In the Fine Gael hospitality room, by contrast, Enda Kenny and his handlers lingered contentedly, too drained, too choked with gratitude to the election gods, to rise and break the spell. The air was thick with relief. After weeks of warnings that the contest was his to lose, they were toasting not victory, but basic survival."

The next paragraph reads like an extract from Mills and Boon:

"Never mind the issues. The movement for change was evident on the way in, when he resisted such classic, turn-off Enda-isms as the silly thumbs-up and the lame clenched fist. The clean, vigorous leap from the Mercedes, the jacket slung over the shoulder, were an echo of Blair in his pomp. His few words to the media conveyed quiet confidence with a dash of humility, acknowledging the useful sparring practice gained at 'impromptu press conferences' around the country in recent weeks."

And in similar gushing prose Sheridan wrote:

"Now here they were, two hours further on, and they had not lost. To be sure, the thrusting new leader hadn't landed the crushing blow he should have landed on the grizzled old timer, but heck, the show was still on the road."

The only problem with this is that the "*thrusting new leader*", who "*should have*" landed a blow, is five months older than the "*grizzled old-timer*". But why let the facts get in the way of propaganda and so:

"... for all Bertie's tombstone grin and fighting form, dread hangs around Fianna Fail like a shroud. For one friendly Fianna Fail regular at Treasury Buildings (or Meltdown Manor, as some denizens have christened it), 'it's like going to someone's house where something really terrible has happened and everyone has been locked in for a long time. The campaign isn't really functioning. Something's just not working. They're coming across as an old, tired team who've had their day'"

And even the good news was bad news:

"The marvellous celebratory set-pieces that have conferred a deserved place among the greats on Bertie Ahern, and were seen to be brilliantly strategic in their timing, have also associated him, however, with Tony Blair's unseemly clinging to power and interminable farewell. Blair had to concede, finally, that 10 years is enough. Clinton is gone because the American people hold that no president is worth more than two terms. That leaves Bertie, battling gamely for a third. 'Fear is the only tactic in town now', says a Fianna Failer, i.e. 'The left is nigh'"

And this was not just at Fianna Fail head office:

"In the soundest of Fianna Fail areas, suspicion crackled too around the decision to hold the election on a Thursday. The issue raised its head repeatedly, as parents complained that, having imbued their children with the duty to vote, they were almost being disenfranchised."

And:

"Waste and arrogance were constant themes."

And on the stump:

"What often followed was a tale of horror about health, school places, or three-hour commutes, often with a curse on the heads of those who wasted pots of public money on electronic voting and management consultants. One quoted Noel Dempsey's famous riposte about the 50 million euro electronic voting project—that 'it wasn't a lot of money ... relatively speaking'"

And of course Ahern's finances also came up:

"Bertiegate of itself is not enough to sink the Fianna Fail ship: it's just another

thread in the blanket of corrosion. In Cashel, a businesswoman and Fianna Fail voter, forced to work three menial jobs to support her two children while being pursued through the courts for details of her husband's whereabouts after his desertion 20 years ago, railed against the 'cheek of Bertie in his big Government job... saying he needed a dig-out, using his separation as an excuse to take money from businessmen. Separated and divorce people will never forgive him for that.'"

Kathy Sheridan deserves an *Irish Times* employee of the month award for that paragraph alone. It touches pretty well all the 'politically correct' bases. But it is very curious that the anonymous Fianna Fail voter describes Bertie as being in a "*big Government job*". Why not "*Taoiseach*"?

So what is the consequence of all this doom and gloom for Fianna Fail?

"Two months ago, a well-known Fianna Failer, chatting about the party's electoral prospects (and who probably had access to the private polls), tore a page from a notebook and wrote down a figure: 'Hold on to that. See if I'm right.' It read '62'.

"If it materialises it spells melt down, 19 seats gone south. This week, after hitting the canvass and what he called 'the semi-final of the Eurovision' (the four smaller parties' debate on *Prime Time* on Wednesday) he texted a message: 'Remember 62'"

But Fianna Fail returned with 78 seats and no reduction in its First Preference share. Kevin Rafter of the *Sunday Tribune* on the day after the election blurted out on RTE that the campaign bore no relation to the result of the election. And he said it without a hint of self irony.

At his first television interview after the election Ahern commented on the media campaign. Interestingly he said that he had nothing against the individual journalists involved. They had well paid jobs, but had to "*do as they were told*".

So Kathy Sheridan cannot be blamed. Nor can the Editor of *The Irish Times*. They were only doing what they were told. The ultimate responsibility lies with the secret oath-bound directory, which controls the newspaper: the Governors of *The Irish Times Trust*.

Check out the
Athol Books website at
www.atholbooks.org

Write to *Irish Political Review* at
athol-st@atholbooks.org

Tally Ho Ho Hoey

It's another case of the unspeakable Kate Hoey MP in pursuit of something rather inedible, but not a fox this time. Ms. Hoey, who opposes the ban on hunting and has ridden with the Duke of Beaufort's Hunt, was being interviewed on BBC Northern Ireland's *Hearts & Minds* (Thursday, 10th. May) about Blair's legacy and the coming election for Deputy Leader of the Labour Party.

The interviewer, Noel Thompson, asked her if she agreed with Ian Paisley's remark that Blair's willingness to conciliate Republicans had delayed the bright dawn of a brave new day in this part of the world and Ms Hoey did, in her forthright way, kind of, like, sort of, agree, if you know what I mean, like, kind of thing:

"Well I think there certainly were times when I felt that there was being too, it wasn't so even handed as I perhaps had thought it should have been. But you know, whatever has happened in the past the reality is, as Alf (Dubs, former NIO minister) has said, he did stick to it and I remember being also in Northern Ireland in the very early days when he (Tony Blair) made it very clear that he was not in favour of what had been the Labour Party policy that a United Ireland was what the Labour Party was campaigning for and that was changed in the whole way of bringing in consent was very very important because it gave people in Northern Ireland some confidence that they weren't going to be sold out. And in the end you know that has worked out that at least what has happened now has been a result of the people of Northern Ireland voting for the parties that in the end have delivered a back to the assembly."

After rubbishing current Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain's candidacy in the election for Deputy Leader Ms. Tally Hoey then had this to say:

"There is no doubt about it, there has been a feeling in the Labour Party that the leadership has kind of left the membership behind and Parliament itself I think has been, there's been a feeling that Parliament has been ignored. So I think we'll see all the candidates. I personally won't be supporting Peter Hain and I'm hoping that those small number of people in Northern Ireland who are allowed to join the Labour Party and of course that's been something that has changed. Membership can now happen in Northern Ireland and, indeed, in a week or two, we'll see some announcements that will make it even more possible for

people to become members and active members and I don't think many of them will probably be voting for Peter Hain."

Now then, what's to be said about this. First that Blair did not "*bring in consent*". Labour's position on Northern Ireland since the Fine Gael-led Coalition's declaration of an Irish Republic was that no change to its constitution could be enacted without the consent of its Parliament. The abolition of Stormont made that formulation redundant and Labour's Irish policy for some years was an occasional Troops Out crescendo played against the background of a fugue. Long before Blair that dissonance was cleared up when Labour committed itself to campaign for "*Unity by consent*". That is the position now. Labour is committed to campaigning for Ireland to be united, with the consent of a majority in the North. And that will be the position a month from now when Mr. Blair undergoes his apotheosis (or perhaps his apocolocytosis, with Brown's election marking the pumpkinification of New Labour).

In any event, while Ms. Hoey clearly looks forward to the establishment of British Labour in Northern Ireland as yet another small u unionist party, no announcements of the next week or two can accomplish that. British Government policy these days is made and changed whimsically, on the backs of Lottery tickets, at the drop of a stetson. Labour Party policy is still subject to conference. British Labour in Northern Ireland may soon attain the status of a Forum Group along the lines of the Irish Labour Party organisation. It is possible. But that, and any other formal arrangement, will leave it committed to working for unification.

In recent years Ms. Hoey has been voting against Blairite measures, against Foundation Hospitals and against Top-up

Fees. A certain leftist fantasy has had Gordon Brown, who voted for all of that, conspiratorially at the back of the back-bench revolts. In which case Ms. Hoey may find herself well-regarded by the Pumpkin and his friends. It's possible. But then she voted against the abolition of hunting. So it's not very likely.

Tally ho, hounds away!

Joe Keenan

Note on 'apocolocytosis': Philosophers generally have had little enough sense; usually just enough to keep out of politics. Those who haven't kept out of politics have often come to a bad end. One thinks of Socrates and Boethius. Also Seneca.

Seneca was a philosophical and literary senator of the early Roman Empire. The emperor Clau Clau Claudius took Seneca under his wing and promoted the hypocritical lickspittle well beyond his merits. He became tutor to Claudius' adopted son and heir Nero and part of the plot which arranged the assassination of the one and succession of the other.

So far so good and pretty much par for the course. But Seneca then set the seal on his treachery by writing the Apocolocytosis—a satirical skit on the Pumpkinification rather than the Deification (apotheosis) of Claudius in which the former emperor joins Julius and Augustus not as a fellow God but as an eternal pumpkin. Having helped murder his benefactor the philosopher had set about ridiculing him.

Seneca lasted a few years after that as a rather ineffectual *eminence grise*. Then tiring of him Nero gave him the option of a good death or a bad one. So Seneca finished by cutting his veins in a nice warm bath. Another glorious martyr for the noble cause of philosophy, or so some very silly classical scholars would have us believe.

Fianna Fáil, *The Irish Press*

And The Decline Of The Free State

by *Brendan Clifford*

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Aubane, Millstreet, Co. Cork

ORDERS: jacklaneaubane@hotmail.com

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Fianna Fail And The Decline Of The Free State

PRESENTATION TO BATT O'KEEFFE TD

The Aubane Historical Society (AHS) organised a local launch of its latest publication and presented a copy to Minister of State, Batt O'Keeffe TD. It is called "*Fianna Fail and the decline of the Free State*" by Brendan Clifford and is dedicated to Jack Roche.

INTRODUCTION

Jack Lane of the AHS welcomed all and apologised for the short notice. He explained the background to the publication and that it was a continuation of the story published by the AHS in Sean Moylan's memoir and dealt with developments after the war over the Treaty and the coming to power of the first Fianna Fail Government.

He was pleased to have a Government Minister present because the Government's decision to open the Bureau of Military History archive and their decision to also make available the records of the successful applications for War of Independence pensions should be acknowledged. This involves making available tens of thousands of invaluable documents—primary sources of information. This was a great contribution to the study of Irish history. Disputes and disagreements are inevitable but all should accept that maximum information is the key to a proper understanding of our history. The essential requirement for settling disputes and disagreements is very simple—let's have all the facts. The Government have helped greatly in this.

The book was dedicated to Jack Roche in recognition of the great work he was doing for all aspects of Irish culture and history, locally and nationally. He had been a supporter of the AHS's work for many years and helped ensure its successful publishing efforts in the early years through the support of IRD Duhallo.

JACK ROCHE

Jack Roche said it was a most worthwhile publication and dealt with a contentious period in our history which has been by and large ignored. He discovered quite a lot that was new to him. He emphasised the lack of history as a subject in our current education curriculum. This was deplorable and he hoped it would be rectified. The work of the AHS was filling a vacuum.

BATT O'KEEFFE

The Minister of State recalled his previous visit to the Aubane Community

Centre about two years ago when he discussed the tourist potential of the area and the development of the Butter Road. He was glad to see the recent improvements in the road.

It was very appropriate to dedicate this book to Jack Roche who personifies all that contributes to a vibrant rural society. He embodies the spirit of those who fought for our freedom in his idealism and the practical projects he has initiated in a variety of areas.

He liked the way that the AHS had recorded local history and also put it in a national context. The material was sometimes challenging and controversial but independent thinking was very important when it comes to the study of history. This latest book dealt with a period that he was particularly interested in.

He noted the strong tendency of immig-

ration in the 'Celtic Tiger' years and he saw the challenges of creating strong communities.

"One of the means by which our new citizens can become part of us is to share with them our own history, our own unique stories from our own unique places" he said.

It is unfortunate and regrettable that the men and women of the Independence struggle are sometimes denigrated today. A publication like this helps to set the record straight by showing the difficult—almost impossible—choices they all had to face and it thereby tries to be fair to all concerned.

Jack Lane

*"*Fianna Fail and the decline of the Free State*" by Brendan Clifford published by the Aubane Historical Society is available at Liam Russell's in Cork, Wordsworth's in Millstreet, Philips in Mallow, Kanturk Bookshop and Macroom Bookshop.

Fair Employment: *The Flynn & Debast case*

Almost twenty years ago, the Northern Ireland Fair Employment Act provided a legal basis for the requirement on employers to monitor and report on the religious composition of their workforces. At the time, the forerunner of the *Irish Political Review*, the *Northern Star*, opposed the illiberalism of branding workers, but made the point that—if this sort of engineering was to be engaged in—then formalized quotas might be safer for all.

The employment of teachers was one area of employment excluded from the provisions of fair employment legislation. In essence, this was to protect the "*ethos*" of faith schools which, in Northern Ireland, are predominantly Catholic schools. The recent case in the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal, *Flynn and Debast Vs Laurelhill Community College and the South Eastern Education and Library Board* has demonstrated some of pitfalls of the legislation and, in particular, how discrimination in education is imbalancing the teacher workforce.

In May, the Court of Appeal determined that a challenge to the right of Northern Irish school employers to discriminate on religious grounds was "*out of jurisdiction*". The test case, backed by the Equality Commission, was brought by two Catholic teachers applying for internal promotion within a state-controlled school. They applied unsuccessfully for the post of Head of Modern Languages. The job went to two non-Catholic teachers on a job-share basis.

Traditionally, Northern Irish schools

have been allowed to discriminate on religious grounds when making appointments, a practice otherwise illegal under fair employment legislation. The Equality Commission argued that the post was a "*promotion*", with the school employers arguing that it was an "*appointment*" and therefore outside the scope of fair employment legislation. As a test case, the ruling ensures that "*Discrimination Rules*" in any post. The right to discriminate, although challenged by Catholic teachers in the state sector, predominantly protects the ethos of Catholic schools.

The issue is important. Thirteen years after the ceasefires, and with a new Assembly in place, should the right to discriminate in appointments be continued? Or in promotions? Protected discrimination was put in place to protect the ethos of particular schools, but such measures appear now to be out of proportion to the limited measures actually required to protect "*ethos*"?

One side effect is a developing and unhealthy community imbalance in Northern Irish teacher supply. Figures recently revealed through Parliamentary Questions show that, since 2002, St. Mary's University College has had an exclusively Catholic intake, with Catholics making up around a quarter of the intake at Stranmillis University College. The "*chill factor*" of the right to discriminate may be having negative impacts on opportunities to teach—with Catholics starting to dominate the profession?

Schools of all sorts are funded almost entirely by the taxpayer. Should discrimination, therefore, have a place in the profession, or should discrimination not be restricted to the small minority of posts requiring particular doctrinal qualifications?

Whilst the DUP made a robust statement against discrimination, raising the concerns about an imbalancing of the workforce, Sinn Fein's Equality spokesperson, Martina Anderson made a non-

committal statement which, whilst welcoming Equality Commission involvement, challenged neither the teacher exclusion in recruitment nor the treatment of "promotions" as "appointments" within the legal ruling.

It seems unlikely that the Kerr, Campbell and Girvan ruling will be the end of the matter.

Mark Langhammer

land.

It will have to be taken back. And the least that is needed to achieve that is a Palestinian State-in-waiting which is powerful enough to alter the balance of power and policy in the region.

All the efforts of Israel and its allies are directed towards ensuring that such a State-in-waiting does not emerge. If it does emerge, it will, along the way, have weakened Israel, made the United States take account of it, and altered the thinking in the neighbouring Arab states in regard to their policies towards Israel.

Reflections On Palestine

Family And Policy

A Fatah politician told me that he was coming around to the view that the Separation Wall may be a good thing as it could finally define the limits of the Israeli State—something which that State has refused to do since its inception.

