

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2015/89/10
Creation Date(s):	5 October 1985
Extent and medium:	7 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.



FIANNA FÁIL PRESS OFFICE
THE REPUBLICAN PARTY
FIFTH FLOOR, LEINSTER HOUSE, DUBLIN 2.
PHONE 789911 ext 297, 301, 350. Telex 90479.

PRESS RELEASE: PLEASE WATCH EMBARGO

Address by Mr Charles J Haughey, T.D.
Leader of Fianna Fail

at the 2nd Fianna Fail National Women's
Conference in the Imperial Hotel, Cork

on Saturday, 5 October 1985 at 5.00 pm

W. Keefe
To see pl. - P.S. et seq.
Mr. W. Keefe ~~*Country*~~ *thanks*
W.K.
11. 10. 85

Brian 11/10/85

I would like to congratulate everyone present on a highly successful second National Women's Conference. The enthusiasm and commitment shown both last year and this show that the women members of Fianna Fail have effectively established their role and influence in the party.

We are delighted to be here in Cork on its 800th birthday. Cork, with its unrivalled civic spirit, has made a major effort this year to promote the city as a conference centre and to demonstrate its suitability for cultural, social, commercial and political events. We are holding our Youth Conference here in a few weeks time and many of you will be present for that occasion also.

The purpose of this Conference is to promote the position of women in Fianna Fail, to ensure that the voice of women is heard at all levels of the party and that their capabilities are recognised as widely as possible. Of course, women have been playing an important part in our organisation for a long time. At the same time in common with virtually every other organisation - state boards and trade unions are obvious examples - the representation of women in key positions is still much below what is desirable. Holding a separate women's conference is therefore a piece of positive discrimination, which we hope will be eventually so successful in achieving its aims that it may one day no longer be needed. As a republican party we are fully committed to the equality of all our citizens and we need to uphold this principle particularly within our own organisation.

The local elections represented a satisfactory advance. We now have 67 women elected to the local authorities. I congratulate them all and also all those who went before conventions or who fought as candidates. I would like especially to congratulate Mary Bone on her election to the chair in Leitrim, Bridie Flaherty in Galway, Jane Hanafin in Tipperary North, as well as those elected to the chair in the UDCs and town commissioners, Anne Allen in Tipperary, Clare Hough in Kilkee, Kathleen Ryan in Shannon, Maire Scully in Thurles and Kitty Shannon in Boyle. We are proud of them all.

I am also glad that we have selected two candidates designate, Councillors Mary Wallace and Ann Ormonde in Dail constituencies in the four conventions that we have already held. We want many more women going forward on our panels of candidates in the next General Election. This eagerly awaited election will provide us with a major opportunity to greatly increase our number of women deputies. I hope to be in the position of having an excellent team of women available for appointment to key positions in the next Fianna Fail Government providing us with greater insight and capacity for dealing with the many urgent economic and social problems that will confront us. The activities of the National Women's Conference and the recent local elections have shown us that the talent is there. We now have the opportunity to make a real breakthrough.

I wish to extend a very special and very warm welcome here to Winnie Ewing, our ally in the European Parliament and for so long an able advocate of Scottish nationalism. Scotland and Ireland have many cultural and ethnic links and shared historical experiences. The Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid in his efforts to reforge a sense of Scottish national identity wrote something which will become a slogan for our European Parliamentary colleagues:

Scots steel tempered wi' Irish fire
Is the weapon that I desire

We value and appreciate those Scottish qualities that Winnie Ewing brings to our party grouping in Strasbourg.

Fianna Fail have constantly identified with the mainstream concerns of the women of this country. While jobs and taxation and family income support in these difficult times are the principal issues, we are very conscious of the fact there are many other issues of particular concern to women. We support, as we have always done, the principle of full equality as a matter of right, and acknowledge that there are still areas where this remains to be implemented. Our record of improving the status of women in Irish society is a good one. Other parties pay lip service to this objective. We have acted positively. For my own part I take pride in having appointed the first woman to Cabinet, the first woman High Court judge, set up the Commission on the Status of Women, whose report set out an agenda of action in

the 1970s which has been a basic document since, and in playing an active part in Fianna Fail governments which greatly improved the position of widows, old age pensioners, removed discrimination in regard to inheritance rights, in the social welfare and income tax codes. Among the things remaining to be done a reform of the law of domicile should receive urgent priority, as it obviously and blatantly discriminates against women.

The introduction of free secondary education by a Fianna Fail Government in the 1960s was probably one of the single biggest contributors to creating equality of opportunity for women. Concern with completely eliminating sexism in education is a major objective but how much can be achieved in this area at present with a rising pupil-teacher ratio resulting in restriction on subject choice?

