

## A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM



*The Establishment*

On 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020, the Irish political landscape experienced a seismic shift in party support. Shocked and dazed television and newspaper pundits, as well as senior civil servants gazed around their offices and realised that they were now completely out of touch with the majority of the Irish electorate. Not only THEY but NOBODY they knew had ever even thought of voting for what was now Ireland's largest party with 24.5% of the vote, giving 37 TDs for Sinn Féin.

Of course, the establishment had done nothing wrong or else they could no longer justify their enormous salaries and jobs for life. No. It was the public's fault. These 535,000 naïve fools had been seduced by the unworkable and unrealistic magic money-tree populist promises of Sinn Féin and other smaller left wing parties. Others might think it dangerous or undemocratic that nobody who represents the views and opinions of a quarter of the people in the Irish State is represented in senior positions of the civil and public service or editorial or top ranking positions in the print and broadcast media. But it is they who are wrong. It is the public not the media or senior public servants who must be made to change their minds and, until they do so, they normal rules of editorial balance and democratic rights no longer apply.

The second biggest party Fianna Fáil which won 22.2% and obtained 37 elected TDs - and 1 unelected TD, the Ceann Comhairle - (2.1% and 6 TDs down on 2016) is to be treated as if they won the election. While the fifth biggest party Labour with 4.4% and 6 TDs (2.2% and 1 TD down on 2016) is to be treated by the media as if they were the official opposition.

Unchallenged media bias such as former Fine Gael TD, George Lee's uncritical coverage of Fine Gael's handling of the Covid 19 pandemic or Miriam O'Callaghan's interrogation of opposition leaders, while her own brother Jim served as Fianna Fáil front-bench spokesman on Justice, only further serves to alienate a substantial section of the Irish population from the 'establishment mainstream media'. It also reinforces public scepticism about journalistic independence and increases calls for defunding of RTÉ. As do revelations such as RTE's former broadcaster, Seán O'Rourke, attending a Covid regulation-breaching 'Golfgate' meal in County Mayo with Fine Gael's European Commissioner Phil Hogan, Fianna Fáil's Agriculture Minister Dara Calleary and a recently Fine Gael-appointed Supreme Court judge, Séamus Woulfe. The impression is created in the public mind of a 'cosy cartel' of mutually supporting and overlapping elites who share out highly paid and unscrutinised positions among themselves, while expecting the rest of the 'plebs' to go and eat cake.

The shock to the system was all the greater as it was thought that the danger to the establishment posed not so long previously had passed. Sinn Féin had seemed to be in decline as they had won only 6.4% in the October 2018 Presidential election and 9.5% in the 2019 local elections, losing 77 council seats. However, as polling day approached, the Irish electorate grew fatigued of nearly a century of uninterrupted rule by the two established civil war parties and disillusioned by their lack of imagination and energy in tackling problems like housing and Brexit. Sinn Féin and the other smaller parties were assisted by the unbridled arrogance of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael whom proceeded to lecture the Irish electorate as to whom they would allow into government and whom they would exclude from it before a single vote was even cast. They were also assisted by the breathtakingly stupid and offensive proposal by the Minister for Justice, Charlie Flanagan, of to commemorate the Black and Tans and other Crown Forces a century after their most vile outrages.

There is a real and present danger that an unbridgeable chasm is emerging between the neglected many and the privileged few. Popular demands for housing, jobs and Irish unity are dismissed by the elite as unworkable and unaffordable, yet they continue to increase their privileges and improve their own conditions, while denying the masses a right to implement their policies by democratic means or giving adequate expression to their views. Whenever a substantial section of the electorate view themselves as being permanently and unjustifiably excluded from power and see their political policies ridiculed and ignored, there is clearly a recipe for disaster. Such discrimination resulted in calamity north of the border in the past; let us hope that the southern establishment doesn't sleepwalk into any similar outcome in the future.

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