He, and others, were of the opinion that their first duty was to those that they represented, and they should aim to carve out a defined territory where their people could at last live in peace. That feeling is understandable but I don't think it is realistic, apart altogether from the fact that it abandons an awful lot of Palestinians to Israeli control or to permanent exile.

The Separation Wall, which is a lot bigger than the old Berlin Wall, is not a fixed structure. It is made from concrete panels which can be, and regularly are, removed to alter its course. For example, it was recently altered to enclose the area around Rachel's tomb near Bethlehem. It can and does move about the place and is designed to do so.

It encloses some Jewish settlements, especially in the Jerusalem area. But a great many more are on the Arab side. Then there is the permanent settlement of the land along the Jordan Valley and the military and civilian occupations throughout the West Bank as described in an earlier article.

The view expressed to me about the wall comes not just from a sense of what is practical or achievable for Palestinians. It also reflects the nature of Palestinian society. This is a society based on families or clans which are, and always have been, settled in very definite areas. While this results in an almost indestructible society, it also leads to an attitude of "the devil take the hindmost".

If there was some guarantee of peace and security for individual and separated areas, there are many who would accept this. And there are quite a few who are

close to believing that this is possible, and that their people could live happily in a series of disconnected independent little fiefdoms.

This would entail their security being guaranteed by some outside body. Much of the apparent kow-towing to the Americans is an effort to get the United States to agree to be that body.

This mentality has led to several towns or cities, Hebron for example, being quite proud of their foresight in insisting that refuge camps were sited well away from their populations. This does not reflect any hostility towards or lack of sympathy for the refugees. But a perception that the close proximity of families in the refugee camps who have no organic connection to the local soil will disrupt the indigenous social structure.

I can see the logic of this. And I've had it pointed out to me several times that Nablus, which didn't have the foresight to exclude the refugees, is nothing but trouble. I cannot say that the refugees are the cause of any trouble. I don't know. But the place certainly has a more anarchic air about it than most places.

Still I wouldn't want to give any impression of lawlessness—far from it. Last year a group of Irish people visited Nablus. One man left his camera on a cafe table and, when someone asked whose it was, a young boy said it was his and off he went. A day or two later the boy's father found the camera and contacted the Al Aqsa Brigades and eventually I was given the camera and took it back to Ireland.

When I then ask what is to be done about the refugees, I am told that they must be given their old lands back—of course, silly question! And we are back to square one again. If one thing is certain in that part of the world, it is that no one is going to GIVE the refugees back their

Part 5

RIGHT OF RETURN

The tendency in Palestinian politics which is amenable to the two states solution or to a fragmentation of Palestinian Protectorates in the West Bank and Gaza have already abandoned any demand for the right of return for refugees and are at best ambiguous about the position of Arab East Jerusalem.

In 1948 over 600 Arab towns and villages, and the land farmed by the inhabitants, were emptied of their populations, and most of them were razed to the ground. In many cases the local Arab leaders were executed and there were a few massacres.

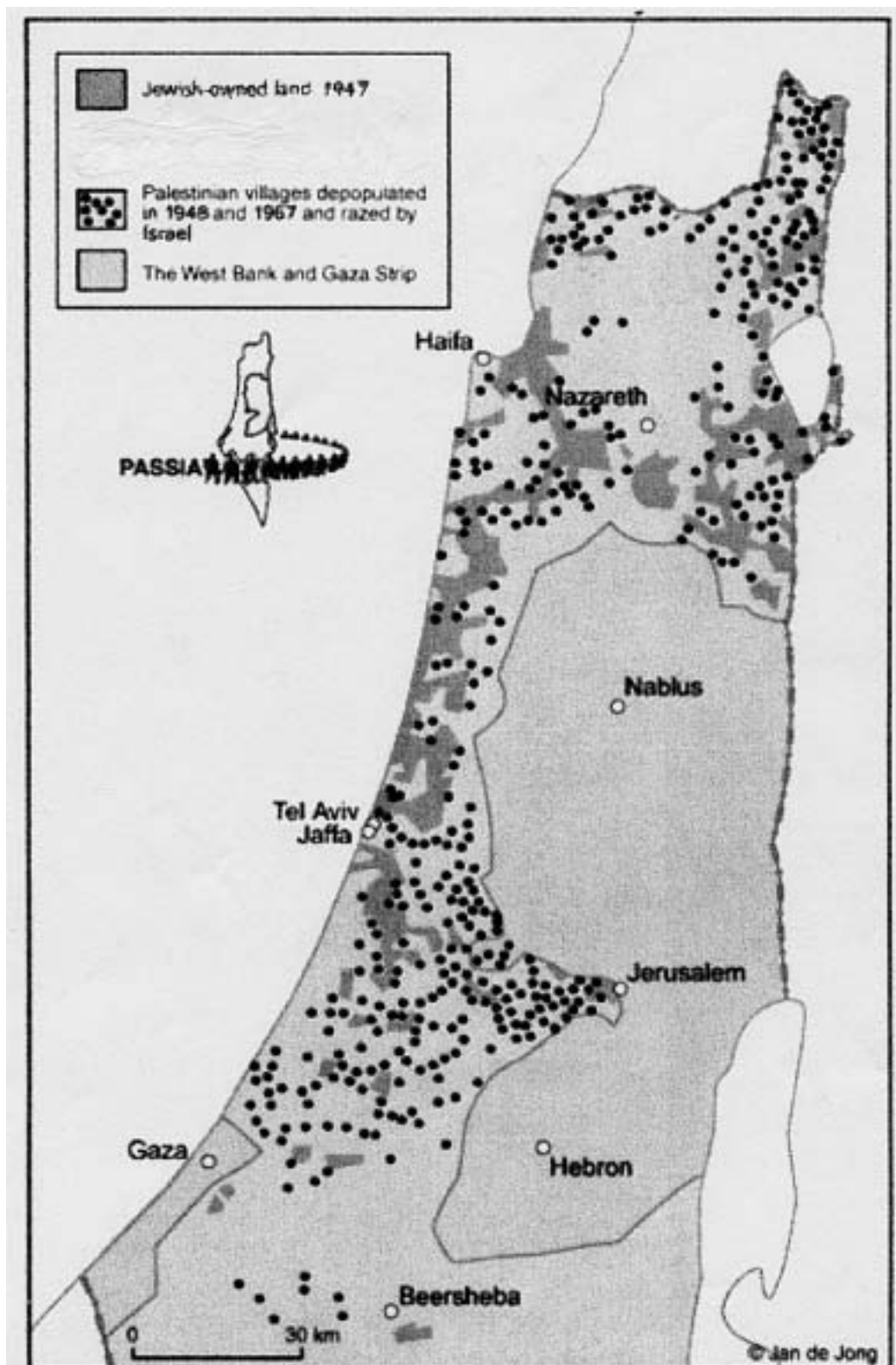
These events were not covered up by the Jewish militias but were publicised and exaggerated by them as widely as possible. By this means rather than direct expulsion, the Arabs were "encouraged" to take to the road as refugees. They had not intended to leave for long but, at the end of the 1948 "war", when they tried to return, this was forbidden.

So they were housed in tent cities in the surrounding territories of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon and as far away as Iraq. With the temporary expulsion of Egypt from the Sinai and the permanent expulsion of Jordan from East Jerusalem and the West Bank, most of the refugee camps, now crowded concrete settlements, came under Israeli control.

In theory these are now under the control of the Palestinian Authority, but I have never seen an Authority official in one of them. They are financed to a small extent by themselves but for the most part by UNRWA, a section of the United Nations, which raises money in various ways.

This seemed to me to be a quite laudable outfit and quite distinct from the main UN refugee body, the UNHCR with its dubious connections to the Americans. Until a few years ago, UNRWA always had a non-Palestinian on the staff of each camp. The Israelis disapproved of this and assassinated the UNRWA administrator in Gaza—so bringing the practice to an end.

(Similarly the Israelis achieved the



Palestinian Villages Depopulated in 1948 and 1967 and Razed by Israel

abolition of the old system of UN monitoring in South Lebanon when it assassinated four senior UN military officials in the course of its recent war with Hezbollah.)

UNRWA now only has international officials in East Jerusalem. Its monitoring system is excellent. Every six months it produces detailed maps showing such things as all Israeli barriers, road blocks, occupation zones and exclusion areas in the Occupied Territories. I only found these maps available from the Jerusalem UN and from Palestinian shops. Leading London and New York map publishers and distributors claimed never to have heard of them.

When the British were land grabbing in Africa, they claimed that they were settling on land that belonged to no one. This was true. It belonged to everyone. That line was being peddled in advertisements as late as the 1960s to attract settlers to Rhodesia and is still the mantra of the ranchers today when Zimbabwe wants to carry out a partial land redistribution.

Occasionally Israel comes up with the same line as it redefines what comprises land ownership or "free" land in the case of Arabs. But not even the pretence of such an excuse is possible in the case of the refugees of 1948. Theirs was a settled community with the farmers having paper as well as traditional titles to their land. They still have those papers today.

A friend of mine visited the land where his father was born. He was immediately accosted by an Ethiopian gentleman who shouted "*get off my land*". My friend replied that legally it was actually his land. So the Ethiopian called the police and my friend spent the next three nights in jail before being returned to the West Bank. He got off lightly.

In some camps, such as Jenin, the refugees can look out and see the land from which they were driven. According to UNRWA the following are the numbers of Palestinians in camps. Those living outside the camps are given in the totals in brackets.

Gaza: 320,470 (586,540). West Bank: 126,400 (477,190). Jordan 239,180 (1,047,940). Syria: 90,670 (308,410). Lebanon: 164,590 (328,360)—minus however many the Lebanese Army have killed in Tripoli as I write.

One fear of the Israelis was that their state, as it expanded, would contain more Arabs than Jews if the refugees returned. That excuse is becoming redundant as the Arab population of Israel increases year on year and the Jewish population declines, even including the large numbers from Russia and Africa who are only pretending to be Jewish.

Conor Lynch

To Be Continued.

The Great Debate

There is no doubt that Bertie Ahern won the "Great Debate" with Enda Kenny on RTE, the Thursday before polling day. Although honours might have been even in the early stages, as the contest wore on Ahern grew stronger and Kenny weaker.

Early on the question of the Taoiseach's finances was raised by the Chairperson Miriam O'Callaghan. Ahern said that he did not do anything wrong. O'Callaghan then asked Kenny if he accepted that the Taoiseach was a man of integrity. Kenny replied that it was not up to him to pronounce on this; it was a matter for the Mahon Tribunal. Kenny then said that if elected he would introduce ethics legislation. Ahern replied that the legislation had already been introduced. All donations to politicians over 499 euros had to be declared.

The issue of the Health service was considered the Achilles heel of the Government, but Kenny failed to land a punch. Ahern claimed that the main problem was in Accident and Emergency, but even there in only a handful of hospitals around the country. Waiting lists in areas such as Cardiac surgery had been reduced from years to months.

On the question of co-location of private hospitals on public land—a policy that this writer opposes—he was plausible. He claimed that there were already 20% of beds in public hospitals which were allocated to private patients. The building of the new hospitals would free up these private beds for public patients. Ahern claimed that the private sector built hospitals more quickly than the public sector. This was not something that a Fine Gael leader could easily dispute, but he claimed that Ahern's own Fianna Fail TDs were distancing themselves from the policy of co-location. The Chairperson Miriam O'Callaghan, who was very fair, helped Kenny out by raising the issue of cherry-picking by the private hospitals (cheap procedures would be performed by Private Hospitals, leaving costly ones to be borne by the State) but Kenny couldn't take advantage of this.

All through the debate Ahern showed an impressive mastery of statistics and was not caught out once. But Kenny was exposed on more than one occasion. He was very unconvincing on where the money would be found for the 2,300 new beds in the Fine Gael manifesto. Ahern accused him of not providing for these in his budget. Ahern asked him to accept that

he would be raiding the 2.5 billion budget on existing projects such as breast screening and other projects.

Kenny waffled about priorities and was very unconvincing in his reply.

Kenny was very weak on the issue of crime. Again Ahern was able to show through statistics that crime had not gone up since 2002 and was quite low compared to other countries. Ahern scored heavily when he accused the FG Justice spokesman of quoting wrong figures. Kenny's weak reply was that Jim O'Keeffe may not have had the statistics to hand. But Ahern persisted by saying that the statistics were available, asking him if he was disagreeing with his own Justice spokesman. Kenny ended by saying that O'Keeffe was an eminent lawyer and was doing a great job.

Kenny preferred to use anecdotal evidence throughout the debate, possibly sensing his weakness in backing up an argument with facts and figures. In support of his contention that crime was out of control, he gave the example by the alleged perpetrator of a victim of abuse who was informed that the case would not proceed. Ahern expressed surprise that Kenny was raising this because this was the responsibility of the Director of Public Prosecutions who was independent. The Justice Minister could not intervene. Kenny quickly retreated by saying that, of course, he fully accepted that (in that case why raise it?).

Kenny was particularly weak on the number of Gardai he would put on the streets. Again Ahern claimed that of the 2000 new Gardai in Fine Gael's manifesto only 1,000 were provided for in its spending plans. In the discussion that followed it emerged that 1,000 of the 2,000 due to be on the streets were Gardai already in training and due on the streets anyway. Kenny just repeated 2,000 new Gardai would be put on the streets by a new Fine Gael-led Government.

But, later on in the discussion, Kenny talked about the 1,000 new Gardai on the streets. Ahern picked up on this and then Kenny repeated that Fine Gael would put 2000 more Gardai on the streets. Ahern expressed scepticism about this and other figures in Fine Gael's manifesto. The longer the debate went on the more Ahern looked like a boss lecturing a subordinate.

The big question concerning Kenny is why he has been around for so long and has made so little impact. During the debate he mentioned that Cosgrave had handed the economy over to Jack Lynch in good shape and then Fianna Fail then wrecked it. Ahern pointed out that that was a long time ago (it was in 1977 and Kenny was already a TD by then). Ahern claimed that the subsequent FG/Labour coalition raised the National Debt to record

levels.

Regarding his lack of experience (he only served briefly as Minister for Tourism), Kenny said that he had served a long apprenticeship and that Fianna Fail had been in office for most of the last 30 years. (The present writer doesn't remember him as Shadow Front Bench spokesman either). Kenny said that the economy was handed over in good shape by the Rainbow Coalition to Fianna Fail. Ahern replied that it had been handed over by himself as Minister for Finance in good shape only two years earlier.

Kenny said that he would defend the 12.5% Corporation Tax and would exercise his veto in the EU if necessary. He also claimed that the Rainbow Coalition introduced the 12.5% Corporation Tax. Ahern said that under the Coalition Government in the 1980s it was 35%. (The truth about corporation tax is that the Haughey Government began decreasing Corporation Tax because the EU indicated that Ireland would not be allowed to continue with the 10% rate for manufacturing. Under the Haughey Government it was announced about 5 years in advance that there would be a phased reduction each year until the tax was at 12.5%. The Rainbow Coalition merely continued to implement that policy when it obtained power at the end of 1994.)

Kenny was also weak on the joint policies of the Labour/Fine Gael Coalition. Ahern pointed out that Fine Gael's policies were going to cost 4.9 billion while Labour's cost would be 5.8 billion. Kenny said that only 2 billion of Fine Gael's policies were agreed with Labour. Ahern kept asking how 5.8 billion was going to fit into 4.9 billion.

On child care Kenny said that every child under five would have free GP care under the FG/Labour coalition. There followed a discussion of how it would be implemented. It was clear that this would be rolled out on a phased basis. Ahern made the telling point that no child alive today would receive free GP care under a Fine Gael and Labour Coalition.

Regarding Fine Gael's famous '*contract with the people*', Ahern made the point that Kenny would be able to stay in office if unemployment increased dramatically. Also the contract had nothing to say about Transport policy.

About the only exchange where Kenny made any kind of score was on the discussion of Stamp Duty when Ahern claimed that Fianna Fail had been good to the Building industry and had ended the uncertainty. Kenny responded: "*You are also the party which has benefited from the construction industry*".