We are continuing to work with the other parties in the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights under the Chairmanship of our own Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, a committee of which I am proud to be a member. We have already produced useful reports on education and social welfare, and will continue with this important task of establishing finally and conclusively women's rights in all areas.

The present level of unemployment is creating serious strains on our society, on family life, on our social welfare system and on the preservation of law and order. Job opportunities for women have become much more restricted as a result of Government policies that have aggravated the recession. The latest labour force survey shows that between 1983 and 1984 7,000 women dropped out of the workforce. It will be the overriding objective of the next Fianna Fail Government to reduce the level of unemployment by every available, feasible means and where necessary by interventionist developmental policies to promote economic activity and development so as to allow a resumption of social advance, and the enhancement of the position of women in our society.

The current levels of taxation bear particularly hard on single people. Assuming only the minimum personal allowance, single people earning slightly over £9,000 will be paying the 60% tax. This is an impossible situation and destructive of the incentive to work. I do not believe there is any parallel to be found elsewhere in the severity of

our tax system on single people earning very little more than the average wage. No country can expect to achieve economic progress while operating under such a tax system. A lightening of the tax burden is therefore a vital priority for the revival of the economy.

Protection of the home, of children and of family life has always been one of the fundamental aims of Fianna Fail. An adequate family income either through employment or the social security network is the vital element for the survival and well-being of the family.

Family income has fallen seriously in the last few years. In two budgets out of three there has been no increase in children's allowances. Some new child benefit scheme which we are told is coming next January and which in the vast majority of cases will be taxed at 35% or more, is no substitute for the present children's allowance. The lack of interest shown by the housewives of Ireland in the farcical £9.60 scheme in 1981 showed that women are not fooled by or interested in payments which are simply deductions from their husband's pay packet. It is wrong to suggest that there is any significant section of the community nowadays that does not 'need' children's allowances. The cost of rearing a family, food, clothing, fares, rent, school accessories is crippling for most families. To pay out large sums then claw them back through the tax system represents a wasteful, circular money flow that will involve nothing more than increased bureaucracy and form-filling.

Despite a few limited improvements, the state of the economy, the employment situation, the levels of emigration are destroying community life. The steadily rising level of unemployment and the serious deterioration in the state of the public finances show that optimistic statements from Government Ministers are nothing more than cynical exercises in propaganda. They are an insult to hard-pressed families everywhere who know what the grim realities are. Three years of monetarist policies and high taxes have achieved no worthwhile improvement in the public finances and have aggravated the problem of unemployment. The Government is now dealing with the consequences of their own decisions and their own failed strategy. This Coalition has inflicted unprecedented damage since it came into office, created conditions of hardship and despair, spread

disillusionment and undermined our people's confidence in themselves and their future. Our first task in Government will be to restore confidence and morale and we shall be relying on the women of Ireland to play their part in this great task.

I was glad to see a debate on the environment on your agenda. The preservation of our natural environment, clean air, the prevention of the pollution of our rivers, beaches and seas are matters which I hope will receive your active attention. I believe also that you have an important role to play in mobilizing support for Fianna Fail's policy of positive neutrality and non-involvement in military blocs, as well as proposals for general disarmament and an end to the nuclear arms race.

Above all else you have a special interest in the establishment of lasting peace founded on justice in our own country.

I am deeply reluctant to talk about fundamental national issues on the basis of media reports and speculation, but we must all be very conscious of a well-orchestrated media campaign which is underway at present, not just here, but among Ireland's friends abroad, to condition public opinion and prepare the ground for some as yet unspecified development. We see the deployment of security forces along the border. I am very much conscious of the uneasy feeling among the general public that there is something afoot about which they are unclear and distrustful. They fear a sellout. I think it is necessary that I should say at this stage that Fianna Fail will not countenance any departure from the sound principles subscribed to by all the constitutional nationalist parties in this country and set down in the New Ireland Forum Report. That Report represents the carefully considered views of nationalist Ireland expressed in their most modern form. The Report states clearly that: "A settlement which recognises the legitimate rights of nationalists and unionists must transcend the context of Northern Ireland". (4.16).

Fianna Fail cannot and will not accept any agreement which would not be in accordance with the basic principles of Irish unity enshrined in the Constitution.

Nor can there be any question of an agreement

which would purport to guarantee what is euphemistically called "the constitutional status of Northern Ireland".

This is a time for great vigilance. There is a great deal at stake. The Irish people must not again have a treaty imposed or be asked to accept Some dubious settlement entered into in response to the short-term political needs of those involved. A Government which, clearly, no longer commands a majority of support among the people should understand that they cannot enter into or commit the people to agreements which would affect fundamental changes in our national position, which would be repugnant to the Constitution and which would make a bad situation a great deal worse.

ENDS.