Most serious commentators have

indicated that Ahern won the debate, but that there was no knockout blow. However Ahern came very close to delivering such a blow in the area of tax policy. He actually succeeded in getting Kenny to admit that Fine Gael's taxation policies benefited the top 3% of income earners. Ahern repeated what Kenny had admitted a number of times. At this stage Kenny looked disorientated. And then he reached for the panic button and kept repeating that Fine Gael's taxation policies benefited 100% of all taxpayers. It was very noticeable that any time Kenny got into trouble he reached for the nearest party political platitude.

This having been said, the debate was of quite a high standard which reflects well on RTE, Miriam O'Callaghan, and both candidates.

THE IRISH TIMES ON THE GREAT DEBATE

Although most commentators believed that Ahern had won, the exception, of course, was *The Irish Times*. Any pretence of objectivity in that newspaper has been abandoned. It used to refer to itself as the paper of record. In recent years it has diluted this to the paper of reference, but in this election even that more modest claim could not be sustained.

It is not often that a reader of a newspaper reads about an event that he himself has witnessed. But this was the case with the election debate.

The headline in the following day's *Irish Times* (18.5.07) was: *Kenny scores on confidence and Ahern on detail*. The clear impression that any reader would get was that the outcome was a draw. But, given that it was a draw (per *The Irish Times*), Kenny really won. This is the logic that it used:

"Given that Mr Kenny had much more to lose if he failed to demonstrate his ability to hold his own in such a crucial contest his supporters will be happier at the outcome. There was certainly no knockout punch from either man in the course of the contest."

This has been a line that has been widely accepted by the media. There might be some logic to it if Enda Kenny was being perceived as being the weak element in the FG/Labour Coalition and that, if he survived the encounter with Ahern, the strengths of the FG/Labour Coalition would come to the fore. But the policies of the respective alternatives are very similar and in the present writer's opinion the Fine Gael Front Bench consists of a collection of non-entities (with the exception of Richard Bruton).

So what sense does the above-quoted paragraph make? The argument per *The Irish Times* was that Fine Gael and Labour were the front-runners according to the

Opinion Polls and therefore the onus was on Fianna Fail to land a knockout punch:

"With the Fine Gael and Labour alliance ahead in the polls in the days running up to the debate their supporters will be happier with the closeness of the contest which is unlikely to change the dynamics of the campaign."

The methodology of the Opinion Polls is dubious. But even the most favourable Opinion Polls indicated that the Fine Gael/Labour coalition was short of an overall majority. Also, the trends in the Opinion Polls at the time of the debate were not going particularly against the Government despite what the media were saying. But no onus was placed on Kenny to deliver a "*knock out*" blow.

In the discussion of the debate many boxing metaphors have been used. But, in boxing, if the contender does not score more points, the champion is declared the winner.

The Irish Times report tended to be impressionistic:

"Mr Kenny looked confident and alert while the Taoiseach looked tired at times. Mr Ahern did pressurise his opponent on how he would deliver on his "*contract*" within budgetary constraints and he also did well on crime."

There is an element of truth in the above paragraph. Ahern did look tired. He had a much harder election than Kenny. Vincent Browne remarked on his radio show that Ahern looked much older than Kenny even though they are in fact about the same age. Browne added that it was not surprising given that Kenny hadn't experienced the pressures of high office.

In the same impressionistic vein *The Irish Times* report continued:

"However, Mr Kenny's argument about the need for change and his pledge to do things differently and hold his ministers accountable for delivering on the promises of the alternative government was expressed forcefully.

"At times the debate descended into detailed argument and assertion about figures between the two men that would have left many viewers confused but there were no fireworks as in the debate the previous night."

It might be thought that a so called paper of reference might have attempted to make some sense of the detailed argument by reproducing it in print, but that would be a profound misunderstanding of the role of *The Irish Times*.

Unlike the *Irish Independent* there was no reference to the most dramatic parts of the debate in which Ahern obtained an admission from Kenny that the potential partners of Labour had a tax policy that

most benefited the top 3% of income earners. Nor, unlike the *Irish Independent*, did it mention that Ahern demonstrated that Fine Gael's own Justice Minister had got his statistics wrong.

A good proportion of *The Irish Times* coverage dwelled on the "issue" of Ahern's finances which in fact consisted of only a very small part of the overall debate.

This magazine has remarked before that the pictures and the headlines in *The Irish Times* are at least as important as the actual content of the articles. The pictures and headlines in the coverage of the debate were quite disgraceful.

At the top of page 8 (18.5.07) a small headline read: *Enda Kenny says he would bring a 'new energy and a new motivation' to role of Taoiseach.*

Then, in a much bigger headline, there was the rather defensive quote from Ahern: *My energy levels as good as ever.* Underneath this headline there was a matrix of nine pictures taken during the debate: four of Kenny and four of Ahern with a picture of Miriam O'Callaghan in the centre. The top picture is of Ahern with his eyes closed.

Underneath the pictures is a box entitled, *Kenny v Ahern: what they said.*

It might be wondered why Kenny's name was first in the above title. As the outgoing Taoiseach and leader of the largest party should it not have been Ahern? Then under the heading there are four quotes each from Kenny and Ahern. Kenny's quotes are confident and aggressive while Ahern's are defensive.

About the only concession to reality came with an insert at the very end of page 8 in which five floating voters were asked for their opinions. Three out of the five said Ahern was a convincing winner and the remaining two thought it was pretty even but that Ahern had come out on top.

In my view *The Irish Times* coverage of the debate was a complete misrepresentation of what happened. The people responsible would have been aware that, unlike in most reports their readers would have witnessed for themselves what was being reported on. One can only imagine how this event would have dealt with if *The Irish Times* had been freed from such a constraining factor.

THE LITTLE DEBATE

The day before the "Great Debate" there was the "Little Debate" between the leaders of the smaller parties (Rabbitte, Adams, Sargent and McDowell).

The little debate was not an impressive affair. Gerry Adams was particularly disappointing. He seemed completely out of touch with southern society and probably hasn't thought about it that much.

He kept on talking about a "rights" based society. Could he have been suggesting that lawyers should run the country? He was also quite evasive on the questions he was asked.

Trevor Sargent the leader of the Green Party came across as being quite sincere, if still a bit rough at the edges.

Rabbitte seemed to be very pleased with himself. He had some joke about McDowell being a "menopausal Paris Hilton", always seeking attention. It was probably funny when it was thought up first in labour head office, but it sounded a bit weird in a studio debate.

McDowell was his usual obnoxious self. In connection with the drugs problem he claimed that Adams was on the Army Council of the IRA, which had sold military know-how to the narco-terrorist organisation FARC. Adams said that McDowell was unfit to be Minister for Justice but in general the Sinn Fein leader wasn't that outraged at the accusation.

Adams also said that he was on the average industrial wage and that his surplus was given to the party. McDowell said that Adams owned a holiday home in Donegal but Adams claimed that the banks owned it. McDowell's riposte was: "*the Northern Bank*"?

Nevertheless, McDowell made a telling point. He asked the other leaders how they proposed to create wealth in the country? They had no answers.

The overall impression at this debate and in the campaign in general is that Labour and to a lesser extent SF and the Greens have accepted all the government policies in the last 10 years.

Labour and Fine Gael were hoping that the people would think that 10 years was enough in a democracy and that we needed a change in personnel to prevent arrogance creeping in. That was the only change offered by the FG/Labour coalition; no change was offered in the area of policies.

The other pitch of the opposition was that they would be more competent but it is doubtful whether many people could name members of the FG front bench, apart from Richard Bruton. And it would be difficult to claim that the Fianna Fail led government has been incompetent, still less that the FG/Labour coalition would do a better job. Certainly the infrastructure has been bursting at the seams. In such a case it is easy to pick holes in projects that were not planned well. But for anyone over 35 who remembers the bad old days, the booming economy and immigration rather than unemployment and emigration cannot be taken for granted.

John Martin

Irish Men And England's Wars

On Friday, 25th May 2007, the *Irish Times*, amid all the hoo-ha about the General Election had an article about Irish military mercenaries. *It's still a long way from Tipperary* by Tom Clonan (*The Irish Times's Security Analyst. He lectures in the School of Media, DIT* [Dublin Institute of Technology]). Dr. Clonan found an alumnus of DIT among the members of the Royal Irish Regiment, currently in Fort George in northern Scotland, "*Lieut Stephen Swan... Howth... trained in Sandhurst at the same time as Prince Harry...*". (Maybe this is simply to 'place' this British Army officer, but it reads remarkably like a piece of silly snobbery.)

Stephen Swan was "*apprehensive*" about "*being assigned*" to the RIR ('rankers' are known as Rangers). He felt that they might all be from Northern Ireland, but was pleased to find "*all shades of Irishness*", where Taigs and Prods "*fight for each other, not with each other for a change*". Well, that's lovely. One can only hope that the Taliban which was shooting them to pieces in Musa Qaleh and Sangin, are pleased at this aspect of their endeavours. Dr. Clonan blandly notes that these were "*particularly hostile locations*" in Helmand province of Afghanistan. It is almost certain that the other British regiments sent there were from Scotland. That has, traditionally, been the British way—kill the Celts first.

Back to Fort George; it was built after Culloden in 1746 no reason is given, but it was to 'pacify' Gaelic Scotland and to serve as a prison for those who were to be sent in their thousands to slavery in the Carolinas and Caribbean. This was a consequence of their fighting for their legitimate monarch. There is an Irish connection in that many United Irish were imprisoned in the place. But Dr. Clonan is struck by "*the universal and unmistakable cadence of Irish accents... ubiquitous presence of Irish cultural symbols... shamrock insignia... harps... Brian Boru the Irish wolfhound...*". The commanding officer is Lieutenant Colonel Michael McGovern from north Belfast, an alumnus of St. Malachy's College. He tells Dr. Clonan that "*soldiers from the Republic have taken a path less travelled in opting for a career in the British army...*" and "*have had to overcome a certain amount of cultural resistance to the idea of service*

in the crown forces...". So, unlike a 44 year old man from north Belfast, who could at the earliest, have joined said Crown forces in 1981.

We have never claimed that the Catholic community in Belfast is amœba-simple, but this man must be unique. He joined the British Army at the start of the Hunger Strikes period, surely in the knowledge that he might at some point be patrolling the streets where he was brought up. He must have witnessed the behaviour of the Crown forces in his own neighbourhood or at least on the way to and from St. Malachy's. It was never in the Black and Tan class, but it was occasionally brutal and did very little to stop the likes of the Shankill Butchers going about their grisly business. The 'Brits' in north Belfast also tended to be careless about using weapons in crowded areas, most of the people killed by 'batons rounds' (rubber bullets) were from that area. Presumably McGovern just likes the idea of fighting and killing, but wants to do on a salaried basis.

There was (and maybe still is) a time when a method of gaining US citizenship was to join the American armed forces. This was used by a fair number of people from Ireland. Whether it was possible to join in Belfast (through the US Consulate) or one had to get to America, I don't know. The CESA (Catholic Ex-Servicemen's Association) carried the Stars and Stripes on its demonstrations: there were a fair number of former members of the US Army in Belfast, and probably the rest of Ireland. Presumably Lieut. Col. McGovern and the rest of the volunteers in this Royal Regiment joined the British Army because the likelihood of getting to kill people was higher than in the various other armies they could have joined.

The CESA carried Belgian and Polish flags, partly because of the Free Poles and Free Belgians, but also because some people from the Belfast area did National Service in Belgium. The French flag was there because of the Foreign Legion (some locals had been in the Spanish Foreign Legion—but that was regarded as mildly embarrassing for some reason).

The above accusation (of their being mercenaries) may be a bit brutal, but what exactly are men from Naas, Ennis, and "Dublin's northside" doing in Iraq or Afghanistan? One Sergeant Major attempts to rationalise their situation and behaviour, claiming that Helmand produces 80% of the world's heroin and between attempting to destroy that and "Islamic fundamentalism", they are

"helping other Irish people". If such was his motivation why did he not join the *Gárda Siochana*? It won't wash, and neither will the paddy-wackery. Apart from the wolfhound and shamrockery the unit also has a *"traditional Irish music group"* called the Brewery Boys (this does not appear to be a misprint, it is written out twice). This group is useful in getting the Iraqis to surrender (sorry, the locals like the music, and even the ones who *"have quite fundamentalist Islamic views... have a bit of a dance to it..."*. Quite what the Taliban do is not recorded, they are fundamentalist Muslims and elements in Islam have strong views on music—it is sinful. The Wahabis in Saudi Arabia have tried to abolish it.

These attempts to make Irish people feel that we are playing a part in the great Manichean struggle against whoever the leaders of the 'Anglo-Saxon' world have decided are the enemies of civilisation bob up in the media every couple of years. They rarely succeed, as the Irish people have a bad habit of looking at what is actually happening, rather than at what the media want us to think is happening. This article is not going to change many people's opinions: if readers do not know why Fort George was built, they can make an educated guess. People who happen to have been born in Ireland are in Afghanistan killing (and being killed) for reasons which most Irish people disapprove of. After all, what happens in Afghanistan is

the business of the people who live there, and not the business of the US, the UK, their allies and satellites.

The US / UK got involved in Afghanistan as a consequence of the last great worldwide struggle against evil. That one was 'godless Communism' (in the form of Brezhnev's USSR), which got involved in the place. This was always referred to as an 'invasion', and probably the Kremlin was up to no good, but a legitimate democratic Government did request its help against Taliban, or Taliban-like groups. 'Reagan's America', with Thatcher cheering from the sidelines, armed the 'Islamists' and colluded in their training in Pakistan. Now the fighters are turning the training and arms on the US / UK, and despite the Irish Government's craven (or commercial / opportunist) attitude to the use of Shannon airport, the Irish people have remained remarkably clear-eyed about the realities of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Royal Irish Regiment are professional (meaning salaried) soldiers in the pay of the UK State. They are not fighting, even in the most tangential manner, for Ireland or the Irish people. Having a full Regiment of mercenaries fighting England's wars is a matter for silent embarrassment, not celebration. Particularly not when they are housed in a prison in which were incarcerated some of the founders of Irish Republicanism.

Seán McGouran

The Irish Times Campaign Against Bertie Ahern

The following press release from the Irish Political Review Group was not reproduced or quoted in any of the print or broadcast media. It did provoke 91 comments on the *Indymedia* website (<http://www.indymedia.ie/article/82476>) and two comments on the Blog section of the *Village Magazine* website (www.village.ie and click Blog tab). Rodney Rice most likely picked up on it when he asked his guests with reference to the Taoiseach's personal finances, *'Is there now a feeling that the media is the problem?'* on the *Saturday View* programme on RTE radio (May 12th).

Apart from these minor responses it is difficult to measure what influence the press release had on the controversy. But the question of the role of the media in the election campaign has become a topic for discussion elsewhere. Bertie Ahern himself stated on *This Week* on RTE radio (20th May) that the media's role would need to be examined closely when the

campaign was over. A most interesting letter was also published in the *Irish Times* on May 16th from Liam Young. It is reproduced after the press release. By pointing out that the *Irish Times* was selective in the way it published details of Ahern's finances, Liam Young has strengthened the case that the paper was pursuing its own political agenda in the controversy.

The Irish Political Review Group

Publisher of *Irish Political Review*

Write to:

* 14 New Comen Court,
North Strand, Dublin 3 *or*
* PO Box 339, Belfast BT12 4GQ *or*
* PO Box 6589, London, N7 6SG *or*
Labour Comment
C/O Shandon St. P.O., Cork City.

Press Statement
Wednesday 9th May 2007

The Media is the Problem!

As an exercise in representative government the current General Election campaign is a shambles. Instead of a debate about the future direction of government we have the second round of a controversy that should never have had a first round. If Taoiseach Bertie Ahern had any questions to answer about his personal financial arrangements fifteen years ago, the place for him to do so was and is before the Mahon Tribunal. Instead we have a distracting witchhunt against a politician with a long, well regarded record of service to the state.

Led by the *Irish Times*, the print and broadcast media have usurped the constitutional role of the Opposition in this controversy. This subversion of democracy has met with no protest from Fine Gael and Labour. Having little by way of an alternative political programme they have been content to trail sheepishly behind the media's coattails. Democracy received a further blow when the Supreme Court recently ruled that the *Sunday Business Post* should be allowed to publish stories based on documents stolen from the Mahon Tribunal. In other words the Supreme Court has ruled that the media may break the law with impunity.

The consequences of that flawed judgement can be seen in the following extract. It is from an *Irish Times* editorial of Saturday May 5th:

"The *Irish Times* received a letter from the Mahon tribunal last evening "to request" this newspaper to "desist from publishing" reference to information obtained from the unauthorised disclosure of documents necessarily circulated to a number of parties. The request was made in "the interest of the constitutional rights of all individuals affected by such premature disclosure".

"This newspaper has investigated the Taoiseach's finances because it has an equal constitutional duty to serve the public's right to know about its leaders, especially during an election campaign. Are we now to be silenced?"

"This can't but be an issue in the campaign. Whether it is a deciding issue or not in the general election remains to be seen."

Such an arrogant denial of a request from a judicial body might conceivably be justified if the security of the state were threatened by rampant corruption in the upper echelons of government. But the security of the state is under no such threat. As a letter writer pointed out the amount of money at issue is equal to the weekly wage of a Premiership football player. The matters at issue occurred thirteen years ago and the strong likelihood

is that no impropriety took place. But in the judgement of the editor of the *Irish Times* these same matters are sufficiently important to justify undermining the Tribunal, destroying an individual's reputation and disrupting the election campaign.

A number of points need to be made against the *Irish Times*:

Firstly, trial by media, as a concept and a practice, is offensive to the basic principles of justice. It is like a court case without proper process, without a judge and with a peculiarly impressionable and inattentive jury. The stock in trade of the Irish media in one of its fits of morality—suggestive headlines, photographs of individuals having to endure the stress of misrepresentation, and innuendo—have been used with consummate skill against Bertie Ahern in this campaign. Against such a barrage no public reputation, however well earned, is safe.

Secondly, the scale of the problem of corruption in the Irish body politic has been greatly exaggerated. The Moriarity Tribunal was unable to instance a single political decision made in response to bribery. Certainly, businesses made political contributions in the hope of ingratiating themselves with the political establishment, but so what? Is that not an inevitable by-product of the economic system we live under?

During the seventies a particular problem emerged when windfall profits could be made from buying agricultural land that would later be zoned for housing development. At that time a journalist with a unique and impeccable record for investigative work, Joe McAnthony, succeeded in getting articles published in the *Sunday Independent* exposing political corruption associated with land speculation. McAnthony later lost his job and a contract he held with RTE was allowed to run out without his doing any work. When he applied to the *Irish Times*, perhaps the obvious home for a journalist of his talents, he was turned down; so he emigrated to Canada. The moral of the story is that if the Irish media had fulfilled its function by employing investigative journalists, the petty corruption that later became endemic in Dublin County Council might have been avoided.

Thirdly, some newspapers, especially the *Irish Times*, have no association with political parties, and the main party of government, Fianna Fail, has no association with a newspaper. This is a disastrous arrangement. All of the great political parties of Europe have associations with newspapers and all of the great newspapers of Europe have affiliations with major political parties.

These associations and affiliations do not force newspapers editors to rigidly follow a party line. It simply means that most newspapers have a political orientation that informs their coverage of current affairs. Without some form of affiliation to a major political party, a newspaper has nothing to ground it in the political intercourse of its society.

In many ways Fianna Fail and the *Irish Times* represent two centres of power in contemporary Irish society; two contending worldviews. That one has no overt political affiliation and the other no media outlet is the nub of the problem of the Irish media.

Fourthly, the publication of leaked documents from the Tribunals should be rendered illegal through an Act of the Oireachtas. The Tribunals are being treated with contempt by media organisations. If these expensive judicial bodies are not to be afforded protection from media interference, they should be wound up.

In conclusion, the possibility that the campaign against the Taoiseach is based on a hidden agenda on the part of elements within the media cannot be discounted. It seems strange that 'Bertiegate' only became the subject of newspaper articles after Mr. Ahern had made a commitment to revive the commemoration of the 1916 Rising, but we can only speculate about such matters.

Outside of election time there is little that members of the public can do about the threat to democracy that all of this poses. But we are not outside of election time! We advise anyone opposed to the witchhunt of the Taoiseach to vote Fianna Fail. Alternatively they should consider writing on their ballot papers an off-the-cuff comment made recently by a respondent to a radio vox pop: 'THE MEDIA IS THE PROBLEM'.

Ends

Contacts: M Lawless, D Alvey

Letter to Irish Times (16th May)

Your latest Editorial in a long succession of increasingly partisan ramblings today (May 14th) informs your readers that there is an elephant in the room which isn't the recent newborn in Dublin Zoo. Now that the Taoiseach has, following a series of selective and prejudicial Mahon tribunal leaks published in your newspaper, provided a detailed explanation of the circumstances surrounding his personal finances, one wonders indeed what or who this elephant might be.

Having studied the statement issued by the Taoiseach on Sunday, I came to the only conclusion that I believe most sensible people could possibly come to, which is that, although the series of financial transactions surrounding Mr Ahern's house purchase was unorthodox, the explanations

given are understandable and entirely plausible. It seems obvious and entirely rational to me that the primary motivation for Mr Ahern's rent-to-buy strategy was based on a number of factors including his then-recent marital separation, the uncertainty of his future income given the political instability at that time, and the need to ensure he didn't have the stigma associated with having a "no fixed abode" tag applied to a taoiseach-elect.

No evidence of financial impropriety has been uncovered, despite the very best efforts and premature conclusions of the media.

Now that we finally have all of the facts, your readers are in a position to make their own judgments as to whether the Taoiseach acted properly in relation to his personal finances. Your readers would have, in any case, been given this opportunity within the next few weeks when the Mahon tribunal's public hearings take place.

However, *The Irish Times*, followed by other sections of the media, took it upon themselves to circumvent this process "in the public interest", despite written warnings from the chairman of the Mahon tribunal, and despite a pending contempt of court hearing against you, Madam Editor, relating to previous unauthorised publication of material relating to this case.

The content and tone of The Irish Times coverage of this entire affair, going back to its first leak in October 2006, has now been shown to have been unbalanced, one-sided and possibly illegal. Had The Irish Times simply published all of the information that it had in its possession, then one could possibly argue that publication was indeed in the public interest.

However, the nature of the leaks, including the fact that some of the information available was deliberately kept from the public by The Irish Times and other national media, raises serious questions about your and other national media's role in this affair.

The Irish Times promises its readers that its reports are "honest, accurate and comprehensive, and analysis that is informed, fair and based on the facts". Your readers have, now, for the first time, following publication of the Mahon tribunal interview transcript and the Taoiseach's statement, the opportunity of reviewing these facts without your editorial interference or control, and deciding for themselves who lived up to the standards set for them and who did not.

Given all the circumstances, Madam Editor, could it be that the elephant in the room is, in fact, you.

LIAM YOUNG, Dublin 6.

Reply To Professor Garvin,

part two

Preventing The Future

Ireland after 1921, according to Professor Garvin's vision, had the object of averting the future instead of achieving it: the future being the situation that came about three-quarters of a century later. The scene is set in the opening page for the long struggle against the future:

"The new state [of 1922] was effectively independent and gradually rid itself of symbols of the old British connection... The new Irish state, which came into existence in international law on 6 December was apparently greeted with a deep indifference by its own citizens. This seems to have been the case despite the overwhelming vote for independence, or something like independence, that had occurred in December 1918 and which legitimated the subsequent Dail Eireann's declaration of independence" ~(*Preventing The Future*, p1).

As the song says: "*After you get what you want/ You don't want it*" !

In his earlier book, *1922: The Birth Of Irish Democracy*, Professor Garvin was sceptical of the idea that the Irish electorate had voted for independence in 1918. He suggested that the vote for independence was achieved partly by Republican terrorism, which intimidated electors, and partly by massive personation by Republicans; and that, even so, only a minority of the votes cast were for independence. Has further researching led him to conclude that the 1918 voting was a genuine and "*overwhelming*" vote for independence?

Anyhow, the new story is that the electorate voted overwhelmingly for independence in 1918. And then,

"A short 'Tan War' or War of Independence followed, and eventually an Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in December 1921, in which partition was reluctantly accepted by the Irish" (p1).

But wasn't something else reluctantly accepted as well—and accepted much more reluctantly? Partition scarcely figures in the dispute within Sinn Fein about the Treaty.

The passage continues:

"Whether the new Irish Free State was authentically sovereign remained a moot point and split the national independence movement... The subsequent short civil war or *Cogadh na gCarad* (war of friends, relatives) embittered intra-elite relations for forty years and certainly contributed mightily to the stultifying of Irish democratic

politics in its first generation of independence. Furthermore the conflict involved a systematic attempt by the *coupiste* anti-Treaty IRA to wreck the infrastructure of the country and ensure that the Free State remained stillborn" (p1,2).

So, over a period of four years, there was an overwhelming vote for independence, followed by a war of independence, followed by a war over whether what Britain conceded was independence.

In fact there was no pretence by the Treatyites in the first instance that they had gained independence when, under threat of immediate and terrible war made by the British Prime Minister, they signed the Treaty. If they thought they were being offered independence, why did they need to be threatened into accepting it?

The 'Civil War' was not fought between a party which thought it had gained independence by signing the Treaty and a party which thought it hadn't. The issue was whether to accept for the time being an arrangement dictated by Britain under threat of war, which was not independence, or to hold to the democratically-mandated Declaration of Independence of 1919, despite the British threat that it would mobilise the military resources of the Empire for a re-conquest of Ireland.

The case for the Treaty is not that it was in substance British recognition of Irish independence, but that it averted an all-out British war of reconquest. And, five years later, in the 1927 Election, the danger of a British reconquest was still the nub of the Free State case against Fianna Fail.

The title *Preventing The Future*, indicates a problem about time, as does the statement that "*The new state was effectively independent and gradually rid itself of symbols of the old British connection*".

If this new state, whose terms were dictated by Britain which had spent the preceding years making war on the democratically mandated Republic, was effectively independent, why did those who were establishing it retain symbols which led to war with their colleagues of 1919-21? Was it not wanton negligence on Collins's part that he left those symbols of submission in place in his independent state at the cost of war with his colleagues?

In fact Collins did his best to treat the most obnoxious features of the Treaty as mere symbols and to exclude them from

the Constitution which gave effect to the Treaty. He was summoned to Whitehall and given a further ultimatum. The 'symbols' had to stay.

In his earlier book Professor Garvin said that the British Government decided to concede Irish independence in December 1921, but needed to attach some Imperial decorations to the Treaty for the purpose of deceiving its Jingoistic Parliament, and unfortunately it was the backward and unsophisticated Irish who were deceived. He seems to have pulled back from that view in this book, though he does not state the other view. But the matter is crucial to an understanding of what happened in 1922.

"The new state was effectively independent and gradually rid itself of symbols of the old British connection". But it fought a war in defence of those symbols which destroyed the body politic of 1918-21 and subverted national morale. The reasonable conclusion from that fact was that the symbols were not meaningless emblems left over from an *"old connection"*, but expressed the reality of a new connection of subordination.

If the 'Civil War' was fought over nothing, then somebody was mad. If the British insisted on war over symbols, while their intention was to recognise Irish independence, they were mad. If the Treatyites retained the symbols at the cost of war, when they might have discarded them, then they were mad. And if the anti-Treatyites rejected independence because some meaningless symbols were attached to it, they were the ones who were mad.

On the assumption that the symbols were meaningless, it was those who insisted on war over them who were mad—and they were the members of the British Cabinet.

But that assumption is false. And there was not even a misunderstanding. So nobody was mad.

The symbols were intended to express an ongoing relationship of subordination between Britain and Ireland. And British insistence on compelling the Treatyites to make war in defence of the symbols, under a further threat of a war of re-conquest, had the entirely rational political purpose of making the Irish national body politic destroy itself.

But the symbols were later discarded, which proves that the anti-Treatyites fought a war over nothing?

This is where time and circumstance come in.

The Treaty laid down a relationship between the Imperial British state and a subordinate Irish state to be constructed under its aegis. But the British state was unable to sustain that relationship in the

face of Republican resurgence in Ireland ten years later. Things were possible in 1932 that were not possible in 1922, because the British state was not in 1932 what it had been in 1922.

It has always been a wonder to me that Irish historians thought they could write Irish history without writing the history of the English state, even though Ireland was very much a subordinate element within the English state from the 12th century to the 20th. This practice led to attributing to the Treaty, as a document, developments which were made possible by changes that occurred in the English state—particularly to the fall of the War Coalition in the face of Turkish defiance of the Treaty dictated by the Versailles Victors, and the inability of the weak party Governments which followed to give purposeful government to the expanded Empire of 1918. British political life entered a period of demoralisation after the humiliating retreat before the spirited Turkish defiance. Without dismantling the Empire, Britain began to make compromises with developments that were eroding Imperial authority. That is the meaning of *"appeasement"*—the name by which the period is summed up by British historians. One of the forces appeased was resurgent Irish Republicanism in the form of Fianna Fail.

Pre-revisionist Irish historians paid little heed to English political affairs. They knew that England was *"perfidious Albion"* and inquired no further. The revisionist historians purported to be breaking out of the cramped horizons of nationalist history, but actually narrowed these horizons still further. England became invisible to them. They are in substance an Irish regional variant of British history-writing, and their object is to cloud the history of the English state in Ireland.

And so we get Professor Garvin's story that the Treaty established an independent Irish state, but the Irish fought a civil war before accepting it because some unimportant symbols were attached to it.

Also: *"The British... left behind a good physical infrastructure, a well-run and recently overhauled civil service machine and a fair standard of elementary education"* (p2). So why, with all of these advantages conferred on it by Britain, did Ireland set about preventing the affluent future for which Britain had prepared it?

The purpose of the Treaty and the Civil War was to ensure that the Irish state should be a British state at second-hand, with the British element in Ireland holding an influential position within it, even though it had no democratic (electoral) base in Ireland.

I know of no reason to suppose that the

Irish Government established after the 1918 Election would not have run the country well, if Britain had not sought to destroy it by terror. It set up an effective administration, even despite the terror. In 1922 that administration was destroyed. It was an effective condition of the Treaty that it should be destroyed and that the British apparatus of state in Ireland should as far as possible be the apparatus of the Free State.

Perhaps there is a history of the destruction of the apparatus of state of the Republic by the Treatyites. I don't say there isn't. I only say I have never come across it. The fact that it happened is something that gradually dawned in my mind over many years. Whether it is considered a good or a bad thing that it was done, the fact that it was done clearly has an important bearing on the history of the state and it should be established as a distinct fact of history.

The fact that the British civil service in Ireland became the Irish civil service—except for a small fraction that could not bear to live at one remove from the Crown—is presented by Professor Garvin as an advantage which the Irish managed to overcome in order to keep themselves backward and prevent the future. But a civil service is never a neutral body with administrative skills which it puts at the disposal of whoever comes along. There is a sense in which the civil service of a state *is* the state. Hegel was often ridiculed for saying that the civil service of the Prussian state was the end of history. The sense in the statement was that Prussia was the only one of the fifty German states of those times with a post-French Revolution state apparatus. Although Prussia was a monarchy, it had established an impersonal civil service which operated by routine. The Prussian state was therefore capable of becoming the state of a capitalist, or social-democratic, democracy.

Modern states which call themselves democracies pretend to see their roots in ancient Athens, but they are different in kind.

Rousseau said that democracy was not possible in large states. That was a true statement if one takes it that a democracy is what ancient Athens was. He also said that representative democracy is a contradiction in terms—or words to that effect. And that is true, in that government *by* the people and government *of* the people by representatives are not the same thing.

What we call democracies are states with a permanent administrative stratum, governed by one of two or three stable parties, somewhat randomly selected by a mass electorate every few years.

In modern British political culture, basic

truths about the state can only be broadcast as comedy. I have seen a perfectly accurate historical account of British conduct in the Middle East presented in the *Rory Bremner Show*, with the audience laughing uproariously. I have never seen it presented in a serious programme for the purpose of informing the democratic electorate. History is propaganda. Truth is for the Joker. Otherwise life would become intolerable.

And the truth about the conduct of Government was presented in the hilarious comedy series, *Yes Minister!*

The modern democratic state can be run by the civil service without the elected Government; but, if the civil service was a bland instrument for servicing the impulses of democratic Ministers the state would soon be a shambles.

The civil service is specific to its state. It is not a neutral quantity, transferable between states. If it is transferred, it will carry with it, as far as possible, the values of the state which created it, and which it created.

There was something like 90% transference of the British civil service to the Irish state in 1922. And the Ministers in 1922-33 were people who had bowed to the Imperial will of Britain, under threat of all-out war, and agreed to do its bidding. After Collins got himself killed in the war that he started, none of them were dominating personalities from the War of Independence. They were political small-timers, united only by a conviction that British power would be irresistible if it was fully deployed. The strong personalities were all on the other side. What one sees in the Free State government is the authoritarianism of weak men. (Lest it be thought that this is a sexist comment, I should say that I cannot think of any woman who was prominent amongst them. The War of Independence women were on the other side, hence the Free State jibe about "*the women and Childers party*".)

When Cumann na nGaedheal/Fine Gael announced in 1933 that it had become a Fascist party, the *Catholic Bulletin* said that was old news, coming ten years after the event. But the Immaculate Conception massacre, though commended by Churchill and others, was not really a strong act of authority comparable with the Night Of The Long Knives. Britain was the Keeper Of Conscience for the imitative strong men of the Cumann na nGaedheal State, and its strength was their strength.

Unfashionable though it is, the truthful answer to Professor Garvin's question: "*Why was Ireland poor for so long?*" is that England took a lot of trouble to disrupt it and disable it. The nearest thing I can think of to English rule in Ireland from the conquest of 1690 until the late 19th century

is Jewish rule in Palestine since the conquest of 1948. And the English did not have the excuse of the Jews that somebody else had persecuted them.

The last four years of English rule were the worst, and its final act the worst of all—the 'Civil War' that it insisted upon as the condition of permitting a subordinate Irish Government.

This is forbidden thought in Irish academia under resumed English tutelage. It is ruled out as *Anglophobia*.

A state of mind has now been brought about (with Fianna Fail's Martin Mansergh as one of its architects) which holds that anybody who writes an objective account of what England did in the world is in the grip of *Anglophobia*, which means an irrational hatred of England based on groundless fear. (Sean Moylan's reply to an English newspaper correspondent sixty years ago: that he did not hate the English, he only hated what they did, is a distinction that is no longer allowed.)

Professor Garvin concedes that English conquest, Penal Laws, Famines, etc. etc "*left behind some evil traces*", such as urban slums and the "*incivisme*" of "*being 'agin the government*", which "*hobbled*" Irish democracy. He continues:

"However, perhaps the most pervasive legacy of British government in Ireland was the partnership that had developed between the Catholic Church and the British State, giving the religious organisations the tasks of educating the young, running much of the health system and controlling much of the civil life of society. This partnership was inherited by the fledgling Irish democracy of 1918-22. In effect, this made the Catholic Church in independent Ireland... a state within the state... Above all, the Church attempted to control, some would say enslave, much of the intellectual and emotional life of the entire country" (p2-3).

What Professor Garvin calls the partnership of the Protestant state with the Catholic Church in Ireland began in the 1790s. After the conquest of 1690, the Irish were defined as Catholic and the Penal Laws against Catholicism were put in operation to plunder them, deprive them of the right to own property in land, or personal property above a certain value, to exclude them from public life, and by these means to abolish them.

But, a hundred years later, they were still not abolished—they were in fact more numerous than ever (like the Palestinians)—and England was making war on the French Revolution. The French had reorganised the Catholic Church by means of the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*. This had some similarity with what England did in the 16th century when its

King became its Pope [Henry VIII]. Rome rejected and condemned the *Civil Constitution* in the early 1790s, but a decade later made a Concordat with Napoleon, which made the state an authoritative intermediary between Rome and its Church in France.

England had the bright idea of enlisting the Catholic Irish for the war against the French state which had upset Rome. The Catholic Irish had survived a century of systematic persecution and the English state now had a use for them as cannonfodder against the godless French. It was in the course of that war that fundamentalist Catholicism in Ireland began.

While recruiting the Irish Catholics to make war on the French, the Government at first made no provision for them in Army Regulations, but at some point during that long war Catholic Chaplains and Catholic Church parades were introduced in the British Army. And Maynooth College was set up in Ireland.

Catholicism in Ireland was an easy-going religion until the 19th century. England conquered Ireland in the 12th century on a mandate from the Pope to bring the Church in Ireland to proper order within the Roman system. But the Catholic Irish remained wayward Catholics. Then they resisted English Protestantism from Henry VIII, through Cromwell, to Charles 2, without becoming fundamentalist. They then resisted the Penal System during the century following the Williamite reconquest, and were still easy-going when Maynooth was set up.

Irish priests were ordained and Irish gentlemen were educated in France, Spain, and Austria during the century of the Penal Laws. The Continental system suited the Irish Catholic temperament.

The English balance-of-power strategy towards Europe often involved it in sharp ideological contradiction between home policy and foreign policy. It was anti-Catholic at home and was usually allied with the Pope in its European wars. This led in the 1790s to an attempt at an alliance with the main body of Catholics at home for cannonfodder purposes, and the independent (but exclusively Protestant and intensely anti-Catholic) Irish Parliament was forced by its Government (which was the Whitehall Government) to repeal some of its Penal Laws.

The notion grew up that Catholic priests educated at home would tend to be more loyal to the British Crown than priests educated on the Continent. It turned out otherwise. The Continental system of Church/State relations inculcated in the clergy a sense of subordination to the state. The new Maynooth system, not formed within a political structure of national tradition, could not do that. In the course of the following generation it was

the priests from the Continent who were by their training predisposed towards playing a part in the life of the state under Government hegemony. The French Church before the Revolution had accepted the state as an intermediary between it and Rome no less than the Church of the Civil Constitution. The Gallican clergy had recognised the King as a source of authority for them ever since the time of Louis XIV—hence the alliance of the Pope with William of Orange in 1690. And, if the French clergy set themselves against the changes made by the Revolution, it was not with a view to placing themselves directly under Roman authority.

The Gallican clergy in Ireland collaborated with the Government because of their training within the national church in France. They did so without regard for the fact that the Church in Ireland could not be national in the same way because the state in Ireland was anti-national, in the sense of having been for generations an institution actively hostile to the great bulk of the population. And the anti-Catholicism of the British state was altogether different in kind to the degree of anti-Romanism built into the Catholic state in France.

On the Continent Catholic seminaries were supervised by Catholic and national states. Maynooth could not be supervised and shaped by the anti-Catholic and anti-national state, and it was not a continuation of the historic Catholicism of Ireland. It was an anglicising influence in the matter of language, but it tended to be nationalist politically in accordance with the actual national situation of Ireland within a state that was actively hostile to it, on both Imperial and religious grounds. And so Maynooth became the basis of a new Church formation in Ireland, directly subordinate to Rome.

In the 1840s Rome directed the Irish Church against the radical national politics of Young Ireland—because it was itself under pressure from Mazzini's Young Italy nationalism. The British state, having failed to establish a party-political base for itself in Ireland after the Union, was led by the conflict between the Church and Young Ireland, and its Fenian continuation, to try to suppress the national development by according the Church an increasing role in the administration of the country.

Catholic Ireland was subjected to a long oppression by the English state, with the purpose of abolishing it. This oppression led in the end to Irish Catholicism taking on a fundamentalist character, partly due to the convolutions of English foreign policy. The English state then entered into alliance with fundamentalist Catholicism in Ireland for the purpose of stifling Irish national development.

When a strong national development went ahead nevertheless, and the country voted for independence, and the British state set out to over-rule Irish democracy by force, the Church did not as a body condone the resistance of the Irish democracy to naked British military rule. In the area of strongest resistance, the Bishop issued a Decree of Excommunication against members of the Irish army of resistance. The Decree proved ineffective. Then, when Britain sought to split the Irish body politic with an offer of limited self-government under the Crown, with the threat of all-out war if the offer was not submitted to, the Catholic Hierarchy urged submission to the Treaty and excommunicated all who resisted it by force. The Free State wing of Sinn Fein then established a state in tight alliance both with Britain and the Catholic Hierarchy.

The combination of British arms and Roman anathemas led to the defeat of the Anti-Treatyites. The unconditional Romanists were herded into the Free State corral, and the Free State accorded extensive areas of public life to the Church. But the defeated party in the war of 1922-23, which had defied the excommunications, went on to become the major party in the state when the British threat of war receded. However, the State/Church combination had been tightly forged by the time the Anti-Treaty party came to office in 1932. Within that accomplished fact, for which it was in no way responsible, Fianna Fail conducted itself on liberal lines on the issue of religion.

According to Professor Garvin, the position achieved by the Church in the formation of the Free State enabled it to enslave the emotions and the intellect of society, especially in rural parts, and thus prevent the future.

As explained last month, I lived in rural Ireland all through my teens and into my twenties, during the high tide of 'enslavement', and I was alienated from the religious dimension of life and refused to participate. If the texture of life was as Garvin describes it, I would certainly have noticed.

I couldn't stand religion. I would say that, for a substantial part of the community, say a quarter, it was the case that it did not bother them to go along with the minimal practice of going to Mass on Sunday, and they allowed themselves to be badgered into the annual Confession, or at least a decent pretence of it. Most people approved of religion as quite a good thing in itself, as it distinguished us from the animals and it was an opportunity for socialising. A very small number were religious enthusiasts. They were the urban element who saw themselves as modern,

were College-educated, and took part in things like the Legion of Mary. But I think it would be going a bit far to describe even these as being *enslaved*.

Religious practice certainly did not stultify the intellect—unless the fact that the intellect did not deploy itself against religion is taken to be stultification. And, in that matter, I would say that a poet in the townland next to mine expressed a very widespread opinion with the lines—

With truth and pretence as a mixture
This world is a puzzle profound.

Regarding economic affairs, I could not see that religious practice had any effect whatever. The place was buzzing with small-scale enterprise. The future was not being prevented. It was being prepared. What is happening now would not be possible without what was happening then. In my locality, what was a small carpenter's business then now employs more than a thousand workers in the fastness of Slieve Luacra swampland. I don't know if they gave up going to Mass as they became more successful. I doubt it.

Economic growth comes through overcoming obstacles. There were certain obstacles, which exercised a strong retarding influence on enterprise, that were left behind by Britain after it left in 1922. Enterprise at a certain point needs financing. The financial structure of Ireland for a couple of generations after 1922 was dire. The golden threads, that Connolly warned about but that his professional admirers congregated around the *Irish Times* prefer not to understand, remained in place until they began to be broken by Charles Haughey's generation, and largely by Haughey himself.

Professor Garvin doesn't even mention that dimension of economic affairs. His own understanding in that regard seems to be on a par with that of the less enterprising part of the past which he deplores. There are 53 Lemass references in his Index, but Haughey—who brought the Irish economy into the stage of finance capitalism—has 3 references, all of them trivial.

Professor Garvin's argument is a rehash of Sir Horace Plunkett's argument about a century ago. Plunkett was replied to, and comprehensively refuted by reference to actual economic history, by Fr. O'Riordan in a book which was itself an incitement to even greater enterprise by Catholics: *Catholicity And Progress In Ireland*. It would be interesting to look at that debate again, with a view to helping Professor Garvin to distinguish between fashionable religious prejudice and economic fact. If religion is a bad thing, it is not because it is anti-economic.

Brendan Clifford

Shorts

from
the Long Fellow

IRISH TIMES'S OPINION POLL STRATEGY

The Irish Times has had a problem since the 2002 election. It has been very clear that the only viable Government was one led by Fianna Fail. The opposition Labour/Fine Gael alternative was consistently behind the FF/PD coalition before this election. From *The Irish Times* perspective the danger has been that floating voters, concerned about a government dependent on independents, would inevitably gravitate towards Fianna Fail.

In such circumstances it was important to build up the strength of the Labour/FG opposition and pretend that it rather than Fianna Fail represented stability. A key tool in its campaign has been the use of opinion polls.

The Irish Times/TNS mrbi poll published on 11th May gives the following percentages for the core vote: FF 35, FG 22, Labour 10, Sinn Fein 8, Greens 4, PDs 1, Independents/Others 5 and Undecided 15.

The "core vote" is nothing more than the votes for all parties including "undecided". Simple arithmetic would suggest that the core vote for FF alone is 35% and for the Labour/FG opposition is 32%. But yet the headline on *The Irish Times* front page says "FF increase while alternative coalition maintains lead".

Certainly the headline recognises that support for the FG/Labour coalition alternative has been falling away despite the best efforts of *The Irish Times*, but how can it justify the view that the alternative coalition was maintaining its lead or even ever had a lead?

The Irish Times buries the "core vote" figures in the body of the report and concentrates its article on the "adjusted figures". The "adjusted figures" are the percentages arrived at when the undecided votes are taken out of the equation. One could argue as to how the undecided figures should be distributed. In my view a plausible method would be to assume that the undecided will decide in proportion to the strength of the parties as already declared. Another assumption would be that the vast bulk of them will not vote. Voter turnout tends to be about 65%. It is reasonable to assume that a good proportion of the 15% undecided will be included in the 35% who don't vote.

As it happens, both of these assumptions lead to the same mathematical conclusion. To calculate the adjusted figure you should

multiply the core vote percentages by 100 and divide by 85. This will lead to "adjusted figures" of FF 41, FG 26, Labour 12, Sinn Fein 9, Greens 5, PDs 1, Independents/Others 6. [And this is much how the Election came in—Ed.]

Again we see that Fianna Fail alone is comfortably ahead of the combined FG/Labour coalition. So what "adjusted figures" does *The Irish Times* present? Of the 15% undecided it gives 1 percentage point to Fianna Fail, 6 to Fine Gael, 3 to Labour, 2 to Sinn Fein, 1 to the Greens, 1 to the PDs and 1 to the Independents. So the adjusted figures are: FF 36, FG 28, Labour 13, Sinn Fein 10, Greens 5, PDs 2 and others 6. And on this basis it claims that the FG/Labour coalition is maintaining a lead.

It appears to arrive at these figures by reducing the "adjusted" (i.e. per normal calculations) Fianna Fail vote by 5 percentage points (i.e. one eighth of the 41%). It then allocates this 5% in proportion to the strength of the remaining parties.

There is no doubt that opinion polls influence political behaviour as well as reflecting it and *The Irish Times* understands this—as can be seen from the following comment on the 2002 election from Fintan O' Toole:

"With almost every poll overstating Fianna Fail's eventual vote, the polls ceased to reflect opinion and began to shape it by making it clear that Fine Gael were no hoppers" (*The Irish Times*, 5/5/07).

As we have seen *The Irish Times* has more than compensated for that alleged defect in 2007 in order to present the FG/Labour coalition as a potential stable Government, rather than the FF/PD coalition.

The picture accompanying the front page opinion poll story (11/5/07) shows on the right side of the page Kenny and Rabbite striding confidently forward with broad smiles on their faces. And on the left Ahern and McDowell are huddled close, looking down at the ground and whispering together.

The opinion poll strategy must include pictures as well as words and figures!

IRISH TIMES'S CORRUPTION STRATEGY

Of course, opinion polls are not the only weapon in the *Irish Times*'s armoury.

The propaganda against Bertie Ahern has been relentless. With the aid of selective unauthorised leaks from the Mahon Tribunal it has attempted to level a charge of corruption, but nothing of substance has stuck. Indeed nothing new has emerged since Bertie Ahern's finances first came under scrutiny last year. And yet in *The Irish Times* numerous front-page column inches have been devoted to it during this election.

On Saturday May 12th a whole page in

The Irish Times review section was devoted to the so-called "issue" and absolutely nothing new was revealed by the journalist Colm Keena.

All of this relates to matters in 1994. There is no doubt that Ahern's affairs in every sense of the word were not in order. In 1992 he didn't contest the 1992 FF leadership contest against Albert Reynolds, following the resignation of Charles Haughey. At that time Michael Smith—the then Minister for State of the Department of Industry and Commerce—commented that "the people need to know where the Taoiseach sleeps at night".

In 1994 following the unexpected resignation of Reynolds, Ahern scrambled to sort out his living arrangements since he was expected to succeed Reynolds as Taoiseach.

The Irish Times one page report is remarkably coy regarding its own role in all of this. Buried in the middle of the long report Keena only once refers to the hand that the newspaper played in Ahern's destiny:

"Although there was no prospect of Michael Wall completing the purchase of the house in December 1994, Ahern was anxious to be able to point to a definite rental agreement should he become taoiseach on Tuesday, December 6th. Late on Monday, December 5th, the day Larkin made her lodgements with AIB, Ahern was photographed being driven out of Government Buildings with a list of the people he intended appointing to his cabinet. But it was not to be. A report in *The Irish Times* of that day caused Labour to change tack and go into government with Fine Gael and Democratic Left."

And that's all that is said about the newspaper's involvement then. No mention of the fact that it was Geraldine Kennedy, the current Editor, who wrote *The Irish Times* story which caused "Labour to change tack" and the story was very far from being just a piece of advice.

The strategy seems to be to devote as many column inches to the so-called story under loaded headlines. Very few people will read what has actually been written, but the impression will be given that Ahern has a case to answer.

IRISH TIMES'S PROPAGANDA STRATEGY

In order for *The Irish Times* to retain some element of credibility it must give the appearance of objectivity. But the mask well and truly slipped in its editorial of 5th May. The opening paragraph begins with the following sly innuendo:

"As the only citizen in the State who has the power to apply to dissolve the Dail, it is incumbent on the Taoiseach that that constitutional power would be exercised in the public interest—not his personal financial interest."

Note very carefully what is being said

here. The editorial is not saying that the Taoiseach called the election in his own political interest. Such a charge would be ridiculous. It is taken for granted that the outgoing Taoiseach of the day is perfectly entitled to dissolve the Dail at the most politically opportune time for his political party and therefore himself. (Of course, if it is called long before the expiry of the full term people are entitled to be suspicious but that is not what happened here).

The editorial is implying that the Taoiseach dissolved the Dail because it was in his *personal financial interest* to do so. He would obtain a financial gain.

The next two paragraphs continue with the theme that the calling of the election was a ploy to prevent scrutiny of his finances. The assumption is that he is guilty. That is the only "*rational explanation*" for his behaviour according to *The Irish Times*:

"Undoubtedly, from all that we know, these separate events weighed heavily on Bertie Ahern's mind. He became desperate, realising that he would have to exercise his public function to prevent a personal disadvantage on the eve of the election."

"This is the most rational explanation for Mr Ahern's furtive visit to President Mary McAleese in the early hours of last Sunday morning to dissolve the 29th Dail."

In the above two paragraphs the editorial says that he called the election to prevent a "*personal disadvantage*". It doesn't say that it was to prevent a "*financial*" disadvantage. But that is already implied in the first paragraph. The use of the words "*desperate*" and "*furtive*" also implies wrongdoing.

The editorial continues along these lines, but probably the most obnoxious paragraph is the following:

"People believed then that Mr Ahern, as he asked them to believe, had given them the full picture about his own personal finances, bared his soul, infringed his own privacy surrounding his separation from his wife and told them all in the Bryan Dobson interview on RTE. We now know that this was not the case."

What an interesting form of words! Ahern infringed "*his own privacy*". The editorial can't say that he infringed his wife or his family's privacy because that would be untrue as well as libellous. Ahern would have committed an illegal act. So we are left with the charge of infringing "*his own privacy*". The paragraph doesn't say he lied, but it does say that he did not give Bryan Dobson "the full picture about his own personal finances".

So on the one hand it is implied that Ahern must not "*infringe his own privacy*", but on the other hand he must tell all.

But if Ahern is obliged not to "*infringe*

his own privacy", such a stricture should not apply to *The Irish Times*. *The Irish Times* believes that it is perfectly entitled to investigate everything, even if a quasi judicial body such as the Mahon Tribunal requests it to do otherwise.

The last three paragraphs in the editorial indicate the role that *The Irish Times* has arrogated for itself in Irish society:

"*The Irish Times* received a letter from the Mahon tribunal last evening 'to request' this newspaper to 'desist from publishing' reference to information obtained from the unauthorised disclosure of documents necessarily circulated to a number of parties. The request was made in "the interest of the constitutional rights of all individuals affected by such premature disclosure".

But the "*constitutional rights of all individuals*" are of no account because our "*learned friends*" in Tara Street (its new base) have ruled that:

"This newspaper has investigated the Taoiseach's finances because it has an equal constitutional duty to serve the public's right to know about its leaders, especially during an election campaign. Are we now to be silenced?"

"This can't but be an issue in the campaign. Whether it is a deciding issue or not in the general election remains to be seen."

And no bounds on the public's right to know are stated.

It seems that *The Irish Times* believes that it and the rest of the media should decide the issues to be raised. In the Weekend Review section of *The Irish Times* (5.5.07) Fintan O' Toole regrets that the 2002 election unlike the 2007 election did not go to plan.

The title of the article is *Spinning out of Control* and the opening blurb is as follows:

"The ideal election for party handlers is one they prepared earlier—but it looks as if some are not getting their way this time."

The long article contains the following remarkable sentence on the 2002 Election:

"The stage managing of the campaign became even more effective because, with the media ceding control of the agenda to the dominant parties, the election turned into a kind of meta-election."

The ceding of control by the media almost invalidates the election?!

One suspects that Ahern's appeal over the heads of the media in his Bryan Dobson interview was by no means the least of his sins.

So there we have it. The 2007 election is a battle between the media agenda and the agenda of the democratically elected political parties. On that basis the Long Fellow will be voting for Fianna Fail.

French Election Special

LE GRAND DÉBAT

It can be interesting to observe how other countries do things. Just before the Irish General Election the French Presidential election took place. Like in Ireland the French had their equivalent of the "great debate". In their case the debate was more justified since it genuinely was a contest between two candidates whereas in the case of Ireland the Taoiseach would not be elected by the people but by the Dail.

The debate between Nicholas Sarkozy and Segolene Royal lasted for 2.5 hours, more than an hour longer than our equivalent. It was more about ideas and was less about details. It was very clear that a clear political choice was on view whereas the debate in Ireland was about which candidate would be most competent to do the job.

The Long Fellow prefers the French approach to politics, but the Irish system has much to recommend it as well. It is very clear that the Irish candidates are much more in touch with what ordinary people think. Also, there was an unreal aspect to the French debate. The candidate for the government party, Nicholas Sarkozy, felt no obligation to defend the record of the Government in which he served. Sarkozy was the candidate for change rather than the socialist candidate Segolene Royal.

The Long Fellow thought that that Segolene Royal did quite well in the debate. He was surprised at how aggressive she was. At one point she accused Sarkozy of hypocrisy when he advocated handicapped children being educated with normal children. She said his Government had cut back on the specialists who gave individual tuition, which would make such a policy possible. She accused him of being "*immoral*". Sarkozy responded that she should calm down. A French President must be calm. She said that a French

President can be angry, especially a healthy anger. Then Sarkozy tried to say that it was nerves. She said that it was anger. Sarkozy then expressed disappointment at her aggression. She then said sarcastically "*are you hurt?*" *The Long Fellow* thought Sarkozy was visibly shaken by the exchange.

Royal also seemed to catch him out on some technical points with regard to nuclear power.

Royal didn't have it all her own way. *The Long Fellow* thinks she is very weak on foreign policy. As regards Turkey: Sarkozy stated his unambiguous opposition to Turkey joining. He went on to say that those who oppose Europe wish to expand it so as to prevent a political Europe from being achieved. Royal on the other hand wants a referendum.

Royal also was taking a hard line on Darfur. She proposed that France might consider boycotting the Olympic games in Peking because of what China was doing there! Sarkozy didn't think this was a good idea and noted that she didn't include herself in that boycott since she had recently visited China.

On the 35 hour week, Royal defended it and said that the reason why it had not been abandoned by the government was that it was seen as a social progression. It facilitated family life. However she conceded that there were aspects to the law that were too rigid.

POLITICAL DISASTER

There is no doubt that the election of Sarkozy is a disaster for the French and indeed European working class. Sarkozy is a Thatcherite having to adjust to French political realities. His mild criticism of US foreign policy during this election must be taken with a grain of salt. His acceptance speech amounted to a declaration of intent. He said that his election signalled a break from the past and the old ways of doing things.

Sarkozy is not just a creature of political fashion: his commitment to introduce Anglo-Saxon values into France is profound. As well as abandoning the 35 hour week he wants to encourage greater home ownership in France by freeing up credit and giving tax relief to domestic mortgages.

The intellectual antecedents to Sarkozy can be traced to the unsuccessful right wing Presidential candidate of the 1980s Edouard Balladur, who wrote an influential book entitled *"The End of Jacobinism"*.

The Sarkozy project includes a re-evaluation of the French Revolution and subsequent French historical events of democratic significance.

During the later stages of the election campaign an interview appeared in a philosophical magazine in which Sarkozy expressed the view that people are born bad or weak and can't change. He believed that paedophiles would always be paedophiles. More controversially, he said people who commit suicide have a weakness in their character.

The implication being that you should identify who is bad and lock them up to protect the rest of us (a kind of extreme Protestantism).

NOT MUCH GOOD NEWS

The bad news is that there is not much good news. However, some small consolation can be taken from the fact that the French Presidential election result represented a triumph of politics over image. Royal was consistently vague about her policies and when difficult questions, arose such as the admission of Turkey to the EU or introducing greater flexibility in

the 35 hour week (effectively abandoning it), she kicked for touch by suggesting a referendum or greater consultation.

Another small consolation is that the Socialist Party recognises that it was a defeat. It is not making any excuses. The rivals to Royal within the socialist party were advocating a political change within the party. Dominic Strauss-Kahn has been advocating an adaptation to new conditions and a more social democratic approach, which sounds suspiciously like Blairism. Lauren Fabius, on the other hand, wants an updating of socialist strategy in the light of globalisation and the expansion of the EU.

FRENCH ELECTION: COMMUNIST REACTION

The following is a statement of the leader of the French Communist Party, Marie-George Buffet after the French Presidential Election

"A Political Catastrophe!"

Today the French have voted massively. Nicholas Sarkozy has been elected President of the Republic.

At this point, I think above all of those who will be the first to be threatened by the projects of the new President of the Republic. I think of the wage earners, who exhausted by work do not earn the means to live in dignity, of all the victims of inequality and discrimination, of the unemployed, and of those on the poverty line. I want to say to them that the communists will be at their side. Everywhere, in all areas, we will take with them initiatives allowing them to oppose with determination and responsibility.

I want to say to men and women of the left, to democrats that I share this evening their dismay, their bitterness and their great worry.

I say in all solemnity that the election of the president of the UMP and the serious failure of the left constitutes a real political catastrophe. For the first time since the Liberation there is someone in the highest echelons who is guided by the political ideas of the extreme right and who openly supports the economic and ultraliberal programme of the MEDEF [employers organisation—JM]. Our social system—already undermined by years of political liberalism—and our democratic rights are in danger. We must unite to resist the policies that the right wants to implement. I urgently call on all of the forces of the left to organise a riposte.

The Communist Party will not lower its arms. Everywhere, in the cities, in the localities, in businesses, its militants, its elected local councillors, regional representatives, parliamentary representatives will be by the side of our people to oppose the social division and attacks on our liberties. Against all these attacks they will work tirelessly to unite all those who have, at heart, social progress and democracy to

organise the vigilance and the struggle.

From this evening I call for a reinvigoration of the active forces of the left to make the legislative elections [in June—JM] a reaction to the very heavy defeat we have just suffered. We must not let all power in the hands of Nicholas Sarkozy. It is necessary that all those who wish to contribute to the riposte be able to form a united front to elect the greatest possible number of deputies resolute in their opposition to the right.

I call on left wing voters, in the light of this, to elect the many candidates representing or supported by the communist party. They will be, with a parliamentary group, an indispensable force of resistance to the right, and as a reservoir of support for the many social mobilisations and struggles.

Beyond that I wish to say that the defeat of Segolene Royal this evening, after that of the defeat in 2002, poses crucial questions for the left. The significance of this result is that Nicholas Sarkozy has succeeded in making credible beyond the right wing electorate brutal answers to the problems of our society. The failure of the left, by contrast, shows the necessity to bring alive the values of equality, of liberty and of social justice in a political project in the context of Europe and the World dominated by Global finance capitalism.

This failure is that of each of the forces which consist of the left. They are all obliged, the Communist Party included, to understand the reasons and rebuild hope by opening a genuine perspective of change. I am strongly committed to engage in this.

More than ever our people need a great force of resistance. I call on all those who wish to engage in the battles to come to join the French Communist Party."

Editorial Note

Due to pressure of space, we have had to hold over a number of articles to the July issue.

One of these is an unpublished letter of the late Michael O'Riordan, written in April 1939 to Bill Gandall, a Lincoln Brigader (Spanish Civil War), giving him an insightf Irish history. The letter is introduced by Manus O'Riordan, who explains the circumstances of how the letter was found, and gives some background about the fate of some of the Brigadiers.

A Brief Summary of "Bertiegate"

The Mahon Tribunal investigated allegations made by a property developer, Tom Gilmartin, that Bertie Ahern received payments from a rival developer, Owen O'Callaghan, in connection with the Quarryvale development.

To put it mildly Gilmartin is not exactly a credible witness. Apart from his differences with O' Callaghan some media reports indicate that he has had mental problems. Also, other allegations made by Gilmartin have not been investigated because they lack any basis in fact.

In the course of investigating the Gilmartin allegations the Mahon Tribunal requested Ahern to submit his financial records, which Ahern did.

It was these records submitted on a confidential basis which were leaked to *The Irish Times* and other media outlets and which led to "Bertiegate 1".

BERTIEGATE 1

No connection was established between the leaked records and the Gilmartin allegations, but the records did reveal that Ahern had financial difficulties as a result of a marital separation. In December 1993 he received 22,500 Irish pounds and then in October 1994 he received a "loan" of another 16,500 and a gift of a further 8,000 in sterling from friends. At the time he was the Minister for Finance. But he was also considered a likely Taoiseach. He was not living in the marital home and there was a feeling among his friends that a Taoiseach should not have the status of "no fixed abode".

In the event Ahern did not succeed Albert Reynolds as Taoiseach in 1994 as expected. It is interesting that *The Irish Times* has been remarkably coy about its role in preventing this. It was an *Irish Times* story by Geraldine Kennedy which persuaded Labour to support John Bruton as Taoiseach.

No evidence of political favours being given for the financial help has ever been revealed.

BERTIEGATE 2

For all the digging and for all the numerous articles that have been written, nothing of substance has emerged in "Bertiegate 2", which followed a new round of leaks just before the election campaign.

Bertiegate 2 amounts to this. A lodgement of 30,000 "sterling" in 1994 was recorded at 28 thousand odd in Irish pounds (in that year the Irish pound was more valuable than the pound sterling). The Mahon Tribunal, according to the media argued that the lodgement was a few hundred pounds more than it should have been at the exchange rate at that time. Bertie responded that the 30,000 sterling may have included some Irish pound amounts (the donors were Irish after all).

The Mahon Tribunal suggested (at least according to the media) that the Irish Pound amount equated to exactly 45,000 dollars at the exchange rate ruling then. The implication being that this was money (from an offshore account perhaps?) that Ahern didn't declare to the Tribunal. Ahern denies that the US dollar exchange rate was exactly equal to that. He also denies that he ever received dollars. No indication has come as to where the alleged 45,000 (whose existence is disputed) came from.

The focus of attention in "Bertiegate 2" was the purchase of a house by Ahern. Ahern bought this off a close friend Michael Wall in 1997. He had rented the house from Wall since 1994. It was always the understanding that Ahern would buy the house eventually when his personal and political situation became more stable.

About the only thing that can be said of Ahern's dealings with Wall is that they were not orthodox. But financial transactions between friends are quite often unorthodox. Wall was in the coach business and received a lot of cash in the course of his business. He gave Ahern 30,000 sterling in cash to build a mews and carry out refurbishment on his house which Ahern was renting. Ahern's then partner Celia Larkin dealt with this. There was also an understanding that Wall, who was based in England, could stay with Bertie any time he visited Ireland.

An editorial in *The Irish Times* (14.5.07) didn't like the "architecture" of the whole thing. And that's all it can say. Colm Keena in his article in *The Irish Times* (12.5.07) claimed that logic (i.e. his logic) would suggest that Ahern should have bought the house in 1994 and not wait until 1997. The implication being that Ahern was really the purchaser in 1994. Keena also implies that the fact that Ahern had plenty of cash indicates that he should have been in a position to buy the house. But we know that Ahern took out a loan and we don't know how much he borrowed. So there is no firm evidence that he was in such a great financial situation.

Certainly Ahern's dealings with Wall were not exactly at arm's length. But if there was anything corrupt in the fact that the house was sold to Ahern at below market value (and it is very arguable that it was sold below market value) why would Wall have left the house to Ahern in his will without telling him. And if Ahern was the real owner in 1994 how could Wall legally leave the house which he didn't own to Ahern in his will. And if Ahern had known that Wall was going to leave the house in his will (which someone doing favours would want to be made known), why would Ahern want to buy the house in 1997?

One of the set pieces of the early part of the campaign was a confrontation between Vincent Browne and Bertie Ahern at a Fianna Fail press conference. Ahern was very happy to discuss the Quarryvale matter in which there was a real issue of political corruption but Brown accepted his bona fides in this and persisted in questioning Ahern on the house purchase.

There are times where journalists keep a big story going by writing small stories around the subject. This is very dubious from an ethical point of view because an innocent man could be hounded without any justification. But if the big story emerges, the journalists can be vindicated in retrospect.

But there is no sign of the big story yet and it looks as if it was never there. If nothing emerges, the media campaign led by *The Irish Times* can be seen for what it was: a political campaign, which had nothing to do with the public interest.

NURSES continued

It feeds a public service that thrives on precedent and pay scale envy. Its primary purpose is to placate public service unions in return for electoral security.

Never forget the bedrock of much of Fianna Fail's electoral power lies in the public sector, they have always been regarded as the real friend of the Public and Civil servants: the Gardai, Teachers and the Health sector. But we are living in unreal times, for some, especially the middle-class, there is no tomorrow!

There's a fecklessness out there that just seems to prevent sections of the society from standing back and taking stock. A nurse has a job for life. A pension at 60. The INO/PNA commence a work-to-rule campaign, then two and three hour stoppages and demand that they lose no wages in the process.

If Benchmarking is to continue it must be transformed into something more rigorous and transparent.

The Benchmarking process added around 1.2 billion to the annual cost of running the State.

The process lacks any semblance of transparency. The second phase which is due to be launched this summer must avoid past mistakes. It must be fully transparent. A parallel universe for public sector workers cannot be allowed develop any further.

The cost of living has clearly escalated in recent years, and despite much bluster, not a lot has been done to control it.

The whole debate about 'rip-off' Ireland has totally missed the point and the removal of the Groceries Order was a total red herring and was never going to lead to the fall in prices that were promised.

TEACHERS AGAIN

TEACHERS have repeated their calls for a review of the latest pay deal as inflation continues to erode the increases granted to public servants.

The Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) said the pre-election frenzy has clouded the fact that the annual inflation rate, at 5.1% in March and April, is far higher than the *Towards 2016* pay deal, which sees 4.6% annual increases over 27 months

TUI General Secretary Jim Dorney said workers, including his union's 14,000 members, are feeling the pinch as cost of living rises are outstripping their wage hikes.

"When inflation went up unexpectedly in the past, the wage agreement at the time was revisited, so there's no reason it can't be done this time," he said.

"The delegates at our annual congress

last month were angry that teachers are still making productivity changes even though their spending power is being reduced."

The issue was also raised by delegates at the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI) annual convention at Easter, after an emergency motion was passed seeking the deal to be renegotiated.

Their concerns and those of a number of other unions have been raised with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), whose General Secretary David Begg discussed the difficulties caused by rising inflation at a recent meeting with Taoiseach Bertie Ahern.

He has also said the matter is likely to be at the centre of debate at the ICTU biennial conference in early July, 2007 if the rise in inflation continues.

Teachers are one of the largest groups

of public servants awaiting the outcome of the deliberations of the public service Benchmarking body.

The TUI, ASTI and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation made a joint submission to the Benchmarking body last year, seeking a 10% increase on the common pay scale for primary and second level teachers.

THE ASTI yesterday voted in favour of holding postal ballots of all 17,000 members in future.

The surprise decision was seen as a victory for the moderates in the teachers' union. They pointed out that many decisions about pay and action were voted on by tiny numbers at branch meetings and the votes were not always representative of the "silent majority". (Irish Independent, 13.4.2007).

The Mid Cork Election Ballad of D.D. Sheehan

Men of Mid-Cork prepare yourself before it is too late
And prove to Josie Devlin that you will not tolerate
To be represented by a henchman of his choice
But send him back from where he came in no uncertain voice.

Say who is Billy Fallon or who heard of him before
From the village of Kilmichael to the cross at Donoghmore
Or from far famed Ballingearry all over dell and glen
By the River Lee to Inniscarra where brave Mackey drilled his men.

When the sheriff and his agent and the burly peelers came
To hunt you from your homesteads in the King of England's name
Who was foremost in the struggle to stop that hellish work
But the gallant D.D. Sheehan ever member for mid-Cork.

Who negotiated purchase and secured you in your land
Free forever from the bailiff or the cruel eviction band
And brought joy and consolation to your children and your wives
Which they ever will remember to the finish of their lives.

Who obtained commodious dwellings for the hardy sons of toil
Not alone in this division but throughout the Holy Isle
For that very Act of Parliament would never see the loom
But for Mr. D.D. Sheehan and O'Brien at Macroom.

And will you now abandon him and let yourself be fooled
By that milk and water turncoat whose known as Dr. Goold
Or that sanctimonious auctioneer, that hypocritical jackeen
The likes of which our county Cork had better never seen.

Shout it back to Josie Devlin and his standing committee
To the laity and the clergy of every degree
That no power can damp your gratitude that burns in your souls
When you boldly vote for Sheehan and elect him at the polls.

Post election epilogue

Mid-Cork sent its answer right back to the mob
To poor Billy Fallon who failed in his job
They wanted no Mollie to be their M.P.
They got what they wanted and that was D.D..

NURSES continued

greater trade union movement.

The suggestion was made during an emergency debate offering the ASTI's support of the right of the Irish Nurses' Organisation (INO) and Psychiatric Nurses' Association (PNA) to negotiate their pay and working hours claim outside the public service Benchmarking process.

The motion passed unanimously by almost 500 delegates stated that the deficiencies and inflexibility of the Benchmarking arbitration process must not be used to isolate, obstruct and demean a caring profession.

Dublin South delegate Bernard Lynch said the issue at stake was much wider than the nurses' claims, but also about the quality of the under-funded public service.

He called on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) to do what unions are supposed to do and support the nurses in pursuing their claim.

ASTI rejoined the ICTU a year ago, after withdrawing its membership during its own pay dispute in 2000.

"The biggest obstacle to the nurses getting their pay claim properly dealt with is not the Government, who would settle in the morning because of the general election.

"It's not the state of the public finances which have never been better or it's not the media. It's ICTU, who are supporting pay deals that are destroying health and education, driving Irish teachers and nurses out of their professions," Mr. Lynch said.

Bernard Lynch claimed the ASTI had been *"sucked back in"* by Congress and by SIPTU. He said that Jack O'Connor from SIPTU and David Begg from Congress should show their support for nurses.

Paddy Mulcahy, Cork, a member of the ASTI's Standing Committee which proposed the motion, said the intention was not to make the case for their colleagues in the nursing unions.

"It's about one group of workers supporting the right of another group of workers to negotiate a fundamental right of any union. Some might say they were silent during our dispute, so why should I be silent now," he said.

"Let us show the trade unions within ICTU the real meaning of trade union solidarity and remind all union members of the motto of Congress: "An injury to one is an injury to all", he said.

East Galway delegate John Molloy said he supported the nurses but wondered what the motion was saying to the 300,000 trade unionists in ICTU who had accepted Benchmarking.

"Does it mean that we do not accept the Benchmarking process?" he asked.

A number of delegates pointed out that the ASTI had gone it alone on pay but had rejoined the ICTU last year.

Margaret Moore from Dublin northeast said the union had never taken its lead from other teacher unions such as the TUI and the I.N.T.O.

She called on the union to *"lead by example"*, pointing out that the ASTI had not joined ICTU to be compliant, passive and *"well behaved"*. *"We joined it to shake it up"*, she said.

At its Conference in Bundoran, in Co. Donegal, the Teachers' Union of Ireland passed a one-line motion saying: *"that this Congress fully supports the Irish Nurses' Organisation and all other unions outside the Towards 2016 agreement"* (Irish Independent, 13.4.2007).

THE GARDA

GARDAI are warning that they will submit a knock-on pay claim if nurses are given any concessions outside Benchmarking.

The stance will strengthen the Government's position that any improvement in pay and working conditions given to the nurses outside the system will be followed by claims from gardai, teachers and other public servants, which could lead to an undermining and eventual collapse of the whole Benchmarking process.

The Garda Representative Association, at its Annual Conference in Co. Mayo yesterday, gave its support to the nurses and psychiatric nurses who are escalating their action.

GRA General Secretary P.J. Stone said he hoped the nurses would achieve their objectives but warned that they would be next to follow suit.

"We are sending out a little signal that we will not be behind the door in coming out if other people are facilitated in relation to their working conditions. You cannot treat one section of the public service differently than others."

But social partnership does treat one section of the trade union movement differently to another section?

He believed that An Garda Síochána was being left badly behind in terms of industrial relations mechanisms.

"That's what we've been told year after year after year. We are prepared to present our arguments."

Mr. Stone said he was not talking about the blue flu but the promotion of industrial relations mechanisms for the Garda.

Currently members of the force had no access to the Labour Court or the Labour Relations Commission and he believed Gardai were as entitled as other workers to that access (Irish Independent, 3.5.2007).

BENCHMARKING

"Those fuelling the public sector grievance factor of relativity claims cite other usually small groups which have even fewer working hours than the claimants. One of the purposes of Benchmarking was to put an end to this endless shuffling queue of public sector relativity claims, where people emptied the ATM and immediately rejoined the queue for more. The health sector has been a major source of such claims.

"If relativity claims are not to be abolished by Benchmarking, as we were told at the start of that process, and are used to impose a massive increase in Public Service pay bills, we must consider abolition of the posts—effectively buying out the current contracts with a once-off payment and re-employing nurses on new contracts with a working week similar to that prevailing in the public sector.

"Buying out these posts, unpalatable as it may be, would be a better option than extending them by precedent across the public sector or undermining the wider economy by any attempted extension to the private sector. (Barrett-Sunday Business Post, 6.5.2007).

THE teachers unions' backing of the nurses' work-to-rule is an attack on the Benchmarking system.

The actions of the teachers and nurses represent a concerted challenge to the authority of the Government at its most vulnerable.

The nurses have made clear their attitude to Benchmarking.

They feel betrayed by a system which was introduced in 2000 in the wake of a series of public service disputes, including their own strike and the Garda 'Blue Flu' farce.

The teachers' approach is more problematic.

Having declared support for the nurses' work-to-rule, delegates at the ASTI convention have demanded renegotiation of the terms of *Towards 2016*.

For their part, the INO and PNA have spurned the social partnership in pursuit of what they consider to be fair demands.

And consequently, the situation in the front line of the health service deteriorates, day by day.

In declaring their support for the nurses, the teachers have effectively thumbed their noses at Social Partnership, without actually having to revisit the humiliations of 2003.

The message for the Government, one which may haunt them on polling day if they fail their current test, is that Benchmarking in its present form is a flawed, secretive and undemocratic system.

NURSES continued

patients are human beings, not nuts and bolts, well not yet, at any rate. In the nut and bolt factory have no doubt, the price for such an exercise would be the loss of maybe 10 jobs out of a 100—it would be impossible to apply this principle to the health system (maybe the administration) but not direct carers, nurses, midwives, doctors, etc.

And just imagine for a minute, a worker on strike in the private sector demanding that he be paid whilst out on strike!

Just what pay do INO/PNA get?

Dr. Sean Barrett claims the health sector has never published its pay levels or staff numbers in the Central Statistics Office's series of pay data for both the public and private sectors. However, the "Sunday Independent" (13.5.2007), published the wages recorded for the Mid-West region which appear to be the only available figures in the country.

It appear that of the 3,275 nurses employed by the HSE in the Mid-West area, whose headquarters are in Limerick, fewer than 800 of them work full-time or 39 hours a week.

Of these, almost half of the full-time nurses and midwives working in Limerick, Clare and North Tipperary are making more than €60,000 a year in gross pay.

The Mid-West figures also reveal that last year 379 full-time nurses and midwives made over €60,000 after allowances, shift pay, overtime, and on-call payments were added onto their basic pay.

For 2006, an Assistant Director of mental health nursing in the Mid-West made approximately €99,869 in gross pay after earning just under €59,000 in basic pay.

The same year, a Senior Staff Nurse in mental health made almost €95,000 including €45,129 in basic pay.

Some of the Mid-West rates of pay include a mental health nurse who made €87,767 in gross pay after basic pay of €43,959. An assistant director of nursing collected €86,234 in overall pay after making €65,880 in basic pay.

Most of the nurses making more than €60,000 annually work in non-hospital roles.

A graduate nurse starting in the Irish public health services will earn a basic starting salary of €31,233.

This is exclusive of premium earnings that are on average an extra 23%. Sundays and public holidays are paid at double time.

A staff nurse will receive an additional €218 for 12 hours' duty on a Sunday or

bank holiday. This work is part of their basic 39-hour week.

We are all aware of the commitment and invaluable work of the nurses. And we know that the profession is, or at least was, one that only those with the correct characteristics could hope to succeed at.

We are also aware that commitments had been made to nurses going back over 20 years that they would get reduced working hours. Equally, we are aware that such commitment and vocation was taken as signs of weakness by the employers' groups who forgot the commitments five minutes after they were given.

We even appreciate that the most important part of an effective health service is at the coalface, i.e., with the patients—yet health boards and the HSE have shown by their actions, unlike their words, that the only areas given adequate staffing were in administration. And, yes, these folk are well paid and get a 35-hour week, some it is believed are on 33 hours. So, it's easy to understand the nurse's frustration.

CARE WORKERS v THE NURSES

In an address to the IMPACT Health and Welfare conference, National Secretary, Kevin Callinan said it would be "giving early attention to the fact that care assistants work a 39-hour week".

In his address, Mr. Callinan made a number of veiled comments about the nurses' dispute.

"There has been a lot of talk about expanded roles lately. I want to put it on record that the role of every health professional has expanded in recent years and is continuing to expand. In a complex multi-professional health system, it is simply not possible to focus on one profession in isolation. Everyone is upskilling and expanding roles," he said.

In their campaign, the nursing unions highlighted a pay anomaly that saw some nurses paid less than care workers who reported to them. Mr. Callinan said care workers were victims of "*deeply insulting and misinformed criticism during the dispute*".

"These people do an extremely difficult and sometimes dangerous job—often with the most deprived, disturbed and challenging young people. It is a vital job in residential care and secure units, which most people in our newly prosperous society would never choose to do," he said.

Mr. Callinan said for years care workers were paid a pittance and that when proper pay scales were secured, it was linked to stringent qualification requirements.

"This union chose not to intervene in the debate when another union was in dispute. But I have to say, Minister, it was a shame that nobody on the management side felt willing to tell the

public the facts about the efforts of these dedicated professionals," he said. (The Irish Times, 18.5.2007)

CONSULTANTS

Senior medics have now struck another bodyblow when consultants rejected the HSE €205,000 salary offer, a 10% bonus and €20,000 allowance in return for working exclusively in the public sector. Negotiations have gone on for two years.

Some medical consultants described the proposed salaries as "*Mickey Mouse*". The salaries are probably the highest in the O.E.C.D. countries.

On 21st May 2007, they began industrial action boycotting meetings with HSE officials.

This is over a decision by Health Minister Harney to go ahead and advertise 68 consultant posts. The Irish Medical Organisation (IMO), the general practitioners, have instructed doctors not to apply for the jobs as negotiations on their new contracts have failed.

The Irish Hospital Consultants' Association General Secretary, Finbarr Fitzpatrick, is a former General Secretary of Fine Gael. Their President, Mary McCaffrey, is the wife of Cork city Fine Gael Councillor, Colm Burke.

TRADE UNION SUPPORT

"While the wider trade union movement and social partners are ominously silent, the government and main opposition parties deserve credit for not allowing short-term fleeting electoral advantage to inflict long-term harm on the Irish economy. If any political leaders cave in on the 35-hour week demand, they will destroy their credibility in the election." (Barrett, Sunday Business Post, 6.5.2007).

On April 12, two teaching unions declared their support for the nurses' campaign for better pay and work conditions outside of Benchmarking.

The ASTI and TUI, who are both within the Irish Congress of Trade Unions—which has signed up the national pay agreement—*Towards 2016*, unanimously carried emergency motions of support for the nurses.

Although the motions do not mean the teachers will take any direct action themselves, their support has been welcomed by the nursing unions in their row with the Government.

THE APOSTLES OF FREE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

On Thursday, 12th April 2007, the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI), at their Annual Conference in Sligo, announced their support for the nurses in the health dispute stating that the power to resolve the matter lies with the

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NURSES continued

The department's document also maintains that it would cost an additional €166 million to fund the introduction of a 35-hour week for non-consultant doctors.

The document says the estimates for nursing and non-nursing staff are based on flat rates of pay.

The document also states that a shorter week would generate other costs in the health sector and could also trigger increases in health insurance charges.

LABOUR PARTY

"NURSES should be given a time frame for the implementation of the 35-hour working week to halt their strike action, it was claimed yesterday." (Irish Independent, 3.5.2007).

Labour Party leader Pat Rabbitte said it was an entirely feasible way of resolving the dispute.

"In other words, an hour, or an hour and a half now, in six months time another hour and a half, and the remainder six months later, to be accompanied by the necessary changes and reforms in the health services."

The man is a genius with figures.

He blamed Health Minister Mary Harney for allowing disputes with nurses, consultants and health insurance companies to break out since she had taken the job.

"There is widespread disquiet in the health service. In my own view, you have to be able to motivate the staff and bring them with you in terms of implementing the necessary reforms to improve the health service."

However, Mr. Rabbitte maintained his party's position that the nurses' claim for a 10% pay rise could not be settled outside of the Benchmarking process.

By acceding to the 35-hour week, he has effectively handed them an 11% wage hike.

"I think that if they reflect on it, they will understand that you can't allow a parallel pay determination system to grow up."

A parallel system already exists between trade unionists in the private sector and their public counterparts.

Both Labour and Fine Gael are trying not to lose the votes of the 40,000 nurses but also not to appear to support a pay claim which could shatter the Benchmarking process.

Mr. Rabbitte said the nurses had a genuine grievance about the secrecy of the Benchmarking process, which had led

to other groups in the health service getting higher pay rises without any explanation.

"I think it has to be more open and transparent. Various categories of staff have to see the basis on which decisions were made but that wasn't possible with Benchmarking one." (Irish Independent, 3.5.2007).

The nursing unions held a one-day delegate conference in Dublin on May 10, 2007, inviting representatives of the main political parties to address them.

Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny addressed the gathering of nurses, as did Health Minister Mary Harney on behalf of the Progressive Democrats.

The Green Party have said employers should negotiate with the unions on a 35 hour week and give a date for its introduction. The Green Party don't support the nurses' call for a pay increase outside Benchmarking.

Sinn Fein fully support the claims of the nursing unions including the pay increase outside Benchmarking.

FIANNA FAIL

On the part of Fianna Fail, failure to hold the line on this occasion would have resulted in the collapse of everything the Taoiseach had fought for—a commitment to industrial peace at a national level. Even with this partial climbdown, the seeds have been sown for greater disruption once the election is over.

Couple that with downward trends in the economy and it is not going to be a pretty sight. And given that, Bertie Ahern just might be looking at some reflective time on the back benches, letting the other lads to make a mess of it before being welcomed back as the man to get things right.

The Irish Nurses' Organisation (INO) and the Psychiatric Nurses' Association (PNA) took on the government when it was in a tough position and made the lives of its Cabinet members and Dáil candidates seeking election even more difficult than they already were. A mortal blow may have been dealt to some sitting TDs.

THE CLAIM

"Health trade unions are perversely rewarded for pursuing the 35-hour week. If the claim were to succeed, an extra 4,230 staff would be required to make up the 7.7 million hours no longer worked by the incumbent nurses. Deeply moving media presentations from an A&E near you on the world of overworked health staff would aim to secure the extra staff.

"This would bring the total staff to 112,000 compared to 108,000 today and 98,000 in 2004. This followed a five-year period in which the health budget increased by 125%, the staff by 47% and bed nights by 4%. The Irish

health service has a serious productivity problem. Some 11,100 extra nurses have been added to the payroll since 1997.

"In August 2005, Mairead Lavery and Margaret Hawkins of the "Irish Farmers Journal" published the results of their Freedom of Information (FoI) requests for data on hospitals. The data showed extremely low productivity, especially in the Dublin area.

"One of the hospitals first targeted in the present dispute was St Vincent's in Dublin. The Lavery-Hawkins data showed that it had 479 beds and 1,016 nurses, or 2.1 nurses per bed. The number of admissions per nurse per year was 30, or one admission every 12 days. Patients who lost their place in hospital because of a one-hour work stoppage were extremely unlucky. The 479 beds had a staff of 150 consultants and 251 doctors in addition to the 1,016 nurses.

"The health sector has never published its pay levels or staff numbers in the Central Statistics Office's series of pay data for both the public and private sectors. In the absence of data, a fog has been created around the present dispute. There have been media calls for a "creative approach" to solving the dispute, fogging up the issue further.

"Mary Harney, the Minister for Health, told the Dail on April 3 that the average salary for nurses in 2005 was €56,000 and that the increase since 1997 had varied between 75% and 103%. The increases included 8% to 16% under benchmarking and 13.16% under Sustaining Progress.

"The 2007 average pay rate is €59,900, based on the minister's data announced to the Dail on April 3. The minister estimated that the claims at the core of the present dispute translated into a 22% pay increase, which combined with the 10% under Towards 2016 gives a 32% increase.

"Nurses' wages are already some 90 per cent higher than those in the manufacturing sector, the sector which generates the output to pay the taxes to finance the health service. There must be an open approach to publishing full data on health sector pay and numbers employed so the debate can be informed by the facts. Based on information now available, no government—incumbent or aspirant—should concede the present claims." (Dr. Sean Barrett, Sunday Business Post, 6.5.2007)

The 35-hour work week is the nub of this dispute! Multiply 45,000 nurses and midwives by 4 hours, the number of reduced hours in the claim—who does the cover for those lost hours? Surely, the INO/PNA are not suggesting that their members will cover the four lost hours on overtime?

In a nut and bolt factory, with state-of-the-art technology and flexible work practices, we could achieve this, however, hospitals are about patients, not profit—

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NURSES continued

'LAND OF NOD'

When it appeared that the HSE might refuse to pay them for the work they're not doing, it is regarded as:

Both unions decided that the best place"... the most provocative and inflammatory stance taken by an employer in the history of trade union disputes" (Michael Dineen, INO spokesman, Evening Echo, Cork, 9.5.2007).

But—

"We can no longer sustain costs of €2 million per week, which we are paying people to do the work nurses normally do," said Barry O'Brien, of the HSE

In fact the people doing "*work nurses normally do*" are probably nurses from employment agencies, many of them members of the INO itself.

Mr. O'Brien also suggested the dispute had already cost the HSE €10m to date and said nurses were in breach of their contracts by not co-operating with the use of modern technology.

Responding to Mr. O'Brien's comments, INO General Secretary, Liam Doran warned of a "*significant change in the tone and tenor of the dispute if the HSE docked nurses' pay*".

Mr. Doran went on to recall that the health authority did not cut the pay of senior health managers when they went on a work-to-rule for six weeks in late 2004.

"Those managers got a pay increase and their jobs guaranteed for life," he pointed out.

"This is the most provocative and inflammatory stance taken by an employer in the history of trade union disputes. The very same senior managers who made the decision to dock nurses pay were themselves involved in a work-to-rule situation in 2004 when they managed to secure 11.5 pay rise." (Michael Dineen, INO, Evening Echo, Cork, 9.5.2007).

He added:

"Do not forget that senior management implemented a six-week work to rule before the changeover to the HSE and got jobs for life and an 11.5% pay increase." (Irish Examiner, 9.5.2007).

It is understood the HSE Employers Agency has told the nursing unions that, even if they signed up to *Towards 2016* at that stage, their members may not qualify for a three per cent pay rise which was due last December. The threat was made on the basis that they had not refrained from industrial action.

Already nurses in both unions however have lost out on the first set of pay increases under the national wage agreement which have been given to colleagues in SIPTU and IMPACT who are not in dispute. It means that from June when another stage of the increase comes into effect they will have lost out on a 5% pay increase (Irish Independent, 5.5.2007).

The INO refused to sign up for the new national partnership programme, *Towards 2016* when it was negotiated last year. Their General Secretary, Liam Doran is a member of the ICTU Executive. The PNA is not affiliated to Congress.

We now learn that they will not be docked under the Settlement proposals issued by the National Implementation Body:

"The NIB urges the parties to accept these proposals in order to avoid further planned stoppages, the ongoing work, to, rule and proposed salary deductions, and in the interest of patient care."

PRIVATE HOSPITALS

Only one major stand-alone private hospital, St Patrick's Psychiatric Hospital in Dublin, had been singled out by unions for work stoppages.

Asked why public patients had borne the main brunt of the disruption so far, Dave Hughes of the Irish Nurses Organisation (INO) said the unions did not have members in all private hospitals.

The union had served the claims on private hospitals where they had members but as they were a separate employer to the State they were negotiating with them (Irish Independent, 8.5.2007).

POLITICAL RESPONSE

PNA General Secretary, Des Kavanagh said the protest had become part of the fabric of the election.

Speaking at a one-hour stoppage by nurses in the Mater Hospital in Dublin, Des Kavanagh of the PNA said government parties and the Opposition would pay a price at the polls for their stand on the dispute.

He said the opposition parties had not gone far enough and they needed to be unambiguous in their support for the nurses' stand—otherwise votes will "*not go to them either*".

"There are a lot of votes available from nurses and their families and the question now is who is going to come forward with a solution.

"Our votes are not going cheap. It really does require an absolute commitment and guarantee that they are going to sort it out," he said.

INO Vice-President Sheila Dickson, a

former Fianna Fail Councillor in Killarney, called on Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny to come out stronger in his support for the nurses.

Both unions decided that the best place "My own vote and the votes of more than 40,000 nurses are up for sale," she declared.

Spiral of pay and prices hits Ahern's poll hopes

"SPIRALLING wage demands and huge rises in the cost of living are threatening the Government's hopes of being re-elected. Pressure for wage rises from nurses, doctors and teachers came as new figures showed inflation at 5.1%." (Irish Independent, 13.4.2007).

"Other public sector workers who have signed up for *Towards 2016* and Benchmarking II, rightly expect the Government to keep to its side of the bargain by not allowing major special deals for others," states Minister for Health, Mary Harney.

"Taxpayers, who pay for the public sector wage bill agreed in *Towards 2016*, will be deeply concerned at any unravelling of Public Sector pay policy." (Irish Times, 3.5.2007).

Taoiseach Bertie Ahern said nurses had been fair in their negotiations over recent days:

"They have pointed out that there are a lot of flexibilities, a lot of productivity that they can give to the system which will ultimately bring this to a cost-free basis, or as near as they can to a cost-free basis. But the problem is, and it is a problem for everybody now, is that it can't be done in a short period. And that is the difficulty," he said.

Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny said that if elected to Government the next Minister for Health would be mandated to act with flexibility and creativity in relation to the nursing dispute.

He also said he would change the Benchmarking process.

Meanwhile, the Department of Health has forecast that it would cost nearly €550 million per year to introduce a 35-hour working week across the wider health service.

Other unions such as SIPTU have signalled that, if the Government agrees to these claims, they will seek similar arrangements for their members.

The Department of Health document also projects that it would cost a further €144 million to provide for the introduction of a 35-hour week for non-nursing staff in the health service.



The Nursing Dispute And After

Solidarity, Fraternity but no Trade Union Equality

On 23rd May 2007, the Irish Nurses Organisation (INO), which represents the clear majority of nurses, involved in the health dispute, returned a 54% acceptance after members were balloted on the introduction of a 37.5 hour working week by June 2008 and the examination by an independent commission of how a 35-hour week could be introduced without additional costs.

The second largest union involved in the row, the Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA), will announce the results of their ballot on June 5. The PNA yesterday suggested that continuing the industrial action on their own was not practicable.

Commenting on the outcome, Professor Brendan Drumm, CEO of the HSE, stated that a solid platform had been built on—

"which to expand and enhance the role of nurses and midwives during the coming years without reducing services to patients.

"I accept that implementing the N.I.B. recommendation will be a complex and probably, at times, challenging exercise but I believe it will greatly support our four year Transformation Programme."

The Minister for Health and Children, Mary Harney said:

"Together we can deliver changes for patients that do not involve reduction in services or new cost for taxpayers. The value of working within social partnership has been demonstrated again."

How anyone with a knowledge of the health service can seriously believe that by reducing by four hours the work of 45,000 nurses is not going to reduce service to the patients beggers belief! As for not adding cost to the taxpayer, that is simply incredible.

Nurses have described the 17TH May breakthrough in the seven-week dispute with the Health Service Executive as a

"significant victory".

It now brings to an end a dispute, which has caused medical chaos in hospitals and healthcare facilities throughout the country.

The unions have now ceased all industrial action.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) is also rescinding its earlier threat to dock nurses' pay.

Nurses balloted on the following proposal from the National Implementation Body:

*** A 37.5 hour working week by June next year and an independently chaired review of how a 35-hour week might be achieved which would report back in a six-month period.**

*** Their claim for a 10.6% pay increase and an expanded role for nurses/midwives would be dealt with by the Benchmarking body.**

INO spokesman Michael Dineen said:

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"This is a significant victory for nurses—45 days ago we were being told a 35-hour-week was not possible.

"Now we have for the first-time an acknowledgement from management of the legitimacy of our claim and an offer for an initial 37.5 hour week followed by an examination of how a 35-hour-week can be achieved, within a six month period, by an independent commission."

"The proposals are designed to be balanced and fair—fair to nurses, fair to all other parties of the Social Partnership agreements and fair to taxpayers—through cost neutrality and on the basis that they involve no reduction in services to patients. Most importantly, they offer the prospect of an early resumption of full, uninterrupted health services to patients." (Government statement, 17.5.2007).

The Irish Nurses Organisation (INO-35,000 members) and Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA-10,000 members), representing 45,000 nurses and midwives, commenced a work-to-rule campaign on Monday, 2nd April 2007, for the introduction of a 35 hour week and a 10.6% pay rise.

However, other unions such as SIPTU and IMPACT which represent sizeable number of health workers refused to participate in the I.N.A./PNA action.

Both unions decided that the best place to argue their case for improved pay and conditions for nurses is in the Benchmarking process. This is due to report later this year.

SIPTU (8,000 nursing members) were also concerned that a damaging dispute in public hospitals could give ammunition to those who would like to see greater private sector involvement in the health services generally.